

Mindfulness meditation: What are its potential health benefits?

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Can mindfulness meditation be good medicine for both mental and

physical ills?

Yes, says one expert who explains the practice and what conditions it might help.

A particular form of mindfulness that focuses on pleasure has been shown to work as well as a starting dose of a narcotic for pain and better than traditional psychotherapy for [substance abuse](#), said Eric Garland, director of the University of Utah's Center on Mindfulness and Integrative Health Intervention Development.

But the meditation style may work for more than just [chronic pain](#) and addiction.

"The techniques that we teach are also very likely effective treatments for depression, anxiety, [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) and simply increasing resilience in people without any diagnosable mental health conditions," Garland said in a university news release.

So, how does it work?

As a form of therapy, mindfulness is a kind of mental training for cultivating awareness, Garland explained. To do that, it focuses attention on your thoughts, emotions and body sensations as you're experiencing them.

The goal is "watching your experience as if you were a witness," he said. "It's a practice of wakefulness, of becoming awake to the way your mind works and becoming aware of how you're operating in life."

In a [study](#) Garland and his team conducted several years ago, 15 minutes of mindfulness meditation reduced pain by nearly 30%. That equals the amount of pain relief provided by a starting dose of 5 milligrams of

oxycodone, he noted.

Mindfulness also helps people with chronic pain separate emotional and physical reactions and just think about pain as physical sensations, Garland noted, an approach lowers pain intensity by changing how the brain processes it.

Meanwhile, mindfulness to treat addiction cultivates both [self-awareness](#) and [self-control](#). People become aware of their reactions and habits around using substances and then can better control their choices, Garland explained.

But just as the effects of medications don't last forever, the power of a "dose" of mindfulness is also temporary, likely because the brain returns to its old patterns, Garland said. However, his [research](#) has found that an eight-week mindfulness treatment reduces addictive behavior and pain, and these reductions last at least nine months.

Is there anyone who shouldn't use it?

Garland said it's not yet known for whom mindfulness works for and for whom it doesn't. He also cautioned that all mindfulness training isn't equal, and the quality of the techniques taught depends on the skill of the teacher.

He added that people who have experienced trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) could have flashbacks during [mindfulness meditation](#), so these folks should learn correct meditation techniques from an experienced, licensed psychotherapist.

More information: The American Psychological Association has

more on the benefits of [mindfulness meditation](#).

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