

The Worldwide Mindfulness Meditation Practice

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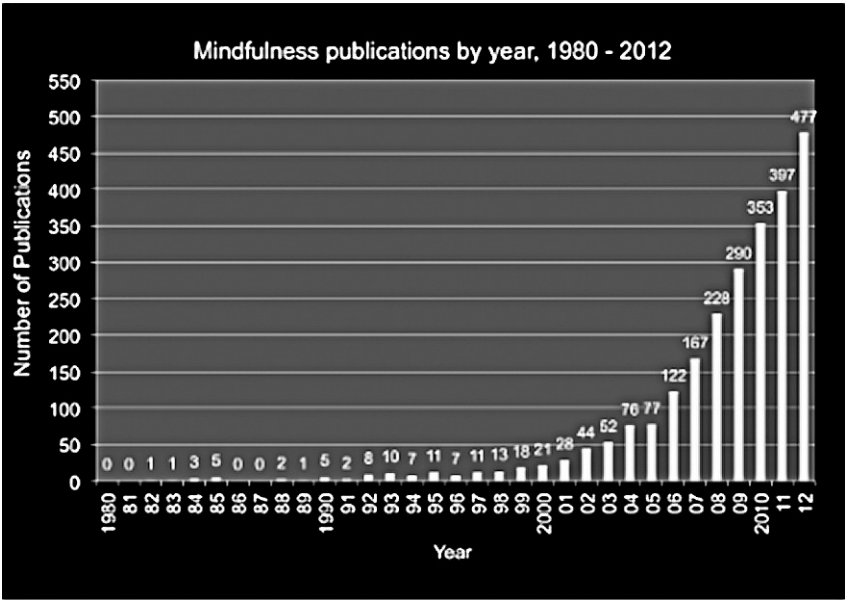
According to JWT Worldwide, (1) the fourth world's largest marketing communications brand, 2014 will be the year of mindfulness living and mindful living is one of 10 trends that will shape the world in 2014 and many more years beyond.

TIME's cover story on mindfulness



Mindful living is the cultivation of a focused awareness on the present moment through practicing meditation techniques (e.g. focus meditation (FM) and open meditation (OM) taught by the Buddha).

Publication of mindfulness studies from 1980-2012



From Mindfulness Research Guide – Informing Mindfulness Research and Practice

TWO FORMS OF MEDITATION

The benefits of meditation continue to fuel its practice in both adults and children alike. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, based on a 2007 survey, (2) over 20 million Americans practiced meditation. Today, the number is much higher - may be triple or more - because meditation has become very popular in America and worldwide for its psychological and physical health benefits.

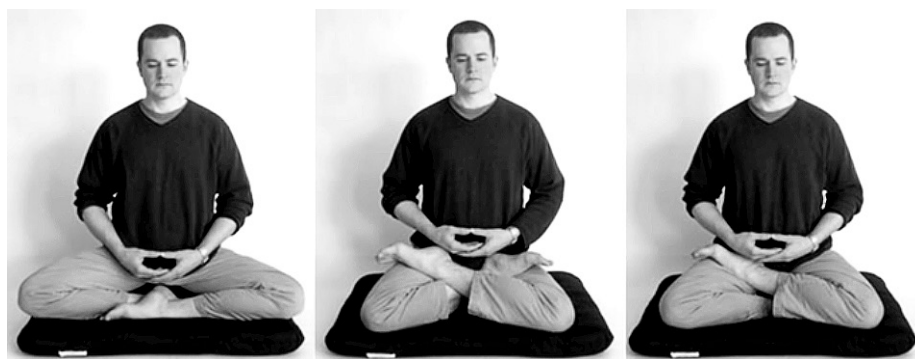
Meditation has many forms with different meanings. In general, meditation, or mindfulness meditation, is a process of familiarization with one’s own awareness. Dr. Richard Davidson, a famous neurology professor of the University of Wisconsin and his colleagues, (3) have studied and conducted many researches on meditation and have proven that meditation leads to long-lasting positive changes in the mind (e.g.

cognition and emotion) and in the brain (e.g. positive neuroplasticity). Through meditation, neurons and its networks in the brain change their connections and activities in response to mindfulness practice and those changes promote well-being.

Meditation has two forms: quiet meditation or sitting meditation, and meditation in movement, such as walking meditation, yoga, qi gong or chi kung, or tai chi. Scientists have proven both forms of meditation can change the gene expression in human bodies to enhance their physical and mental health (4).



Sitting meditation



Images from the internet

MEDITATION BOOSTS POSITIVE EMOTION AND HEALTH

In 2003, in a famous study on the effects on brain and immune function of an 8-week clinical training program in meditation, Dr. Davidson, Dr. Kabat-Zinn and their colleagues (5) reported significant increases in left-sided brain activation, a brain pattern associated with positive emotion, in the meditators compared with the non meditators. They found significant increases in antibody titers to influenza vaccine among those who meditated and the higher increase in left frontal brain activation the higher of antibody titers rise to the vaccine.

