

Meditation training can support well-being in older adults, finds trial

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Following an 18-month meditation program can improve the well-being of older adults, finds a new randomized controlled trial by an international team co-led by University College London (UCL).

The findings, published in *PLOS ONE*, show that [meditation](#) can improve people's awareness, connection to others, and insight.

While the meditation training did not confer significant benefits on two commonly used measures of psychological well-being and [quality of life](#), the researchers say their findings may reveal limitations in existing methods of tracking well-being.

Lead author Marco Schlosser (UCL Psychiatry and University of Geneva) said, "As the global population ages, it is increasingly crucial to understand how we can support [older adults](#) in maintaining and deepening their psychological well-being. In our study, we tested whether long-term meditation training can enhance important dimensions of well-being. Our findings suggest that meditation is a promising non-pharmacological approach to support human flourishing in late life."

The study is the longest randomized meditation training trial conducted to date, and explored the impact of an 18-month meditation program on the psychological well-being of more than 130 healthy French-speaking people aged 65 to 84.

The study, led by Principal Investigator Professor Gaël Chételat, took place in Caen, France. It was conducted by the edit-Aging (Silver Santé Study) research group which involves UCL, Inserm, University of Geneva, Université de Caen Normandy, Lyon Neuroscience Research Center, University of Liège, Technische Universität Dresden, and Friedrich Schiller University Jena.

The researchers compared a meditation program, which included a nine-month mindfulness module followed by a nine-month loving kindness and compassion module, delivered by weekly group sessions (two hours long), daily home practice (at least 20 minutes), and one retreat day, with

a group that did English language training (as a comparison group) and a no-intervention control group.

The team found that meditation training significantly impacted a global score that measures the well-being dimensions of awareness, connection, and insight. Awareness describes an undistracted and intimate attentiveness to one's thoughts, feelings, and surroundings, which can support a sense of calm and deep satisfaction.

Connection captures feelings such as respect, gratitude, and kinship that can support more positive relationships with others. Insight refers to a [self-knowledge](#) and understanding of how thoughts and feelings participate in shaping our perception—and how to transform unhelpful patterns of thought relating to ourselves and the world.

The benefits of meditation training to an established measure of psychological quality of life were not superior to English language training, while neither intervention significantly impacted another widely used measure of psychological well-being.

The researchers suggest this may be because these two established measures do not cover the qualities and depth of human flourishing that can potentially be cultivated by longer-term meditation training, so benefits to awareness, connection and insight are missed.

The program did not benefit everyone equally, as participants who reported lower levels of psychological well-being at the start of the trial showed greater improvements compared to those who already had higher levels of well-being.

Co-author Dr. Natalie Marchant (UCL Psychiatry) said, "We hope that further research will clarify which people are most likely to benefit from meditation [training](#), as it may confer stronger benefits on some specific

groups. Now that we have evidence that [meditation training](#) can help older adults, we hope that further refinements in partnership with colleagues from other research disciplines could make meditation programs even more beneficial."

Senior author Dr. Antoine Lutz (Lyon Neuroscience Research Center, Inserm, France) said, "By showing the potential of meditation programs, our findings pave the way for more targeted and effective programs that can help older adults flourish, as we seek to go beyond simply preventing disease or ill-health, and instead take a holistic approach to helping people across the full spectrum of human well-being."

More information: Marco Schlosser et al, An 18-month meditation training selectively improves psychological well-being in older adults: A Secondary Analysis of a Randomised Controlled Trial, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0294753](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0294753)

Provided by University College London

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