



GORDON C GUNN, MD, FACOG

CONCIERGE PERSONALIZED CARE  
GYNECOLOGY • HORMONE THERAPY  
INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

## MEDITATION

### What Exactly is It?

Over 1000 studies have shown that practicing meditation results in less stress, better sleep, increased creativity, sharper focus, and a healthier mind and body. Meditation is a way to achieve these goals and has its origin in the ancient Chinese practice of *Taoism*, which is more a way of living, rather than an actual theology,

### Taoism – Seeking Balance

Taoism is not a religion, nor a philosophy. It is a "Way" of life. The Tao is a belief in the natural order of things. It is like a river or a force that flows through every living object, as well as through the entire universe. It is similar to the belief of *God* practiced by religions throughout the world, including Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Taoism asks that each person focus on *their* world in order to ultimately discover his or her inner harmonies and the harmony of the universe. It is a theology heavily focused on meditation and contemplation. The original source of Taoism is said to be the ancient *I Ching*, the *Book of Changes*. The primary figures in Taoism are Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, two scholars who dedicated their lives to balancing their inner spirits.

The most common graphic representation of Taoist theology is the circular **Yin/Yang** figure. It represents the circular balance of opposites throughout the universe. Separating the Yin & Yang is to separate the polar aspects of our lives and *see* them with clarity. **Meditation** is a way to seek an awareness and appreciation of these opposites, so as to be able to balance them and bring them into harmony. When they are present equally, a natural state of calm and sense of balance is achieved. When one outweighs the other, there is confusion, disarray and absence of balance. The Yin/Yang is a model or concept of the Tao that allows each person to contemplate the state of his or her lives. When they are brought into balance, it is possible to experience perfect happiness. Meditation is a "Way" to achieve this balanced state of being.

### Meditation and Cardiovascular Risk Reduction

A Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association (J.Amer. Heart Assoc. Oct. 2017)

**(Partial Abstract)** This American Heart Association (AHA) scientific statement systematically reviewed the data on the potential benefits of meditation on cardiovascular risk. Neurophysiological and neuroanatomical studies demonstrate that **meditation can have long-standing beneficial effects on the brain**, which provide some biological plausibility for beneficial consequences on the physiological basal state and on cardiovascular risk. **Studies of the effects of meditation on cardiovascular risk have included those studies investigating physiological response to stress, smoking cessation, blood pressure reduction, insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome, endothelial function, inducible myocardial ischemia, and primary and secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease.** Overall, studies of meditation suggest a benefit on cardiovascular risk,

## What Exactly is Mindfulness Meditation?

**Mindfulness** is the *sense of presence* or 'being in the moment' with a clear focus of what is happening around you – here, now, with clarity and *being fully aware*. Mindfulness is not thinking, interpreting, or evaluating; it is an awareness of perception. It is a nonjudgmental quality of mind which does not anticipate the future or reflect back on the past.

Mindfulness is a way of 'meeting your world on purpose' and without judgment. It is 'paying attention on purpose' to the unfolding moment-to-moment experience both within and without. Mindfulness is learning to remain 'centered' so as to *see* clearly and *feel* fully the changing and evolving flow of sensations, feelings (pleasant and unpleasant), emotions and sounds, as they enter your awareness.

In other words, mindfulness is simply *a state of open and nonjudgmental attention* to the contents of your consciousness, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Cultivating this quality of mindful awareness has been demonstrated in many neuro-scientific studies to modulate pain, mitigate anxiety and depression, improve cognitive function, and even produce changes in gray matter density in regions of the brain related to learning and memory, emotional regulation, and self awareness.

**Meditation** is the *act of taking time* to practice concentrated focusing upon a sound, an object, the breath, or movement or visualization in order to increase awareness of the present moment, to promote relaxation, reduce stress and enhance personal and spiritual growth. It works. How successful is directly related to the frequency and diligence of the time dedicated.

**The Teaching of Meditation** varies among different schools of thought and interpretation of the Tao. Simply stated it can be represented in two basic, but different, forms:

- *Mindfulness Meditation* – focuses on the present experience, aware and feeling 'the moment' and accepts intrusive thoughts.
- *Concentration Meditation* – focuses on a particular *repetitive* phrase, object, prayer or action (like a mantra) and rejects intrusive thoughts.

Achieving a state of *Complete Relaxation* is learning to develop a structural sensitivity to your body and being able to sink (relaxing) and ROOT to the earth (grounded) with a natural calm and with a solid attachment. When you are relaxed and rooted, you are able to bend with external forces (**Stress**) without breaking, as a rooted tree bends with the wind.

## The Practice of Mindful Meditation

The practice of mindfulness is extraordinarily simple to describe, but it is in no way easy. Here, as elsewhere in life, the "10,000 Hour Rule" of author, Malcolm Gladwell, tends to apply. The simple instructions below are analogous to instructions on 'how to walk a tightrope':

1. Find a horizontal cable that can support your weight.
2. Stand on one end.
3. Step forward by placing one foot directly in front of the other.
4. Repeat stepping to the other end.
5. Don't fall.

