

Meditation for Depression and Anxiety

By Dr. Barbara Bachmeier



Balancing With Meditation

Meditation is beginning to receive credibility as a viable approach to decreasing depression.

Research on the effects of mediation on depression has been an ongoing process for more than a couple of decades, and they show promise. The amount of research is quite vast. More recently with the advent of DBT, mindfulness has become a widely used approach by clinicians with their patients who suffer from depression. In the recent past, transcendental meditation was commonly taught. The hypotheses of why meditation helps is also quite vast, including the creation of new neuropathways that facilitate the positive thought processes that are practiced during meditation, the override of ruminating in the mind, the distraction factor, the physiological changes that may be occurring during meditation, and more.

I can say that in my own work, I have never once heard a patient or client of mine deny that meditation helps both anxiety and depression. With many years of working with individuals who meditate, I have received only positive feedback related to the practice. We do know that meditation quiets the mind and helps to calm us. My own hypotheses is that mediation is an extremely useful tool to individuals who struggle with bipolar disorder. It can be an effective tool to use for balancing moods. While most of the studies on the effectiveness of mediation for alleviating depression and/or anxiety utilize specific accepted best practice standardized meditation practices, my own hypothesis is that any form of prayer or meditation that results in facilitating a shift of consciousness toward an elevated and more positive experience while quieting thoughts that trigger distress would likely provide the same positive outcomes. My hypotheses would also contend that the more effective the meditation practiced by the individual is in attaining this shift of consciousness and elevation of experience to a more positive and possibly even spiritual level, the more likely it will alleviate anxiety and depression effectively. Furthermore, my own un-researched opinion is that the effectiveness of one modality, such as prayer, or transcendental meditation over another, might very well be specific to the individual who is practicing it. For example, one person might derive great results from practicing hatha yoga, using both body and mind in unison, while another might <http://blogs.psychcentral.com/bipolar-update/2015/05/meditation-for-depression-and-anxiety/>

engage in brain entrainment (more on that in another post) while falling asleep. We don't have any studies that target the effectiveness of specifically matched forms of meditation with individualized "meditation programs" . (At least I didn't find any..if someone else does, let me know).

There is quite allot of research completed lately in 2014 and as recent as 2015. I found a summary of a meta-analysis completed in 2010. The report was published in the American Family Physicians Journal, summarizes research results reporting that meditation, tai chi, and qigong do not have clear indications of effectiveness in the treatment of depression or anxiety, however the summary did report that meditation seems to be effective in preventing a relapse. They also report that mindfulness does show effective results. [i] My own thoughts are about whether or not the individuals using the mediations actually had practiced the techniques long enough to master the art/science of mediation in order to achieve the altered states of consciousness that are conducive to physiological, mental/psychological, and emotional change; and the probability that the individuals were not match to an individualized meditation form. Rather, they simply measured a few different forms of mediation and for only a short period of time.

If you are struggling with depression and/or anxiety and you have not yet tried mediation; I highly recommend that you do. Mediation does not have any side effects, and it certainly won't hurt you. After a couple of months of consistent practice, you will know if the practice is helping. I do include prayer as mediation. To find the right kind of meditation for you, consider your spiritual orientation and your own personal belief system and seek out something that is congruent with your own personal lifestyle, world view, and disposition. In the next few posts, we will look at different types of meditation that include the ones commonly taught in clinical setting, as well as some that might be more "spiritually" oriented.

Much Peace to You and Please Leave your Comments. This post was inspired by a reader who mentioned her own successful use of mediation to help her overcome depression.

[i] 2010 Apr 15;81(8):981-6.

Exercise, yoga, and meditation for depressive and anxiety disorders.

Saeed SA¹, Antonacci DJ, Bloch RM.

Retrieved from American Family Physician-5/1/2015: <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2010/0415/p981.html>

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