In many studies, reseachers have proven that activities in the left prefrontal cortex are related to happiness, inhibition of negative feeling like fear, anger or anxiety:

- The left prefrontal cortex plays a positive role in happy feelings. The right side of the prefrontal cortex has a strong relationship with negative feelings, (6)

- Greater left superior frontal activation is associated with higher levels of both forms of well-being: eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing, (7)

- Those who are having positive emotions have higher activation in the left prefrontal cortex than those who are having negative emotions have higer activation in the right prefrontal cortex, (8, 9)

- Those who have more left frontal cortex activation have better immune system (e.g. they have more natural killer cells) than individuals who have greater right side activation, (10)

- Those with greater relative baseline left-sided prefrontal activity recover more quickly following a negative event, (11)

- **There are** relations between socioeconomic status (SES) and prefrontal asymmetry in adolescents. The lower the SES, the greater the relative right-sided prefrontal activity, (12).

However, in his brief commentary highlighted seven sins in the study of emotion, Dr. Davidson (13) reminded us that emotions occure not only in our brain but also in our body and specific emotions do not

exist in specific locations in the brain. The brain is not like a computer, but more like an orchestra, with billions of neurons in the left and right brain cooperating to produce positive or negative emotions. Meditation is a good practice to integrate both side of our brain with positive results.

MEDITATION FACILITATING BRAIN INTEGRATION

According to Dr. Siegel, (14) a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and Executive Director of the Mindsight Institute.of UCLA, when practicing mindful awareness, we focus our attention consciously, starting with our breathing and body sensations, then to sounds, sights, smells, taste, and to our emotions and thoughts. When training our minds through mindful awareness activities, we are stimulating the growth of our brain neurons and creating new neural activities patterns. These neural changes, facilitating brain integration in the middle prefrontal region of our brain, improve nine middle prefrontal brain functions (i.e. defined by the author): (15)

1. Body Regulation:

Body Regulation generally works without conscious control and regulates functions like heart rate, breathing, digestion, vascular tone, inflammation and immune response, etc.

2. Attuned Communication:

Attuned Communication is defined as the coordination of input from another mind with the activity of one's own.

3. Emotional Balance:

Emotional Balance is defined as being able to keep from being overwhelmed or becoming inflexible in one's emotional response.

4. Response Flexibility:

Response Flexibility is the capacity to pause before action. This is the delay of reaction, therefore, we can select a variety of possible options.

5. Empathy:

Empathy is defined as conscious awareness and sensitivity to the mind of someone else. It is the putting of oneself in someone else's shoes.

6. Insight, or self-knowing awareness:

Insight links the past, present and future. Insight, thank to our present awareness, help us to know more of our life story and image of the future.

7. Fear modulation:

Fear can be reduced from the middle brain prefrontal cortex via neurons that connect with the amygdala, a limbic structure that registers threat and opportunity. These neurons can release calming neurotransmitters (GABA) and can be consciously reprogrammed.

8. Intuition:

Intuition in this context means registering the input from neurons from the heart and gut.

9. Morality:

Morality means the ability to think of the larger social good and enact those behaviors, even when alone.

20. SCIENTIFIC REASONS TO MEDITATE

There are more reasons to meditate. Dr. Emma M. Seppälä, (16) compiled many new scientific researches showing meditation boosts people health, happiness, and success:

HEALTH**Meditation:**

1. Increases immune function
2. Decreases Pain
3. Decreases Inflammation at the Cellular Level

HAPPINESS

Meditation:

4. Increases Positive Emotion
5. Decreases Depression
6. Decreases Anxiety
7. Decreases Stress

SOCIAL LIFE

Meditation:

8. Increases social connection and emotional intelligence
9. Makes people become more compassionate
10. Makes people feel less lonely

SELF-CONTROL

Meditation:

11. Improves people's ability to regulate his/her emotions
12. Improves people's ability to introspect

BRAIN CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Meditation:

13. Increases grey brain matter
14. Increases volume in brain areas related to emotion regulation, positive emotions and self-control
15. Increases brain cortical thickness in brain areas related to attention

BECOME MORE PRODUCTIVE

Meditation:

16. Increases people's focus and attention
17. Improves people's ability to multitask

18. Improves people's memory
19. Improves people's ability to be creative

20. IT MAKES PEOPLE BECOME WISER

The benefits of mindfulness meditation are vast. For healthy and happy living, practicing meditation daily is necessary. It changes our life and our very sense of being here and now in this world. Mindfulness meditation has been around for more than two thousands and five hundreds of years, since the Lord Buddha enlightenment, and practiced by people from all walks of life and on all five continents of our lovely earth, and it will be here for many more centuries.

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