Clearly, steps 3-5 entail a little practice. Fortunately, the benefits of practicing meditation and developing mindfulness arrive long before mastery ever does.

As every meditator soon discovers, *distraction* is the normal condition of our minds: Most of us fall from the wire every second, toppling headlong--whether gliding happily in reverie, or plunging into fear, anger, self-hatred and other negative states of mind. Meditation is a technique for breaking this spell of distraction, if only for a few moments. The goal is to awaken from our trance of rambling thinking and from the habit of ceaselessly grasping at the pleasant and recoiling from the unpleasant. The goal is to enjoy a mind that is undisturbed by worry and is effortlessly aware of the flow of experience in the present. The ultimate state of awareness is not thoughts *per se*, but the state of thinking without knowing that one is thinking.

There are many different approaches or strategies to meditation. They all have the same goal - a positive and sincere attitude about your practicing. Rather than adding to your 'should' list, choose to practice because you care about connecting with your innate capacity for love, clarity and inner peace. There is no 'right' way to meditate. Striving to 'get it right' reinforces the sense of an imperfect, striving self. Rather, allow the meditation experience to be whatever it is, spontaneously, without trying (state of *Wu Wei*, defined below).

### **Meditation Instructions:**

- Sit comfortably, with your spine erect, either in chair or cross-legged on a cushion.
- Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and feel the points of contact between your body and the chair or floor. Notice the sensations associated with sitting – e.g. feelings of pressure, warmth, tingling, vibration, etc.
- Gradually become aware of the process of breathing. Pay attention to wherever you feel the breath most clearly--either at the nostrils, or in the rising and falling your abdomen.
- Allow your attention to rest in the *mere sensation of breathing*. Do not try to control your breath. Just let it come and go, naturally.
- Every time your mind wanders in thought, gently return it to the sensation of breathing.
- As you focus on the breath, you will notice that other perceptions and sensations continue to appear: sounds, feelings in the body, emotions, etc. Simply notice these as they emerge in your field of awareness, and then return to the sensation of breathing.
- Getting distracted or stalled with your thoughts is totally natural. The moment you observe that you have been lost in thought, return your attention to the breath, allowing your thoughts to resume passing by without any further consideration; like passing clouds.
- Continue in this way until you can simply witness all objects of consciousness--sights, sounds, sensations, emotions, and even thoughts themselves--as they arise and pass away.

The key to successful achieving mindfulness and complete relaxation is **daily practice**. Make a commitment to yourself to sit for a few minutes twice a day and enjoy the feeling. Five minutes after brushing your teeth in the morning and again in the evening is an easy way to start. Practice for a month; consider listening to meditative music or guided instruction (see references below). It becomes a journey.

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There is a Zen teaching: ***“The most important thing - is remembering the most important thing”***.

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**An Interesting Side Story:** One of Taoism’s most important concepts is [Wu-Wei](#), which is sometimes translated as “no-trying or “no-doing”. A better way to think of it, however, is as a paradoxical “action of non-action.” Wu-Wei (pronounced ‘OOO-Way’) refers to the cultivation of a state of being in which our actions are quite effortlessly in alignment with the ebb and flow of the elemental cycles of the natural world around us. It is a kind of “going with the flow” or “being in the zone” that is characterized by great ease and wakefulness, in which - without even trying - we’re able to respond perfectly (what I refer to as: *spontaneous calmness*) to whatever situations arise.

*Wu-Wei* is an important principle in the martial arts. A Zen master's actions flow spontaneously in response to his circumstances, with just enough force -- not too much, not too little – just effortless action.

The state of “Wu-Wei” is to *Try without Trying* or to *Do without intending to Do* – **Spontaneously!**

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### **References I Recommend:**

- ◆ ***Trying Not to Try***’ by Edward Slingerland, Professor of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia. (Print or On-Line)
- ◆ ***Discovery the Healing Power of Tai Chi*** – [Copy & Paste this link]. Sign up for their newsletter. [www.health.harvard.edu/search?q=Tai+Chi](http://www.health.harvard.edu/search?q=Tai+Chi)
- ◆ ***The Mindful Day – Practical Ways to Find Focus, Calm, and Joy From Morning to Evening*** by Laurie J. Cameron 2018

## **Web Resources to Download to your Smartphone, Tablet or Computer (Copy & Paste):**

- ◆ UCLA's [Mindful Awareness Research Center](#) has several *guided meditations* that you may enjoy and find helpful. (Click on the link above)
- <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/meditation>
- <https://www.insighttimer.com>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/well/guides/how-to-meditate>
- <http://nyti.ms/2e1nJjo> (“How to Be Mindful with Your Cat”)
- <http://www.apple.com/itunes/appstore>
  - One-Moment Meditation (OMM)
  - Mindfulness Daily
- <http://buddhify.com>
- <https://www.youtube.com/user/YellowBrickCinema>

**ENJOY YOUR JOURNEY – IT IS ALL ABOUT YOU**

Gordon C. Gunn, M.D.  
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