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Health News

Meditation improves the immune system, research shows

Meditation improves the immune system, reduces blood pressure and even sharpens the mind, according to research.



Now scientists have discovered that regular meditation appears to actually increase the size of the brain Photo: GETTY

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The practice - an essential part of Buddhist and Indian Yoga traditions - has entered the mainstream as people try to find ways to combat stress and improve their quality of life.

Now new research suggests that mindfulness meditation can have benefits for health and performance, including improved immune function, reduced blood pressure and enhanced cognitive function.

The study, published in the latest issue of the journal Perspectives on Psychological Science, draws on existing scientific literature to attempt to explain the positive effects.

The goal of this work, according to author Britta Hazel, of Justus Liebig University and Harvard Medical School, is to "unveil the conceptual and mechanistic complexity of mindfulness, providing the big picture by arranging many findings like the pieces of a mosaic."

The authors specifically identify four key components of "mindfulness" - the state of meditation - that may account for its effects: attention regulation, body awareness, emotion regulation, and sense of self. Together, these help us deal with the effects of stress.

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Dr Hazel said the components are closely intertwined so an improvement in attention regulation, for example, may improve our awareness of our physiological state. Body awareness, in turn, helps us to recognise the emotions we are experiencing.

She said: "Understanding the relationships between these components, and the brain mechanisms that underlie them, will allow clinicians to better tailor mindfulness interventions for their patients."

However, the framework underscores the point that mindfulness is not a vague cure-all. Effective mindfulness meditation requires training and practice and it has distinct measurable effects on our subjective experiences, our behaviour, and our brain function.

Dr Hazel said: "We hope that further research on this topic will enable a much broader spectrum of individuals to utilise mindfulness meditation as a versatile tool to facilitate change both in psychotherapy and in everyday life."

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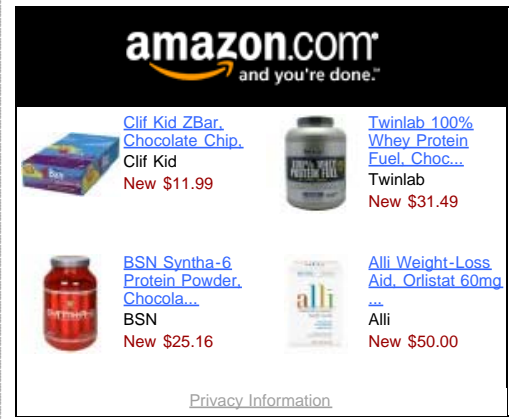
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