

Meditation may decrease the risk of heart disease

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Meditation may decrease the risk of heart disease, according to a first-ever statement on the practice issued by the American Heart Association.

But the key word to remember is "may."

"The research is suggestive, but not definitive," said Glenn N. Levine, M.D., chairman of the group of cardiovascular disease experts who reviewed recent science to determine whether [meditation](#) could help reduce heart disease risks.

The experts found a potential benefit to the heart from meditation, but mostly the small studies were not conclusive.

"Overall, studies of meditation suggest a possible benefit on cardiovascular risk, although the overall quality and in some cases quantity of study data is modest," said the statement, released Thursday.

The committee looked at 57 studies that researched common types of "sitting meditation" and whether the practice had any impact on [heart disease](#).

Some types of meditation included in the research were: Samatha; Vipassana (Insight Meditation); Mindful Meditation; Zen Meditation (Zazen); Raja Yoga; Loving-Kindness (Metta); Transcendental Meditation; and Relaxation Response.

The group excluded studies of meditation that incorporated physical activity – such as yoga or Tai Chi – because physical activity itself has been proven to help the heart.

Levine said there is a good deal of research on the effects of meditation on stress, mental health and conditions such as [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

But research is more limited on meditation and heart health.

"Certainly, it would be desirable to have larger trials that follow patients for a longer period of time," said Levine, a professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Meditation itself has been around for centuries—at least as early as 5000 B.C.

It is associated with Eastern philosophies and religion, including Buddhism and Hinduism, although references or inferences regarding meditation and the meditative process also can be found in Christianity, Judaism and Islam

In recent decades, meditation started becoming increasingly secular and a therapeutic activity, used by practitioners to help with focus, self-awareness and stress relief.

Jeff Breece of Columbus, Ohio, has been meditating about 20 to 30 minutes each day and uses it as an adjunct therapy to help calm the panic attacks he suffered after having a [heart](#) attack in 2015.

He said he finds that it helps him to feel calmer and allows him to observe his anxiety without reacting to it.

"After my [heart attack](#), I felt like it defined me," Breece said.

"Meditating helped me to get my life back. It helps me observe the moments."

Eight percent of U.S. adults practice some form of meditation, according to a National Health Interview Survey, a division of the National Institutes of Health done in 2012.

In addition, 17 percent of all cardiovascular disease patients surveyed expressed interest in participating in a clinical trial of meditation.

But until more research does come, patients should adhere to proven [cardiovascular disease](#) therapies and use meditation only as an additional boost toward cardiovascular health.

"Meditation should be considered as a potential lifestyle modification, but should not be used to replace standard and proven treatments such as smoking cessation, [blood pressure control](#) and treatment of [high cholesterol levels](#)," Levine said.

Provided by American Heart Association

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