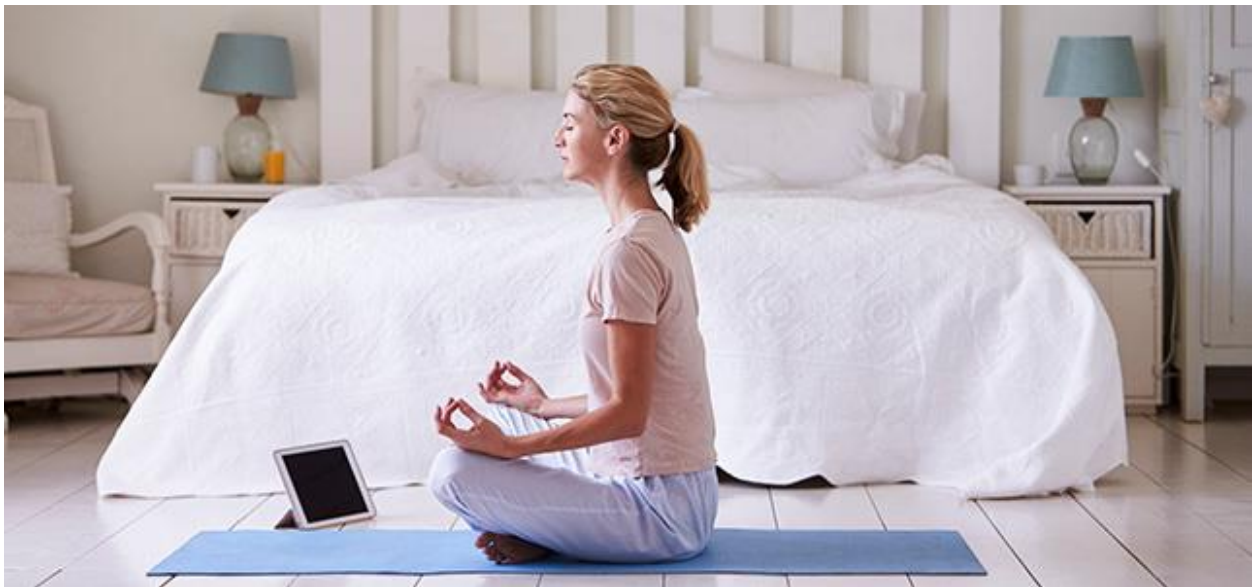


# 7 Ways Meditation Is a Prescription for Mental Health

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*Meditation can not only improve your mental health, but it builds resilience to help solve problems. Here are seven ways meditation benefits your mental health.*



May is Mental Health Month, and an increasing number of people are having to face anxiety, grief, and depression during the coronavirus pandemic. As a collective, we have the opportunity to embrace, integrate, and step back; we create new paths to raise awareness and remove stigmas surrounding mental health challenges.

You, or someone you know, are likely to be searching for a moment of sanity, searching for some inner rest. Creating awareness around mental health must be taken to the next level—to meet an old problem with new solutions. One key to building mental resilience is [meditation](#).

## 1. Meditation Reverses the Fight-or-Flight Response

This [primal instinct](#) is hardwired to help you survive imagined or real threats. It does so by triggering the sympathetic system in the brain that starts a chain of physiological reactions in the

body. It increases your heart rate and blood sugar, while it also suppresses the immune system and produces stress hormones to prepare the body to respond to danger.

Although this system is necessary in the event of danger, some people live with ongoing stress. This predisposes you to reactivity. If you have been through trauma or anxiety, the fight-or-flight response becomes overactive and responds even when there is no actual threat. [Meditation helps the brain turn off the reactivity and shift into a restful response state.](#)

## 2. Meditation Initiates Rest

Rest is how the body heals. Imagine running on a treadmill for a couple of hours without a break. It wouldn't be very long before your body completely tires and your mind starts to generate anxious thoughts such as: "When is this going to end?" This would trigger physical responses in the body from heightened levels of worry to anxiety and even panic.

