



Mind, Body and Heart: How to Nurture Your Inner Calm and Heal With Meditation

PROTECT YOUR HEART, IMPROVE YOUR
EMOTIONAL HEALTH, AND BOLSTER YOUR
IMMUNE SYSTEM, BY QUIETING YOUR MIND

I S A A C E L I A Z M D

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Isaac Eliaz, MD, MS, LAc is a pioneer in the field of integrative medicine with more than 30 years of experience as a physician and researcher. He has partnered with some of the nation's leading research institutes, including Harvard and Columbia Universities. As an internationally recognized expert in the treatment of cancer and other complex diseases, Dr. Eliaz embraces a whole-person approach to healing. He is the author of *The Survival Paradox*, as well as the owner and formulator of EcoNugenics, a line of science-backed supplements. He is also the founder and medical director of Amitabha Medical Clinic & Healing Center in Santa Rosa, Calif.



“I’ve learned to let go of our current medical system’s dogmatic paradigms, both conventional and alternative. People often say I think ‘outside the box,’ to which I reply, there was never a box to begin with.”

— Isaac Eliaz, MD, MS, LAc

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As Americans, we spend a lot of energy caring for our hearts. We research heart-healthy diets, schedule cardio classes, take aspirin, and buy blood pressure monitors. Pharmacies across the nation have entire walls dedicated to heart medications. Despite these efforts, cardiovascular disease is still the No. 1 killer in this country. And rates of other chronic conditions are skyrocketing, from depression and anxiety to autoimmune problems and insomnia.

But new data suggests that one of the keys to life-long cardiovascular and total-body health doesn't come from outside, but inside. Specifically, research is showing that a simple meditation practice can be profoundly beneficial for our hearts, bodies, and mind on every level: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The Science of Meditation

Just 10 minutes a day helps the brain: Breakthrough clinical studies have demonstrated meditation's powerful effects on brain structure and function. Regular meditation — even just 10 minutes per day — improves areas related to concentration, memory, decision-making, and emotional stability. Of course, the association between a healthy brain and a healthy heart isn't new, but we may have underestimated the power of that relationship.



Neuroscientists at UCLA have shown another fascinating neural effect of regular meditation: the ability to increase “cortical gyrification” of the brain. Cortical gyrification refers to the folding of the cerebral cortex, a function that allows the brain to process information faster. The cerebral cortex is the outermost layer of neural tissue in the brain and serves an important role in controlling memory, consciousness, thought processing, decision-making, attention and awareness.

POSITIVITY COUNTS:

For example, a study by the Harvard School of Public Health found that a positive outlook can keep heart disease at bay. It didn't matter whether participants were old or young, rich or poor — happy thoughts proved to be good for the heart.



BLOOD PRESSURE REMEDY:

Another study, conducted in India, examined the health benefits of meditation and yoga. Participants who adopted these practices for 15 days experienced significantly lower resting pulse and blood pressure. This data is especially significant because the window was so brief. The benefits were almost instantaneous.



HEALTHIER HEART VENTRICLES:

Other research, conducted at the Georgia Health Sciences University, showed that teens who practiced regular meditation were able to reduce their hearts' left ventricle thickness, which can increase from high blood pressure.



INSTANT CALM:

The research also indicates one of the prime reasons for these benefits: when we calm the mind, everything else in the body relaxes, including the autonomic nervous system. As a result, fewer stress hormones are produced, heart rate slows, and blood pressure goes down. One study found that 10 minutes a day of meditation helps reduce symptoms of anxiety.



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The Health Benefits of Meditation You Can't Afford to Live Without

In addition to supporting cardiovascular health, clinical data shows that meditation provides numerous other benefits, including:

- ▶ Enhancing immunity
- ▶ Alleviating depression and anxiety
- ▶ Boosting cognitive function
- ▶ Improving emotional health
- ▶ Protecting neurons and DNA
- ▶ Reducing pain
- ▶ Fighting cancer
- ▶ Easing stress and associated high cortisol levels
- ▶ Controlling inflammation



3-Step Shamatha Meditation Practice

One of the simplest ways to calm the mind and body is an ancient form of meditation called Shamatha, which means “calm abiding.” In Shamatha, you focus your breathing and attention on a single object, such as a small pebble. As you place your attention on both the object and your breathing, you learn to let go of your surface distractions and neurotic patterns.

As the saying goes, “The mind is like a blind rider on a wild horse.” Too often, many of us have no control, and don’t know where our thoughts are leading next. We are literally held captive by our everyday mental processes. Shamatha helps peel away these layers of distractions.

As you relax, you begin to experience peace, clarity, and healing.

- ▶ To begin, find a quiet space. Sit comfortably.
- ▶ Place a small object such as a pebble or shell in front of you, and focus on the object and your breathing. It won’t be easy at first. Your busy mind will likely distract you with to-do lists and other chatter. This is a natural part of the process.
- ▶ Gently bring your focus back to your breathing and the object. Practice breathing “into” and “from” the object. As you use your breathing to nurture this inner calm, it will become easier to access over time.



Meditation Retreats — Transformation in a Matter of Days

It isn't always easy to adopt a regular meditation practice. One great way to start is by attending a retreat for inspiration, guidance, and support. Personalized instruction and group support make it easier to let go of stressors. Even more important, developing the practice in a healing environment can help you incorporate meditation into your regular routine.

