

Mindfulness, Relaxation and Other Stress Relief Techniques

Prasanna Jayatilake*

University of Kelaniya, Global Minds (Private) Limited, Sri Lanka

*Corresponding author: Prasanna Jayatilake, MSc, MA, University of Kelaniya, Global Minds (Private) Limited, Sri Lanka, Tel: +94(0)773277558; E-mail: prasannajayatilake@yahoo.com

Received date: July 19, 2017; Accepted date: July 28, 2017; Published date: August 04, 2017

Copyright: © 2017 Jayatilake P. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Introduction

“Stress” is a reaction to a stimulus that disrupts the physical and mental equilibrium, which has become an omnipresent part in life and that many researchers and scientists strive towards finding strategies to meet with this challenge [1]. It seems not possible to control the stresses around; however, using some effective techniques will help to alter the reaction to it; however, using some effective techniques will help to alter the reaction to it [2].

Stress is a bodily response towards any kind of demand or threat. There are some stresses which consider as “healthy” named “eustress” which keeps the individual active and alert, in order to strive towards achieving life goals within the individual’s level of tolerance. The “unhealthy” stress or the “distress” arises as a result of failing the individual to accomplish demands within his potentials or limits [3]. A stressful situation can trigger the fight or flight response, causing hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to surge through the body. It is helpful at emergency situations when instant actions or response needed. However, when this process happens frequently in everyday life, it breaks the equilibrium of the nervous system. Exposure to stress in the long run leads to “chronic stress” resulting various physical health complications such as heart disease, diabetes etc. The psychological complications would include common conditions such as anxiety and depression [4].

“Relaxation” is referred as a release of tension or a return to equilibrium, which would help the individual to balance and minimize the effects of negative stress [5]. In the society, people have some misbeliefs, the things such as watching television, roaming on Facebook, surfing internet, going on trips etc. would help to feel relaxed. Such things would break a person from his fixed routine, but purely they would not give the sufficient level of energy to fight with stress. The best solution would be to awaken the body’s natural healing and relaxation process and the results would be effective and long lasting. Systemic practice of the relaxation techniques such as conscious breathing, mindful stretch yoga, relaxation music, being in natural environment would be effective. At the same time, engaging in spiritual activities and psychological counselling also can be considered as effective ways of relaxation [4].

“Mindfulness” is another general, but comparatively a better option for relaxation, which is defined by Kabat-Zinn et al. [6] as “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. It brings one’s attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment. There are various types of mindfulness practices around the world. The researchers have proved that the practice of mindfulness helps to increase higher mental functions such as logical thinking, reasoning, memory, emotional regulation, etc. which would in return help to reduce the effect of stress [7].

The research findings of Corcoran et al. [8] suggest that regular practice of mindfulness meditation would enhance working memory, hence witnessed effective emotional regulation in stressful events as well. The metacognitive change achieved through mindfulness meditation result in effective emotional regulation [8]. Research by Ortner et al. [9] suggest that mindfulness practice helps individuals to get detached from distressing or harmful stimuli and focus attention to the task at the present moment. Research provides evidence that mindfulness meditation facilitates the individuals to be less reactive to stressful or problematic situations [10].

“Right Mindfulness”, which is considered as a highly philosophical and advanced technique for psychological wellbeing and enlightenment, which is taught in the original doctrine of the Lord Buddha. The uniqueness of mindfulness meditation taught in Buddhist philosophy is that it promotes insight or the “Right View”, before achieving “Right Mindfulness”. Right View means seeing in the right way. According to the Lord Buddha’s discourses in Tripitaka (the collection of scriptures which includes the original teachings of the Lord Buddha), ‘Right Vision’ refers to the understanding and acceptance of the realistic nature of the world, or this existence. According to Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness is referred as ‘Right Mindfulness’, which is being mindful about the realistic nature of the world. If one would practice this process completely, he/she even has the capacity to reach the cessation of all sufferings (as in Maha Salāyathanika Sutta (MN-3, p. 594) and Anicca Sutta (SN- 4, p. 108).

These different types of relaxation and mindfulness techniques would help to bring the unbalanced nervous system back the state of equilibrium by providing relaxation response. Relaxation response is controlled by the hypothalamus and is a protective system against stress. It brings into function by decreasing sympathetic nervous system activation, increasing the function of parasympathetic nervous system and thereby restoring the balance of both systems [5].

Relaxation and mindfulness are both physical and mental processes, mainly governed by the mental processes. In relaxation, the mind gets activated and for that it is essential to have physical calmness including both body and the environment [11]. In general practice, mastering a relaxation technique for about 10-20 min per a day would help to have relief from the burnings of stress in everyday life. However, the duration of practice is more personalized and can extend it for 20-30 min to 1 h according to the individual preference and requirement of being relaxed [9].

The choice of a relaxation or mindfulness technique greatly varied from person to person. It would be better to have awareness through self-exploration or ideally seek advice from a specialist to select the relaxation which would resonate with the individual the best. The common points to consider when selecting a relaxation technique would be the individual’s specific requirement, personal preference, level of physical fitness and stability and the individual’s natural

response to stress [9]. The ideal relaxation technique would be the one which would feel the individual comfortable in practicing, aligned with the lifestyle and able to make the individual feel relaxed from stressful thoughts and thereby to activate the relaxation response effectively [5].

