20 Scientific Reasons to Start Meditating Today

[](https://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/emma-m-sepp-l-phd)New research shows meditation boosts your health, happiness, and success!

## About the Author

**[Emma Seppala, Ph.D](https://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/emma-m-sepp-l-phd)**[, is the Associate Director of the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University.](https://www.psychologytoday.com/experts/emma-m-sepp-l-phd)

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I started meditating soon after 9/11. I was living in Manhattan, an already chaotic place, at an extremely chaotic time. I realized I had no control over my external [environment](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/environment). But the one place I did have a say over was my mind, through [meditation](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/meditation). When I started meditating, I did not realize it would also make me healthier, happier, and more successful. Having witnessed the benefits, I devoted my PhD research at Stanford to studying the impact of meditation. I saw people from diverse backgrounds from college students to combat veterans benefit. In the last 10 years, hundreds of studies have been released. Here are 20 scientifically-validated reasons you might want to get on the bandwagon today:

**It Boosts Your** [**HEALTH**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/health)

1 - Increases immune function

2 - Decreases Pain

3 - Decreases Inflammation at the Cellular Level

**It Boosts Your** [**HAPPINESS**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/happiness)

4 - Increases Positive Emotion

5 - Decreases [Depression](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/depression)

6 - Decreases Anxiety

7 - Decreases [Stress](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/stress)

**It Boosts Your** [**SOCIAL LIFE**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/social-life)

Think meditation is a solitary activity? It may be (unless you meditate in a group which many do!) but it actually increases your sense of connection to others:

8 - Increases social connection & [emotional intelligence](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/emotional-intelligence)

9 - Makes you more compassionate

10 - Makes you feel less lonely

**It Boosts Your** [**Self-Control**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/self-control)

11 - Improves your ability to regulate your emotions

12 - Improves your ability to introspect

**Changes Your** [**BRAIN**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/neuroscience) **(for the better)**

13 - Increases grey matter

14 - Increases volume in areas related to [emotion regulation](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/emotion-regulation), positive emotions & self-control

15 - Increases cortical thickness in areas related to paying attention

**It Improves Your** [**Productivity**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/productivity) **(yup, by doing nothing)**

16 - Increases your focus & attention

17 - Improves your ability to multitask

18 - Improves your [memory](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/memory)

19 - Improves your ability to be creative & think outside the box (see research by [J. Schooler (link is external)](http://www.psych.ucsb.edu/people/faculty/schooler))

20. **It Makes You** [**WISE**](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/wisdom)**(R)**

It gives you perspective: By observing your mind, you realize you don't have to be slave to it. You realize it throws tantrums, gets grumpy, [jealous](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/jealousy), happy and sad but that it doesn't have to run you. Meditation is quite simply mental hygiene: clear out the junk, tune your talents, and get in touch with yourself. Think about it, you shower every day and clean your body, but have you ever showered your mind? As a consequence, you'll feel more clear and see things with greater perspective. "The quality of our life depends on the quality of our mind," writes [Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (link is external)](http://www.wisdom.srisriravishankar.org/). We can't control what happens on the outside but we do have a say over the quality of our mind. No matter what's going on, if your mind is ok, everything is ok. Right now.

**It Keeps You Real**

Once you get to know your mind, you start to own your stuff and become more authentic, maybe even humble. You realize the stories and soap operas your mind puts you through and you gain some perspective on them. You realize most of us are caught up in a mind-drama and become more compassionate towards others.

And...the more you meditate, the more you seem to benefit, research studies [such as this (link is external)](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053811909000044) one suggest.

**Myths about Meditation**

Having an empty mind—nope, in fact, when you start meditating, you'll find its quite the opposite

Sitting in lotus position—nope, you can sit on the couch (just don't lie down, you'll fall asleep)

Sitting for an hour a day—nope, small doses work just fine

Chanting in a language I don't understand—nope, not unless that floats your boat

Buddhist, Hindu or [religious](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/religion)—nope, not unless you make it so

Weird—what's so weird about sitting and breathing? Besides, US [*congressmen (link is external)*](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18563_162-57568552/ohio-congressmans-meditation-crusade/), [*NFL football leagues (link is external)*](http://espn.go.com/nfl/story/_/id/9581925/seattle-seahawks-use-unusual-techniques-practice-espn-magazine) and the [*US Marine Corps (link is external)*](http://www.nbcnews.com/health/meditating-marines-military-tries-mindfulness-lower-stress-1B8050993)are doing it, how weird can it be?

Wearing robes—what?

**"I can't meditate" because**

I can't clear my mind—no worries, while you're sitting there you'll experience the noisy chaos of a wound up mind that's unwinding: tons of thoughts, feelings and emotions. Don't worry about how you feel during, notice how you feel after and throughout the rest of the day

I can't sit still—that's ok, just sit comfortably, fidget if you need to

I get anxious—that's also normal, all the junk's coming up, learn some breathing practices to calm yourself down, exercise or do yoga before meditating

I hate sitting still—that's fine, then go for a walk without your earphones, phone etc; or start with yoga; or do breathing exercises…give yourself time to just "be" without constantly "doing" something

I tried and I hated it—there's not just one kind of meditation, there's a whole menu out there, look for the shoe that fits: [*mindfulness*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/mindfulness), Transcendental, compassion, mantra, Vipassana, Art of Living breathing practices, yoga nidra, yoga, insight, loving-kindness, tai chi etc...

I don't have time - if you have time to read an article about meditation all the way through, you have time to meditate. Think of all those minutes you waste every day on the internet or otherwise, you can definitely fit in 20 minutes here or there to give your life a boost! Gandhi is quoted as saying "I'm so busy today, that... I'm going to meditate 2 hours instead of 1."

**To read more on the benefits of meditation for your health, happiness & success, check out my book** [**The Happiness Track (HarperOne) (link is external)**](http://amzn.to/2oY6jcu)**, now available in paperback!**

