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MEDITATE AND LOSE WEIGHT

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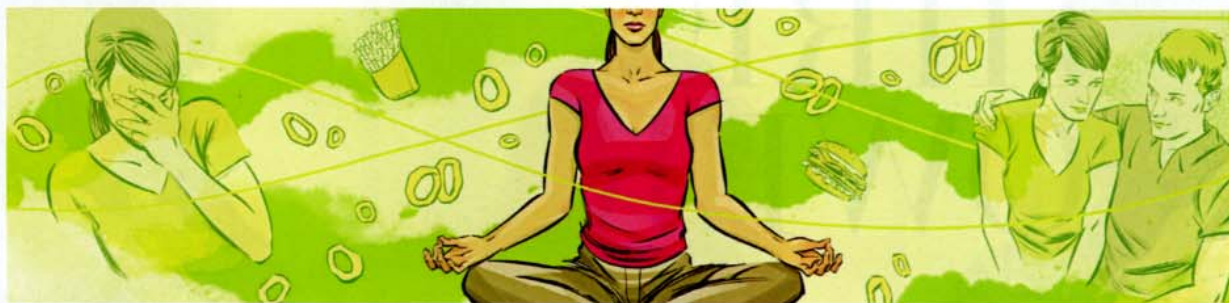
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Meditation FOR:



Depression

WHY IT WORKS

People who struggle with the blues tend to see sadness as a problem they need to fix. When the emotion wells up, they begin to ruminate over such questions as *Why am I feeling like this? What does this say about me? Will I ever get better?* But the brooding only causes more pain. Meditation can help quiet those thoughts, says psychologist Mark Williams, coauthor of *The Mindful Way Through Depression*. It teaches the mind to experience emotions without judging them, and people who are vulnerable to depression learn to avoid falling into whirlpools of counterproductive thinking. "As a result," Williams says, "the sadness tends to dissolve much more quickly than it might have otherwise."

HOW IT WORKS

Williams and two colleagues adapted Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program to create Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), a blend of meditation practices with therapy techniques to reshape self-critical thoughts. In the two-month course, participants meet for class once a week (topics include "Staying Present" and "Automatic Pilot"), and do one hour of meditation "homework" (like a visualization) each day. Clinical trials have shown that MBCT, which costs about \$500, is as effective as antidepressants at reducing the rate of depression relapse. Go to mbct.com to learn more. If there are no courses in your area, you can follow the program in *The Mindful Way Through Depression*.

Weight Loss

WHY IT WORKS

It's hard to believe that anything could quell a late-night Rocky Road craving besides the cold, creamy stuff. But with enough practice, meditative techniques can kill that mindless urge to eat. Whenever you eye the breadbasket or pop open a bag of pretzels, a brief breathing exercise will help clear your head: Try counting your breaths up to four (*innn, one, innn, two...*), and then ask yourself, *Am I hungry, or am I eating for some other reason?* You build this habit the way you build a muscle, says Nina Smiley, PhD, who runs a four-day mindful eating retreat at the Mohonk Mountain House in upstate New York. Eventually, eating becomes a choice rather than a thoughtless habit.

HOW IT WORKS

Breathing exercises can be combined with other techniques that help you reconnect to your physical self. "Most of us inhabit our bodies without really feeling them," Smiley says. She asks guests at her retreat to rate their hunger level from one to ten every time they eat, to practice tuning in to their natural cues. She also asks them to keep a food journal, in which they write down what they eat, when they eat it, and (most important) how they're feeling at that moment. Soon they should start to see patterns and change their behavior. For example, if you eat cookies simply to reward yourself, you might consider an alternative prize, like taking a candlelit bath. To book a retreat, visit mohonk.com.

Your Marriage

WHY IT WORKS

Meditation appears to train the brain to be more empathetic, a handy trait when you feel like strangling the person you love. In 2007 researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison used fMRI scans to peek inside the brains of 16 monks and found that meditation lit up the temporal parietal junction—a region that helps us to feel, and respond to, others' emotional states. This could explain why spouses say that the practice leads to more compassion in their relationships. In recent research by Virginia Tech's Marriage and Family Therapy Program, high-conflict couples who started meditating by focusing on one word or phrase for ten minutes at a time (together or alone) found themselves arguing less often.

HOW IT WORKS

Diane Gehart, PhD, a marriage counselor in Thousand Oaks, California, who specializes in mindfulness, suggests that couples start small, with just two to five minutes of meditation a day (and take the weekends off). You should be seated, facing your partner, but meditate in whatever way you prefer: You could listen to a track from one of Kabat-Zinn's CDs or follow one of the guided meditations on Gehart's Web site (dianegehart.com). Or you could simply set a timer and sit in silence, observing your breath, noticing your thoughts and then letting them go. After about two weeks, Gehart's clients start to report greater intimacy. —SALLY McGRANE