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The How and Why of Meditation

Meditation might not be what you think it is – and it could unlock some good things in your life.

When you hear the word “meditation,” do you picture a blissed-out monk sitting cross-legged, holding perfectly still? Actually, there are a number of very different practices that meet the definition of “meditation.” (And you needn’t fold yourself like a pretzel to do them.)

In this article, we’ll look at why you might want to give meditation a try. And we’ll introduce you to several approaches you may want to consider.

What’s good about meditation? Quite a bit.

Meditation has demonstrated a number of benefits for people of all ages, including seniors. Among the areas most cited for beneficial effects:

- **Mental health:** Meditation is shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and can also improve overall mental well-being. This is particularly important for seniors who may be prone to mental health issues due to age-related changes, or from life events such as the loss of loved ones.
 - **Physical health:** Meditation can have positive effects in reducing blood pressure, improving immune function, and reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke. It can also help you manage chronic pain and may even improve sleep quality.
 - **Cognitive function:** Studies have linked meditation to improved memory, attention, and other cognitive skills. This can be especially beneficial for seniors, who may be more prone to age-related cognitive decline.
 - **Emotional regulation:** Meditation helps regular practitioners better manage their emotions, leading to increased emotional stability and reduced stress.
- **Social connection:** Looking for a sense of community? Meditating in a group (or even discussing the practice with friends) can help you connect with others in a meaningful way.
 - **Sense of purpose:** Meditation helps some people find more meaning and purpose in their lives, leading to a greater sense of well-being.

Which kind should you do?

It’s important to find a style of meditation that works for you—and to be patient with yourself as you learn and practice. It may take time to develop the ability to quiet the mind and focus, but if you stick with it, meditation can be a valuable tool for stress management and overall health.

There are many types of meditation, so it may take more than one attempt to learn what works for you. Here are a few types of meditation to consider:

- **Concentration meditation.** Here, you focus on a single point, such as the breath, a mantra, or an object. The goal is to quiet the mind and bring your attention to the present moment.
- **Mindfulness.** This type of meditation involves noticing and paying attention to your present experience—including thoughts and emotions—without judgment. The goal is to cultivate a nonreactive, accepting attitude toward all that arises in the mind.
- **Loving-kindness meditation.** This involves silently repeating phrases of well-wishes and compassion toward oneself and others. The goal is to cultivate feelings of kindness, compassion, and acceptance of self and others.

- **Body scan meditation.** This is generally done lying down or seated comfortably. You focus on each part of your body in turn, starting from the toes and moving up. The intention is to relax your body and bring awareness to physical sensations.

Meditation can be a simple, effective way to improve your mental and physical health, and to add meaning and purpose to your life. It's a practice that can be easily incorporated into daily living and can be done by people of all ages and fitness levels.

Ready to give meditation a try? There are many resources available to you, including guided meditation apps, in-person meditation classes, and online resources. Good luck!

References:

Meditation: A simple, fast way to reduce stress - MayoClinic.org

16 Health Benefits of Daily Meditation According to Science - PositivePsychology.com

Courtesy of PacificSource



Your Vision Health and Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

Did you know that the leading cause of vision loss in people over age 65 is not glaucoma but age-related macular degeneration (AMD)? AMD can cause difficulty for activities such as reading and driving.

What is AMD?

AMD causes damage to the macula, the small spot on the retina that helps us see clearly as well as most of our color vision. When the cells in the macula are damaged, central vision becomes blurry even though peripheral or side vision remains stable.

There are two types of AMD: dry and wet. Dry AMD is more common—about 90 percent of people who have AMD have the dry form—and it is characterized by the thinning and aging of the macular tissue. Wet AMD is the more serious form of the condition, and it occurs when blood vessels grow behind the macula and leak fluid into it, causing blind spots.

AMD happens very slowly in some people and it can happen in only one eye or both eyes. Some who have it may not experience vision loss for a long time, while for others, AMD progresses faster.

Can AMD be prevented?

