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[Cover of Meditation Practices for Health](#)

Meditation Practices for Health

State of the Research

Evidence Reports/Technology Assessments, No. 155

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Structured Abstract

Objective: To review and synthesize the state of research on a variety of meditation practices, including: the specific meditation practices examined; the research designs employed and the conditions and outcomes examined; the efficacy and effectiveness of different meditation practices for the three most studied conditions; the role of effect modifiers on outcomes; and the effects of meditation on physiological and neuropsychological outcomes.

Data Sources: Comprehensive searches were conducted in 17 electronic databases of medical and psychological literature up to September 2005. Other sources of potentially relevant studies included hand searches, reference tracking, contact with experts, and gray literature searches.

Review Methods: A Delphi method was used to develop a set of parameters to describe meditation practices. Included studies were comparative, on any meditation practice, had more than 10 adult participants, provided quantitative data on health-related outcomes, and published in English. Two independent reviewers assessed study relevance, extracted the data and assessed the methodological quality of the studies.

Results: Five broad categories of meditation practices were identified (Mantra meditation, Mindfulness meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi, and Qi Gong). Characterization of the universal or supplemental components of meditation practices was precluded by the theoretical and terminological heterogeneity among practices. Evidence on the state of research in meditation practices was provided in 813 predominantly poor-quality studies. The three most studied conditions were hypertension, other cardiovascular diseases, and substance abuse. Sixty-five intervention studies examined the therapeutic effect of meditation practices for these conditions. Meta-analyses based on low-quality studies and small numbers of hypertensive participants showed that TM[®], Qi Gong and Zen Buddhist meditation significantly reduced blood pressure. Yoga helped reduce stress. Yoga was no better than Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction at reducing anxiety in patients with cardiovascular diseases. No results from substance abuse studies could be combined. The role of effect modifiers in meditation practices has been neglected in the scientific literature. The physiological and neuropsychological effects of meditation practices have been evaluated in 312 poor-quality studies. Meta-analyses of results from 55 studies indicated that some meditation practices produced significant changes in healthy participants.

Conclusion: Many uncertainties surround the practice of meditation. Scientific research on meditation practices does not appear to have a common theoretical perspective and is characterized by poor methodological quality. Firm conclusions on the effects of meditation practices in healthcare cannot be drawn based on the available evidence. Future research on meditation practices must be more rigorous in the design and execution of studies and in the analysis and reporting of results.

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Expand All Collapse All

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