

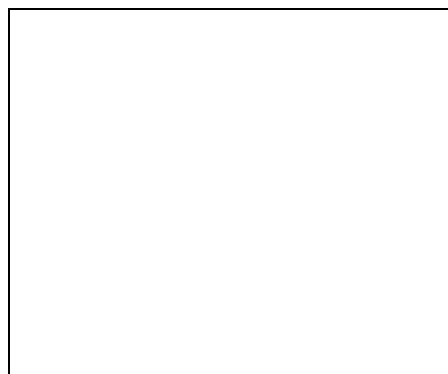


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Study: Mindful meditation may strengthen certain brain regions

Practice may improve memory, sense of self and ability to handle stress

Source: (AHN) Reporter: David Goodhue
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New research suggests meditation may improve certain brain regions and help them with memory, sense of self, empathy and stress.

The Massachusetts General Hospital researchers said in a statement that changes in brain structure in people who practiced eight weeks of mindful meditation suggest the practice goes beyond simply making people feel better because they are spending time relaxing.

Meditation has long been recommended by practitioners as a way to achieve peacefulness, physical relaxation and cognitive and psychological benefits that persist throughout the day.

The researchers studied 16 participants two weeks before and after they took part in an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program. In addition to questionnaires, the participants were also analyzed by MRI images to observe changes in certain regions of the brain.

Compared with a control group, images of the brains of participants who reported spending an average of 27 minutes each day meditating showed increased gray matter density in the hippocampus, known to be important for learning and memory, and in structures associated with self awareness, compassion and introspection.

The researchers said their findings show how malleable the brain is and that meditation can go a long way in improving personal well being.

A report on the study will be published in the Jan. 30 issue of *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*.

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