You may live this way. You rarely turn off your brain; rather, you live with ongoing anxiety. [When you meditate](#), the body is able to reset from stress and begin to move into a restful, but aware, state that allows you to feel recharged.

## 3. Meditation Activates Resilience

We are taught to think that resilience is a 12-step skill that can be downloaded. [Resilience](#) is your birthright. It is that "thing" that shows up when you lose your dream job or experience heartbreak. Resilience is the substance that allows you to experience hope, bounce back, and recover—even though everything inside whispers that you can't.

When you meditate, you tame the fear response that is registered by the amygdala, the part of the brain that senses danger. Since fear and anxiety have a habitual component, over time meditation calms and regulates emotions. You aren't meant to live in the primitive brain. As time passes you naturally begin to tap the higher brain centers that are responsible for critical problem solving and inspired thinking. You experience self-mastery and tap into your natural resilience. An aspect of emotional intelligence, resilience is enhanced through successful outcomes. The easiest way to experience emotional mastery is through [breathwork](#) and meditation.

## 4. Meditation Creates More Space in Your Head

Deepak Chopra has said that people experience [60,000 to 80,000](#) thoughts each day; some of those thoughts are recycled, intrusive, and negative. They contribute to harsh self-judgment and anxiety. Like swimming in rough waters, you battle [negative thoughts](#) or shove them deep down because they are painful.

But in doing so, you create more thoughts; you come up against your [inner critic](#) and begin to lose confidence. Simply bypassing those thoughts on a regular basis allows you to decrease the activity in your mind. A part of addressing negative thinking is meditation. As a tool, meditation allows you to move from the constant activity that goes on in the mind to places of calm within yourself.

## 5. Meditation Creates New Pathways in the Brain

The old view of mental health centers around symptom management; the new view of mental health is rooted in self-mastery. [Self-mastery](#) is about developing mental hygiene practices that

view your brain and biology as an ever-changing system of information and energy, one that is flexible and adaptable.

For instance, [a study](#) conducted by Harvard University and Mass General shows that after just eight weeks of meditation, participants experienced growth in areas of the brain associated with stress regulation, learning, self-awareness, and empathy. Also, the research indicated that meditation may enhance your ability to break the loop of fear and habitual anxiety. This study demonstrated that a simple meditation practice can create core changes to affect a rebalance in your biology.

## 6. Meditation Releases Brain Chemicals that are Linked to Happiness

[According to the National Institute for Mental Health](#), nearly one in five Americans (450 million people) lives with a mental health disorder. Meditation naturally releases chemicals in the brain that are often targeted by prescription drugs; the deep state of rest that happens through meditation triggers the release of brain chemicals that are linked to [happiness](#). Although changing your current medication regimen isn't advised, checking with your healthcare provider about adding meditation is suggested.

## 7. Meditation Helps You to Attain Balance

Meditation allows you to return to your body and mind as the vessel of your spiritual evolution. When you look at your mental health from a holistic perspective, you become aware that you are not just the mind or personality—you are part of a larger collective experience. Your healing and health come from greater mental space and sustained emotional balance. This is achieved by centering your body and mind. You become aware of your spiritual nature and come to understand that you are inextricably connected in all facets of life.

Mental Health Month is a reminder to create greater awareness and less stigma around these prevalent health issues. Mental health is part of the larger experience of being a healthy human—drawing out our natural resilience.

If you are overwhelmed or anxious, seek sources to support your emotional well-being—from trusted friends to trusted mental health professionals. **Remember you are not alone.** Give yourself permission to know that you are working through challenging times. You are here for a reason; when you have engaged the collective participation of mind-body-soul, you begin to have freedom.

*\*Editor's Note: The information in this article is intended for your educational use only; it does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Chopra Center's Mind-Body Medical Group; and is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health providers with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition and before undertaking any diet, supplement, fitness, or other health programs.*

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