

Meditation may reduce death, heart attack and stroke in heart patients

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African Americans with heart disease who practiced Transcendental Meditation regularly were 48 percent less likely to have a heart attack, stroke or die from all causes compared with African Americans who attended a health education class over more than five years, according to new research published in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*.

Those practicing meditation also lowered their blood pressure and reported less stress and anger. And the more regularly patients meditated, the greater their survival, said researchers who conducted the study at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

"We hypothesized that reducing stress by managing the mind-body connection would help improve rates of this [epidemic disease](#)," said Robert Schneider, M.D., lead researcher and director of the Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention in Fairfield, Iowa. "It appears that [Transcendental Meditation](#) is a technique that turns on the body's own pharmacy—to repair and maintain itself."

For the study, researchers randomly assigned 201 people to participate in a Transcendental Meditation stress-reducing program or a health education class about [lifestyle modification](#) for diet and exercise.

- Forty-two percent of the participants were women, average age 59, and half reported earning less than \$10,000 per year.

- Average [body mass index](#) was about 32, which is clinically obese.
- Nearly 60 percent in both treatment groups took cholesterol-lowering drugs; 41 percent of the meditation group and 31 percent of the health education group took aspirin; and 38 percent of the meditation group and 43 percent of the health education group smoked.

Those in the meditation program sat with eyes closed for about 20 minutes twice a day practicing the technique, allowing their minds and bodies to rest deeply while remaining alert.

Participants in the health education group were advised, under the instruction of professional health educators, to spend at least 20 minutes a day at home practicing heart-healthy behaviors such as exercise, healthy meal preparation and nonspecific relaxation.

Researchers evaluated participants at the start of the study, at three months and every six months thereafter for body mass index, diet, program adherence, blood pressure and cardiovascular hospitalizations. They found:

- There were 52 primary end point events. Of these, 20 events occurred in the meditation group and 32 in the health education group.
- Blood pressure was reduced by 5 mm Hg and anger decreased significantly among Transcendental Meditation participants compared to controls.
- Both groups showed beneficial changes in exercise and alcohol consumption, and the meditation group showed a trend towards reduced smoking. Although, there were no significant differences between the groups in weight, exercise or diet.
- Regular meditation was correlated with reduced death, heart

attack and stroke.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death worldwide. Death from heart disease is about 50 percent higher in black adults compared to whites in the United States. Researchers focused on African Americans because of health disparities in America.

"Transcendental Meditation may reduce heart disease risks for both healthy people and those with diagnosed [heart](#) conditions," said Schneider, who is also dean of Maharishi College of Perfect Health in Fairfield, Iowa.

"The research on Transcendental [Meditation](#) and cardiovascular disease is established well enough that physicians may safely and routinely prescribe stress reduction for their patients with this easy to implement, standardized and practical program," he said.

Provided by American Heart Association

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