

For busy medical students, two-hour meditation study may be as beneficial as longer course

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For time-crunched medical students, taking a two-hour introductory class on mindfulness may be just as beneficial for reducing stress and

depression as taking an eight-week meditation course, a Rutgers study finds.

The study, conducted by researchers at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, is published in the journal *Medical Science Educator*. The researchers say many [medical students](#) would like to use meditation to avoid burnout and provide better [medical care](#), but are daunted by the prospect of making time for a daily meditation routine.

"What we found should encourage even the busiest medical students and physicians," said lead author Periel Shapiro, an MD candidate at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "There are shorter, sustainable ways to bring meditation into your life, and they can help you reduce stress and depression and improve your medical study and practice."

Mindfulness is defined as maintaining nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment, and continuously returning to that awareness when pulled away by distraction. Mindfulness practices are believed to have physiological and psychological benefits resulting in reducing the mind's negative focus on [feelings](#) of distress and increasing the body's ability to relax.

Studies have shown that medical students are at disproportionately high risk for depression and anxiety, and that [mindfulness](#) can help them develop coping mechanisms to reduce these feelings. Previous studies have also shown, however, that medical students often drop out of meditation courses because of a perceived lack of time and other support.

The Rutgers practitioners found that there has been a lack of research into identifying [meditation](#) methods that may be most accessible to busy medical students and physicians. For their study, they assigned random groups of medical students to a two-hour introductory course or a full

eight-week course on meditation. Those who took the eight-week course became more familiar with mindfulness techniques and felt more comfortable recommending mindfulness to patients.

Both groups described benefits in reducing their feelings of stress and depression—and many students viewed mindfulness as a safe alternative to treating those feelings with medication. Many students also described mindfulness as providing a deeper sense of happiness and fulfillment.

The findings suggest that the full eight-week course is helpful in promoting greater awareness of how to practice mindfulness in [everyday life](#) and that the brief introductory course is an effective and efficient way to help students begin practicing mindfulness and experiencing its benefits. The authors said the study can help guide medical schools to introduce mindfulness courses or fine-tune them in ways that will benefit students.

More information: Periel Shapiro et al, Mindfulness Meditation for Medical Students: a Student-Led Initiative to Expose Medical Students to Mindfulness Practices, *Medical Science Educator* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s40670-019-00708-2](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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