Often, people undergo visible transformations in just a few days. For some, results can be as simple as improved sleep. Others, who have struggled with chronic pain, describe the simple joy of being able to sit comfortably. Still others report reduced blood pressure, improved emotional health, and enhanced well-being. Those suffering from cancer and other forms of chronic illness can also often derive great benefits from meditation. Meditation can work for everyone — once you feel the benefits, it becomes an important part of your life.



To experience the full benefits of mind-body healing, look for retreats that incorporate guided meditation, yoga, Qi Gong, energy medicine, and insights from Tibetan, traditional Chinese, and other time-honored healing systems.

As a life-long practitioner of meditation, I've had the opportunity to study with renowned teachers, and I'm passionate about sharing my experiences and insights through meditation workshops, retreats, and other educational events to support others on their paths. Buoyed by personal guidance and group support, participants are free to uncover their natural inner peace in a deeply healing environment. It's a transformational process that extends well beyond the initial event. These practices can infuse us with a lifetime of healing.

Heart-Body Medicine

Mind-body methods like meditation can only unleash our innate healing potential when we figure out how to truly engage our hearts. In this regard, a more accurate term for this type of healing is “heart-body medicine” rather than “mind-body medicine.” It is heartfulness rather than mindfulness. I call this “open heart medicine.”

The basic physiology of our heart and the fundamental mechanics of this vital organ function in a way that actually allows and supports “miracle” healing — an unexpected positive outcome that defies probability.

Finding Motivation and Gratitude During Difficult Times

When life is overwhelming, the last thing we have energy to think about is how to help others, or ourselves for that matter. How do we find the motivation to “think positively” and to be grateful for a crisis? First of all, it’s very important to be honest with ourselves. Frustration over hardships is real and natural, and it’s important to recognize it without covering it up under a thin layer of positive thinking, just because people tell us to “keep a positive attitude.” Being honest with ourselves is the foundation for having authentic motivation.



The Peeling Process

But, it's equally as important not to identify ourselves with our crises, and not to internalize our suffering and thus make it more painful. Remember, we are not our illness/condition/circumstance. One way to move through such challenges is to allow our feelings to flow freely without overindulging in them, and begin to experience it as a "peeling process."

There is a very real truth to the philosophy that crises present an opportunity for growth and healing on all levels, physical, mental, emotional and psycho-spiritual. This is the "peeling process," where layers of obstructions and distractions seem to peel away or vanish during a crisis, and our true essence can emerge. In fact, many people would never experience the same growth, or transformations, without such challenges.

The Energetics of Motivation

What are the motivating forces at work here? Part of giving rise to motivation is the recognition that all beings want the same thing. All beings are united by our natural fears and desires. We all want to be happy and likewise, we all experience suffering. It's the truth of our existence. The goal for healing and growth is to liberate ourselves from our hopes and fears, to cut through our attachments and aversions, to give rise to greater love and compassion. This in turn can generate authentic motivation to benefit ourselves and others.



Though it may seem contradictory, it is this sense of detachment from our “superficial” circumstances in life that can bring about a greater sense of presence and awareness of a much deeper, more profound state of being. Then, of course, if we can heal ourselves, it inspires us to share it with others, like a bucket that is filled with water. So that’s part of giving rise to authentic motivation, and this comes from the heart.

True healing, regardless of the health program, is about uncovering greater love and compassion, thereby allowing our innate healing capacities to arise and flourish. Meditation is one of the best ways to accomplish this. In this way, we overflow our cups with unconditional love, gratitude, and compassion for all beings, and effortlessly offer this healing energy to ourselves and everyone around us. And that’s something to be truly grateful for.

The Role of Liver, Heart, and Kidneys in Motivation

ORGAN:
LIVER

TRAITS:

Easily congested, accumulating toxins (including anger and other difficult emotions) and other metabolic byproducts and excesses.

REMEDIES:

When we can open up the liver through acupuncture, homeopathic remedies, herbs, mind-body practices, etc., we can begin to experience freedom from our own afflictive physical, mental and emotional issues.

ORGAN:
KIDNEY**TRAITS:**

Directly connected to the heart relate to willpower, discipline, perseverance and our understanding of time. Kidneys govern ordinary discipline, but they also govern something called “timeless discipline” that arises out the impermanent, ever-changing quality of everything.

REMEDIES:

Acupuncture, herbs, nutrition, mind-body practices, and other modalities can nourish the kidneys to help us experience true timelessness. This is where anything and everything is possible and when we can become real healers.

ORGAN:
HEART**TRAITS:**

Nourishes the body as a whole — the heart is the ultimate giver and the ultimate transformative organ. It takes in “dirty” blood containing everything that other organs, tissues, and cells determine to be waste products, purifies the blood, and returns clean, oxygen-rich blood to nourish the entire body. There is a complete connection between the heart and kidneys where we give rise to the genuine motivation to benefit ourselves and others, and the kidneys where we generate discipline and the understanding of the timelessness of everything. It’s a very deep place — one where authentic motivation originates from an energetic standpoint.

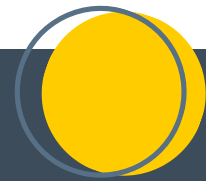
REMEDIES:

Meditation, practicing gratitude and compassion, circulation-boosting herbs and nutrients, and stress reduction therapies.

Watch Meditation Videos from Dr. Eliaz:

 [Meditation + Healing 5 Day Program](#)

 [Tonglen Meditation](#)



Sources

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