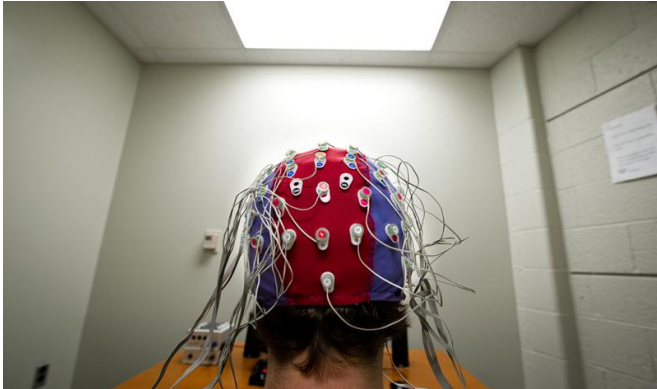


Meditation keeps emotional brain in check

29 September 2016



Credit: Michigan State University

Meditation can help tame your emotions even if you're not a mindful person, suggests a new study from Michigan State University.

Reporting in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, psychology researchers recorded the [brain activity](#) of people looking at disturbing pictures immediately after meditating for the first time. These participants were able to tame their negative emotions just as well as participants who were naturally mindful.

"Our findings not only demonstrate that meditation improves emotional health, but that people can acquire these benefits regardless of their 'natural' ability to be mindful," said Yanli Lin, an MSU graduate student and lead investigator of the study. "It just takes some practice."

Mindfulness, a moment-by-moment awareness of one's thoughts, feelings and sensations, has gained worldwide popularity as a way to promote health and well-being. But what if someone isn't naturally mindful? Can they become so simply by trying to make mindfulness a "state of mind"? Or perhaps through a more focused, deliberate effort like meditation?

The study, conducted in Jason Moser's Clinical Psychophysiology Lab, attempted to find out.

Researchers assessed 68 participants for mindfulness using a scientifically validated survey. The participants were then randomly assigned to engage in an 18-minute audio guided meditation or listen to a control presentation of how to learn a new language, before viewing negative pictures (such as a bloody corpse) while their brain activity was recorded.

The participants who meditated – they had varying levels of natural mindfulness – showed similar levels of "emotion regulatory" brain activity as people with high levels of natural mindfulness. In other words their emotional brains recovered quickly after viewing the troubling photos, essentially keeping their negative emotions in check.

In addition, some of the [participants](#) were instructed to look at the gruesome photos "mindfully" (be in a mindful state of mind) while others received no such instruction. Interestingly, the people who viewed the photos "mindfully" showed no better ability to keep their [negative emotions](#) in check.

This suggests that for non-meditators, the emotional benefits of mindfulness might be better achieved through meditation, rather than "forcing it" as a state of mind, said Moser, MSU associate professor of clinical psychology and co-author of the study.

"If you're a naturally mindful person, and you're walking around very aware of things, you're good to go. You shed your emotions quickly," Moser said. "If you're not naturally mindful, then meditating can make you look like a person who walks around with a lot of [mindfulness](#). But for people who are not naturally mindful and have never meditated, forcing oneself to be mindful 'in the moment' doesn't work. You'd be better off meditating for 20 minutes."

Provided by Michigan State University

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