

Evidence Suggests That Meditation Should Be Included In Government-Sponsored

More people still die from cardiovascular disease than any other illness. Dubbed the number one killer and the silent killer, modern medicine has been researching and incorporating complementary and alternative approaches to help treat and in some cases reverse and hopefully prevent this health problem at an earlier stage of the disease. One of those modalities is meditation.

A new research review paper on the effects of the stress-reducing Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique on the prevention and treatment of heart disease among youth and adults provides the hard evidence needed to include such evidence-based alternative approaches into private- and government-sponsored wellness programs aimed at preventing and treating cardiovascular disease.

The paper, "Prevention and Treatment of Cardiovascular Disease in Adolescents and Adults through the Transcendental Meditation® Program: A Research Review Update" is published in *Current Hypertension Reviews*, 2012, Vol. 8, No. 3.

- In teens, the TM technique has been found to reduce blood pressure, improve heart structure and improve school behaviour. According to the paper, the technique has been shown to be a safe alternative. The NIH-sponsored clinical trials conducted with TM mentioned in this review did not observe any adverse effects from TM practice.
- In adults the technique reduced stress hormones and other physiological measures of stress and produced more rapid recovery from stress, decreased blood pressure and use of blood pressure medication, decreased heart pain in angina patients, cleared the arteries, reducing the risk of stroke, improved distance walked in patients with congestive heart failure, and decreased alcohol and tobacco use, anxiety, depression, and medical care usage and expenditures. The technique also decreased risk of death from heart disease, cancer, and all causes.

"These findings have important implications for inclusion of the Transcendental Meditation program in medical efforts to prevent and treat cardiovascular disease," says Dr. Vernon Barnes, lead author and research scientist at Georgia Health Sciences University, in Augusta, Georgia.

"This review is potentially more important than individual research papers because it shows that TM has an integrated, holistic effect on all levels of cardiovascular disease," says co-author, Dr. David Orme-Johnson.

Orme-Johnson says that no other meditation technique has been shown to produce this constellation of changes, especially when it comes to hard measures of cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Barnes said it was important to start preventing heart disease with adolescents before the disease sets. "Adding Transcendental Meditation at a young age could prevent future cardiovascular disease and save many lives, not to mention reduce the national medical bill by billions of dollars."

Uniqueness of the Transcendental Meditation technique

The uniqueness of the outcomes of the TM technique may have something to do with the mechanics of the practice of the technique itself says Dr. Barnes. "Meditation practices are different from each other and therefore produce different results. And this is a very important consideration when evaluating the application of meditation as an alternative and complementary medical approach."

A paper in *Consciousness and Cognition* discusses three categories to organize and better understand meditation. See Are all meditation techniques the same?

The two common categories are focused attention, concentrating on an object or an emotion, like compassion; and open monitoring, being mindful of one's breath or thoughts, either contemplating the meaning of them, or just observing them.

Transcendental Meditation uses a different approach and comes under the third category of automatic self-transcending, meditations that transcend their own activity.

The TM technique does not employ any active form of concentration or contemplation, but allows the mind to effortlessly experience the thought process at more refined levels until thinking comes to a quiet settled state without any mental activity. The mind is awake inside and the body is resting deeply, a level of rest much deeper than deep sleep. It is this state of restful alertness that allows the body to make the necessary repairs to rebalance its normal functioning. This cumulative process resets the physiology and shows up as reduced symptoms of cardiovascular disease and improved health.