The scientists show that relaxation response affects almost all the genes in the body. The contemporary research show the practicing relaxation and mindfulness exercises on a regular basis would increase the anti-oxidation and anti-inflammatory changes that counteract the body's response on stress and many more positive effects. These techniques can be taken as "medicine" with no side effects and improves both physical and psychological health and wellbeing [12-18]. Scientists have proved that relaxation and mindfulness helps to lower heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen consumption. It also helps to improve physical conditions such as hypertension, arthritis, diabetes, cancer, fibromyalgia and also aging [4].

Relaxation and mindfulness techniques help with psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, phobias and to get rid from unhealthy habits such as smoking [19-23]. In general, these techniques increase the level of positive energy in the body, emotional regulation, level of concentration, memory, intelligence, ability to focus, creativity, happiness and ultimately increase the quality of life [2].

References

1. Chrousos GP (2009) Stress and disorders of the stress system. *Nat Rev Endocrinol* 5: 374-391.
2. Hirsch CD, Barlem ELD, Almeida LK, Tomaschewski-Barlem JG, Figueira AB, et al. (2015) Coping strategies of nursing students for dealing with university stress. *Rev Bras Enferm* 68: 501-508.
3. Holt A (2015) Mindfulness-based stress reduction and transcendental meditation: Current state of research. *J Patient Cent Res Rev* 2: 64-68.
4. Biegel GM, Brown KW, Shapiro SL, Schubert CM (2009) Mindfulness-based stress reduction for the treatment of adolescent psychiatric outpatients: A randomized clinical trials. *J Consult Clin Psychol* 77: 855-866.
5. Esch T, Fricchione GL, Stefano GB (2003) The therapeutic use of the relaxation response in stress-related diseases. *Med Sci Monit* 9: 23-34.
6. Kabat-Zinn J, Massion AO, Kristeller J, Peterson LG, Fletcher KE, et al. (1992) Effectiveness of a meditation-based stress reduction program in the treatment of anxiety disorders. *Am J Psychiatry* 149: 396-943.
7. Davis DM, Hayes JA (2011) What are the benefits of mindfulness? A practice review of psychotherapy-related research. *Psychotherapy (Chic)* 48: 198-208.
8. Corcoran KM, Farb N, Anderson A, Segal ZV (2010) Mindfulness and emotion regulation: Outcomes and possible meditating mechanisms. In: Kring AM, Sloan DM (eds.) *Emotion regulation and psychotherapy: A trans diagnostic approach to etiology and treatment*. New York: Guilford Press, pp: 339-355.
9. Ortner CNM, Kilner SJ, Zelazo PD (2007) Mindfulness meditation and reduced emotional interference on a cognitive task. *Motiv Emot* 31: 271-283.
10. Glodin PR, Gross JJ (2010) Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder. *Emotion* 10: 83-91.
11. Creswell JD (2016) Mindfulness interventions. *Annu Rev Psychol* 68: 491-516.
12. Astin JA (1997) Stress reduction through mindfulness meditation: Effects on psychological symptomatology, sense of control, and spiritual experiences. *Psychother Psychosom* 66: 97-106.
13. Bear RA, Kristeller JL (2003) Mindfulness and meditation as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clin Psychol Sci Pract* 2: 125-143.
14. Brown KW, Ryan RM, Creswell JD (2007) Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychol Inq* 4: 211-237.
15. Cullen M (2011) Mindfulness-based interventions: An emerging phenomenon. *Mindfulness* 2: 186-193.
16. Davidson RJ, Kabat-Zinn J, Schumacher J, Rosenkranz M, Muller D, et al. (2003) Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation. *Psychosom Med* 65: 564-570.
17. Felton TM, Coates L, Christopher JC (2013) Impact of mindfulness training on counseling students' perceptions of stress. *Mindfulness*.
18. Kang C, Whittingham K (2010) Mindfulness: A dialogue between buddhism and clinical psychology. *Mindfulness* 1: 161-173.
19. Neale MI (2006) Mindfulness meditation: An integration of perspectives from buddhism, science and clinical psychology. *California Institute of Integral Studies*, p: 01.
20. Siegel DJ (2007) Mindfulness training and neural integration: Differentiation of distinct streams of awareness and the cultivation of wellbeing. *Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci* 2: 259-263.
21. The tripitaka editorial board (2006) Buddha jayanti tripitaka series. In: *Anguttaranikaya Editorial Board (eds.) Anguttaranikaya: VI (17)*. Buddhist cultural center, Sri Lanka, p: 430.
22. The tripitaka editorial board (2006) Buddha jayanti tripitaka series. In: *Venerable Pandita Sumanasara K (eds.) Majjhimanikaya: III (6)*. Buddhist cultural center, Sri Lanka, pp: 212-594.
23. The tripitaka editorial board (2006) Buddha jayanti tripitaka series. In: *Samyuttanikaya Editorial Board (eds.) Samyuttanikaya: IV (10)*. Buddhist cultural center, Sri Lanka, p: 108.