

Meditation

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/17906-meditation>

Meditation is an ancient practice that dates back thousands of years. Despite its age, this practice is common worldwide because it has benefits for brain health and overall well-being. With the help of modern technology, researchers continue to expand their understanding of how meditation helps people and why it works.

What is meditation?

Meditation is a practice that involves focusing or clearing your mind using a combination of mental and physical techniques.

Depending on the type of meditation you choose, you can meditate to relax, reduce anxiety and stress, and more. Some people even use meditation to help them improve their health, such as using it to help adapt to the challenges of quitting tobacco products.

Is meditation a religious practice?

Yes and no. Meditation has foundations in ancient philosophies and several world religions, but you don't have to be religious to meditate.

Some examples of religious and nonreligious methods:

- **Buddhist** (Theravadan, Zen, Tibetan tantric)
- **Christian** (Contemplative prayer)
- **Guided meditation** (used in therapy and group settings)
- **Osho** (Dynamic breathing-based from Hindu tradition)
- **Sufi** (from Islamic tradition)
- **Taoist** (originating in China)
- **Transcendental** (mantra-based)

- **Yoga** (can be spiritual or secular)
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How do you meditate?

There's no one correct way to meditate. Common methods include:

- **Body-centered meditation** (focus on physical sensations)
 - **Contemplation** (focus on a question or concept)
 - **Emotion-centered meditation** (focus on specific feelings like kindness)
 - **Mantra meditation** (repeating a word or phrase)
 - **Movement meditation** (yoga, walking, breathing)
 - **Mindfulness meditation** (present-moment awareness)
 - **Visual-based meditation** (focus on images or mental visuals)
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What exactly does meditation do?

Regular meditation may offer:

- Decreased anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms
- Improved concentration and cognitive function
- Enhanced emotional resilience

These mental health improvements often lead to physical benefits such as better sleep, lower blood pressure, and improved heart health.

Why does meditation work?

Thanks to technologies like **EEG** and **fMRI**, researchers have found that meditation:

- Enhances **brain tissue density**.
- Enlarges brain regions linked to sensory perception, memory, and emotion regulation.
- Strengthens neural connections and increases brain plasticity.

The result: better emotional processing and cognitive function, and even **slower age-related decline**.

How do I start daily meditation?

Steps to begin:

1. **Research:** Read up on various styles.
2. **Talk to your provider:** Ask for meditation program recommendations.
3. **Ask for guidance:** Explore apps, YouTube, Reddit, or local classes.

Tips for routine:

- **Pick your time:** Morning or night, as suits you.
 - **Make time:** Meditate daily for consistency.
 - **Set your space:** Choose a calm and quiet area.
 - **Seek help:** Don't hesitate to consult a guide or mentor.
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Meditation is ancient, diverse, and accessible. Whether spiritual or secular, this practice is now supported by modern science. The physical and emotional benefits of meditation are proven, making it a valuable tool in any wellness routine. With countless forms and resources available, anyone can find a meditation practice that suits their needs.

Alternative Therapy for Depression

Overview

What are alternative therapies?

A health treatment that is not classified as a standard Western medical practice is referred to as "alternative," or "complementary," or "integrative." Alternative therapy encompasses a variety of disciplines that includes everything from your diet and exercise to your mental conditioning and your lifestyle. Examples of alternative therapies include:

- Herbal remedies.
- Acupuncture.
- Reflexology.
- Exercise.
- Meditation.
- Massage.
- Guided imagery.
- Yoga.

What is depression?

"Major" or "clinical" depression is a mental health disorder characterized by an intense and relentless sense of hopelessness, worthlessness, emptiness and/or despair. Clinical depression interferes with working, eating, sleeping and more aspects of your life. It can be caused by one or more factors, including chemical imbalances, high levels of stress, traumatic experiences, life transitions and more. Approximately 10% of people in the United States suffer from depression.

The two most common treatments for clinical depression in Western medicine are **psychotherapy** and **medications**. A therapist provides counseling (talk therapy) and a family healthcare provider or psychiatrist provides medicine (such as SSRIs, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors). These treatments can be very effective. However, if you don't respond to them, or if you want to supplement your treatment, you might want to consider alternative therapies.

What alternative therapies are recommended for depression?

No alternative therapy is guaranteed to cure depression, but the same can be said about several Western medicines and psychotherapies. To be safe, be sure to consult with your healthcare provider before you try one or more of these recommended therapies:

- **Herbal remedies:** St. John's wort and ginkgo biloba.
 - **Acupuncture.**
 - **Reflexology.**
 - **Exercise.**
 - **Meditation.**
 - **Massage.**
 - **Guided imagery.**
 - **Yoga.**
 - **Deep breathing.**
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Treatment Details

How does alternative therapy for depression work?

Each alternative therapy is unique:

- **Herbal remedies:** St. John's wort has ancient roots but lacks definitive proof for moderate/severe depression. Ginkgo biloba may aid cognition.
- **Acupuncture:** Uses fine needles to stimulate balance and natural pain-relief chemicals.
- **Reflexology:** Applies pressure to nerves in hands/feet to promote healing.
- **Exercise:** 150 minutes/week of moderate activity may reduce anxiety and depression.

- **Meditation:** Clears the mind by focusing on one thing, practiced daily for 10+ minutes.
 - **Massage:** Encourages relaxation and body awareness. Includes Swedish, Reiki, aromatherapy, and craniosacral therapy.
 - **Guided imagery:** Encourages peaceful mental images to promote psychological healing.
 - **Yoga:** Combines physical movement and breathwork to restore mind-body balance.
 - **Deep breathing:** Lowers heart rate and calms stress through mindful, slow breathing.
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Risks / Benefits

What are the benefits and risks of alternative therapies for depression?

Benefits:

- **Herbal remedies:** May help, but check for drug interactions.
- **Acupuncture:** Clinical studies show promise, especially for depression with pain.
- **Reflexology:** Improves mood, sleep, and reduces tension.
- **Exercise:** Boosts mood, lowers stress, and improves physical health.
- **Meditation:** Helps manage stress, anxiety, and encourages calmness.
- **Massage:** Increases serotonin and dopamine, decreases cortisol.
- **Guided imagery:** Improves coping with stress, depression, and pain.
- **Yoga:** Builds strength, calm, and overall well-being.
- **Deep breathing:** Shifts focus away from stress, regulates heart rate.

Risks:

- May increase for pregnant or breastfeeding individuals.
 - Always consult a provider before combining with current medications or treatments.
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Recovery and Outlook

What is the prognosis (outlook) for people who use alternative therapies for depression?

There is no uniform prognosis. Effectiveness varies from person to person. Some people benefit greatly from alternative therapies, while others may not. Ongoing communication with your healthcare provider is essential while exploring these options.

When To Call the Doctor

When should I contact my healthcare provider?

Contact your healthcare provider immediately if you:

- Have suicidal thoughts.
- Think of harming yourself or others.

Never stop or start any treatment without medical supervision.