

Meditation – The “Wonder Drug”

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A study from England in the early 1980s introduced us to a therapy that significantly reduced three risk factors for heart disease: high cholesterol, high blood pressure and smoking. The therapy was implemented over a period of eight weeks, and was compared to a placebo. Astonishingly, the effects lasted beyond the eight week trial period. In fact, cholesterol and smoking were still reduced eight months after the trial, and blood pressure was still significantly lower four years after the study ended! This therapy has no side effects and costs nothing. It is meditation.

If we could put meditation in a pill, would it not be marketed as a wonder drug, at least for people at risk for heart disease? And, research has shown similar results for conditions including anxiety, chronic pain, PMS, and insomnia. Studies have even shown that it significantly improves quality of life for those with no health concerns.

So what is meditation? Simply put, it is the practice of cultivating silence and stillness, and offering no resistance to the present moment. Is the neighbor's car alarm bothersome to you? Meditation is the practice of letting go of that aggravation. Are you often worried about accomplishing certain tasks, about how you look or sound, or how you are perceived by others? Meditation is the practice of letting go of those judgments and simply letting the present moment be as it is.

I use the word “practice” because it does take practice to suspend the usual judgments and worries that dominate our waking hours. The simplest beginning practice is to sit in a quiet place where you can't be interrupted, and focus your attention as intently as you can on the cycle of your breathing. Watch or feel your breath come in and flow out of your body. When your mind wanders, simply bring your attention back to your breathing. There are many books and CDs that can help you start your practice, or you can seek the help of a practitioner experienced in meditation coaching. Start with a commitment to just ten minutes per day. It will, over time, improve your health and change your life.