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Meditation Research described in [The Professional Brain Newsletter](#)

Kindness Improves Mental Strength & Social Connection, The Professional Brain 1-9-25

Our first social group is our family, and research shows that strong family functioning is associated with better cognitive development and social engagement in kids. Resilience research demonstrates that engaging in acts of kindness and responding to others with compassion can improve quality of life.

One study of 38 mothers and their pre-school children (ages 3-5 years) who participated in an online kindness curriculum increased prosocial empathy in the children and resilience levels in the moms. Resilience is described in the study as “an individual’s ability to positively adapt in the face of adversity.”

Another study examined the link between a kindness intervention and memory impairment in participants with depression. Depression can impair cognition and behavior. A group of 50 participants who suffer from depression were divided into an unconditional kindness intervention group and a coloring control group, and after 4 weeks of daily 10-minute practice, the kindness intervention group showed an improvement in their memory recall.

A third study involved 122 participants with moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression. The participants were divided into 3 groups who practiced 3 different interventions for 5 weeks:

- Social Planning: they planned social activities for 2 days a week
- Cognitive Reappraisal: they practiced identifying negative thought patterns and reframing them using techniques designed to reduce anxiety and depression for 2 days a week
- Acts of Kindness: they performed 3 acts of kindness per day for 2 days a week.

The Acts of Kindness group experienced greater social connection than the other 2 groups and greater improvement in anxiety and depression symptoms and life satisfaction than the Cognitive Reappraisal group.

One practice that enhances self-compassion, as well as empathy for others, is lovingkindness meditation (LKM). LKM is a reflection designed to extend happiness and peace to yourself and others. There are several ways to practice LKM, but most apply the mantra to oneself, then to loved ones, and finally to all people or beings. Here are two examples:

Jack Kornfield's LKM is:

*May I be filled with lovingkindness.
May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.
May I be well in body and mind.
May I be at ease and happy.*

Followed by:

*May you be filled with lovingkindness.
May you be safe from inner and outer dangers.
May you be well in body and mind.
May you be at ease and happy.*

Another version begins:

*May I be happy.
May I be safe.
May I be healthy, peaceful, and strong.
May I give and receive appreciation today.*

Followed by:

*May you be happy.
May you be safe.
May you be healthy, peaceful, and strong.
May you give and receive appreciation today.*

Takeaway: Kindness is mutually beneficial. It improves the lives of others, while enhancing empathy, resilience, memory, and social connection, and improving symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Sources

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How Meditation Calms an Overactive Brain, The Professional Brain 8-29-24

Stress is harmful to our memory because the stress hormone cortisol can lead to shrinkage of the hippocampus, our brain's memory processor. The shrinkage is caused when cortisol weakens or kills neurons in the hippocampus. Lowering stress hormone levels enables the hippocampus to operate more effectively, enhancing memory capacity.

Because our brains are so vigilant to threat, our thoughts can intensify stress and anxiety. People with overactive brains may experience excessive fast brain waves, which are electrical impulses. The hyperactive brain can be experienced as worry, overthinking, or sleep problems. Faster brain waves (Beta) are associated with concentration, activation, and a busy mind, and slower brain waves (Alpha) are associated with relaxation, deactivation, and a quiet mind.

Thoughts are events of the mind, and meditation practice can help us slow our brains and calm our minds.

Meditation is defined by Jeff Tarrant as “a systematic mental training designed to challenge habits of attending, thinking, feeling, and perceiving.” During meditation, focus on your breath (usually deep slow breaths), and notice any sensations, thoughts, or feelings that arise. Rather than judging these events of the mind, allow them to pass like clouds in the sky. Return your focus to your breath.

Research has shown that meditation can:

- Increase slow brain waves and decrease fast brain waves, leading to greater serenity;
- Decrease stress hormone levels, reducing stress and anxiety, which may also improve memory;
- Increase the neurotransmitters serotonin and GABA, enhancing happiness and increasing calm;
- Enhance brain growth via neuroplasticity, improving attention and concentration, and
- Foster growth in the hippocampus, improving memory.

Takeaway: Meditation can increase mindfulness, calm an overactive brain, reduce stress hormones, and improve attention, concentration, and memory. Consider trying guided meditations on an app or website.

Sources

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