Research shows that you may be able to lower your risk for AMD or slow its progression. Quitting smoking, eating leafy, green vegetables, and maintaining a good blood pressure and cholesterol level can help. Another important step is to get dilated eye exams and vision tests from your eye health professional to diagnose the condition and track any progression. Tell your eye doctor if others in your family have been diagnosed with AMD.

Source: UnitedHealthcare Newsroom, May 2021, What you should know about age-related macular degeneration
Courtesy of UnitedHealthcare®

Flu or COVID? How do I know?

What is the difference between Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19?

Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Flu is caused by infection with a flu virus (influenza viruses).

Although caused by different viruses, both share a number of symptoms:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Shortness of breath
- Body aches
- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Despite sharing symptoms, COVID-19 can cause more severe illness in some people compared to flu. Compared to people with flu, people infected with COVID-19 may take longer to show symptoms and may be contagious for longer periods of time. Consult with your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

Get tested

The best way to determine the difference between flu and COVID-19 is to have a medical professional administer a test that detects both flu and COVID-19. This allows you to get diagnosed and treated for the specific virus you have more quickly and reduces your risk of getting very sick.

Protect yourself

The flu shot and COVID-19 vaccines are your best defense against serious illness and reduce the risk of spreading contagious diseases to friends, family and your community. And it's safe to get both the flu and COVID vaccine at the same time.

- CDC recommends a yearly flu vaccine as the first and most important step in protecting against flu viruses.

- COVID-19 vaccine recommendations are based on age, the first vaccine received, and time since last dose.

Learn more about the flu, COVID-19 and getting vaccinated at: cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm

Sources:

providence.org/news/uf/668552927?streamId=927659

cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm

Courtesy of Providence Health Assurance



Butternut Squash and Chickpea Moroccan Stew

Spiced sweet butternut squash will fill your home with the fragrances of Morocco and warm your soul.

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 small (about 1½ lbs.) butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cut into 1½-inch pieces (about 4 cups)
- 2 cups low sodium vegetable broth
- 1 can (14.5 oz) low sodium diced tomatoes
- 1 can (15 oz) canned low sodium chickpeas, drained
- Cilantro leaves, for garnish

Directions

1. In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium heat.
2. Add the onion and cook, stirring, for 4–5 minutes, until softened.
3. Add garlic, cumin, coriander, ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, red pepper flakes and salt. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute or until fragrant.

4. Add butternut squash, broth, tomatoes and chickpeas. Bring to a boil.
5. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 25–30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until butternut squash is tender and the sauce is slightly thickened.
6. Garnish with cilantro leaves. Serve with couscous or rice, if desired.

Nutritional information (per serving)

Serving size: 1 cup

Number of servings: 4

Calories	282
Total fat	6g
Saturated fat	1g
Cholesterol	0mg
Sodium	499mg
Total carbohydrate	50g
Dietary fiber	14g
Sugars	13g
Protein	10g

Source: Renew Magazine, Fall/Winter, 2022

Courtesy of UnitedHealthcare®

Roasted Asparagus with Dijon-Lemon Sauce

Ingredients

- 2 pounds asparagus spears, trimmed
- 4 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon rind
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Combine asparagus, 2 teaspoons olive oil, salt, and garlic in a large bowl, tossing well to coat. Arrange asparagus mixture in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake at 425° for 12 minutes or until crisp-tender.
3. Combine remaining 2 teaspoons oil, rind, juice, mustard, and pepper in a small bowl, stirring with a whisk. Arrange asparagus on a platter, drizzle juice mixture over asparagus. Sprinkle with parsley.

Nutritional information (per serving)

Serving size: 8 ounces

Number of servings: 4

Calories	86
Total fat	4g
Saturated fat	1g
Cholesterol	0mg
Sodium	303mg
Total carbohydrate	10g
Dietary fiber	5g
Sugars	0g
Protein	5g

Source: Roasted Asparagus and Dijon-Lemon Sauce - Good Dinner Mom

Courtesy of Providence Health Assurance



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