

Meditation:

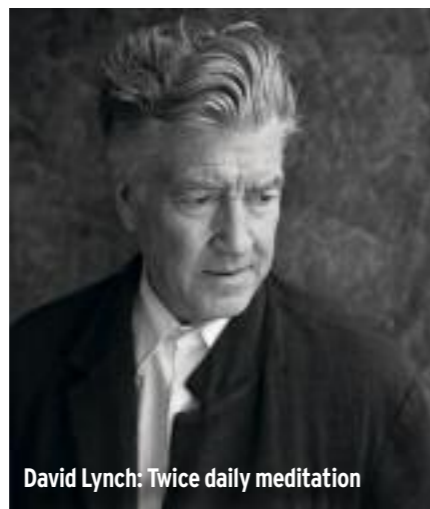
Feeling the space

David Hughes contemplates “meditation for people who think they can’t meditate”

ANYONE OVER 60 probably first heard of Transcendental Meditation in the ‘summer of love’, 1967, when the Beatles travelled to Bangor – and later India – with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Now TM is making a comeback, and it seems the Beatles were on to something.

Five decades of scientific research have found remarkable benefits for mind and body from this simple technique – and it’s now being taken seriously by health professionals.

According to researchers, it dramatically reduces anxiety, slows the ageing process, improves memory and mental performance, cuts risk factors for



David Lynch: Twice daily meditation

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metabolic syndrome, and lowers health care costs – especially for older people. And it’s the only form of meditation identified by the American Heart Association as being able to reduce high blood pressure.

Studies have found TM to give mind and body the exact opposite of a stressful experience, a result which has obvious health implications – around 80 per cent of all illness is thought to be caused or aggravated by stress.

Reducing stress may even be protective against Alzheimer’s, according to a recent study in the US, which found that people who were the most stressed were two-and-a-half times more likely to develop mild cognitive impairment, often a precursor

to dementia. What’s also attractive about this particular type of meditation is that you don’t have to do much. It’s easy to learn and pleasant to practise, sitting comfortably for 20 minutes twice daily with eyes closed.

There’s no concentration or effort, nor even monitoring of thoughts or breathing. You don’t need to believe in it – TM is a technique, not a religion or philosophy. You don’t join an organisation. And you can use TM anywhere, even on a bus or train; you don’t need peace and quiet.

Twenty minutes might seem a fair chunk of time, but TM doesn’t need to be ‘applied’ during the day. You just do it and then forget about it, like a good night’s sleep which leaves you refreshed. TM is

The science....

■ A 14-year study in Quebec of medical expenses for people over 65 found that those practising TM had 70 per cent lower health costs compared with matched controls after five years

■ Studies on middle-aged and older people practising TM have found them to maintain higher levels of the hormone DHEAS, comparable to people five to ten years younger. The hormone declines with age, and low levels are linked with a variety of diseases and increased mortality

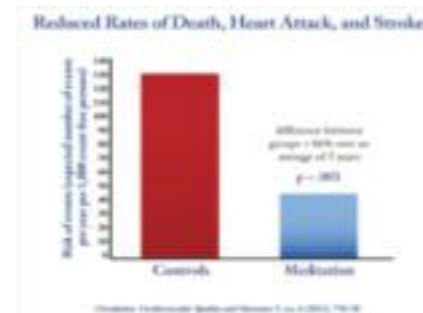
■ Sixty middle-aged TM practitioners were found to have 27 per cent less ‘free radical’ activity than non-meditating controls. Free radical activity has been linked with a decline in cognitive functioning

■ A randomised, controlled study by Harvard University found elderly TM practitioners in residential homes showed greater improvements in cognitive and behavioural flexibility, learning ability, systolic blood pressure and staff assessment of mental health than controls.

meditation for people who think they can’t meditate.

Scientists first became intrigued with TM in the early Seventies when research at Harvard University, published in *Scientific American*, discovered that the technique produced a remarkably deep level of physical rest – twice as deep as just sitting with eyes closed. This deep rest dissolves accumulated tiredness, tension and stress.

TM is taught in a standardised,



seven-lesson course, which makes it easy to measure, and 380 peer-reviewed studies have been published in the world’s leading scientific and medical journals. The US government alone has funded research on TM to the tune of some \$25m (£18m), and, in the words of leading US psychiatrist Norman Rosenthal, “the results have been astonishing.”

He catalogued these results in his 2012 book, *Transcendence* (Hay House UK, £12.99, ISBN 978-1848507753). Perhaps most striking have been the effects of TM in reducing the major risk factors for coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer, including reductions in high blood pressure, insulin resistance, smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, physical and mental stress, anxiety and depression.

A nine-year study of patients with coronary heart disease found those practising TM to have a 48 per cent lower incidence of heart attacks, stroke and mortality, compared with controls receiving diet and exercise advice.

Calming the brain

TM works by allowing the active mind to settle down and ‘transcend’ even the quietest impulse of thought, to reach a state of silent, restful alertness. It’s an entirely natural process which, once properly learned, simply goes by itself.

As the mind settles down, the brain becomes more orderly and integrated, a style of functioning known as ‘coherence’. This coherence, in the alpha waveband associated with restfulness, is linked with just about everything good about mental performance, from increased self-esteem and confidence to higher IQ.

Coherence in the front of the brain is particularly useful, as that’s where we make our decisions and see ‘the big picture’. There’s increasing evidence



Decreased Blood Pressure through the Transcendental Meditation technique
American Heart Association
“...the Transcendental Meditation technique is the only meditation practice that has been shown to lower blood pressure... all other meditation techniques (including MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction)) received a Class III, no benefit. Level of Evidence C” recommendation and are not recommended as clinical practice to lower blood pressure at this time.”

that frontal alpha brain coherence develops resilience to stress.

Studies have found TM practitioners reduce their reactivity to stress by 55 per cent after just five months of twice-daily practice, and TM is now used to help combat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in war veterans and others. In fact, the surviving Beatles – Sir Paul and Ringo – still enjoy their TM and support the David Lynch Foundation, which funds TM courses for at-risk groups including inner-city schoolchildren, the homeless, veterans with PTSD, abused women and prisoners.

How to learn TM

TM is tailored to each individual, and learned in a series of four 90-minute lessons on consecutive days, following a couple of free introductory talks to explain what the technique is and how it works. Fully qualified TM teachers cover all parts of the UK.

What they said...

■ “I’m a great supporter of Transcendental Meditation. I’ve been using it for almost 40 years now. I think it’s a great tool for anyone to have, and to be able to utilise for stress. I think you’ll find it’s a great system to use in life in general – otherwise, why would I have been doing it all these years – almost half of my life!”
Clint Eastwood

■ “I started Transcendental Meditation in 1973 and have not missed a single meditation ever since. Twice a day, every day. It has given me effortless access to unlimited reserves of energy, creativity and happiness deep within. This level of life is sometimes called ‘pure consciousness’ – it is a treasury. And this level of life is deep within us all. If you don’t already meditate, take my advice: Start. It will be the best decision you ever make.”

Film director David Lynch

■ “Nine in the morning, and 4.30 in the afternoon no matter what is going on, we stop and we meditate... And you can’t imagine what has happened in the company: people who used to have migraines, don’t, people are sleeping better, they are having better relationships and they are interacting with other people better. It’s been fantastic.”

Oprah Winfrey, describing what her company has gained from TM

■ “I had a belief that, with a bit of luck, I might be able to sleep just a little bit better, but the reality was dramatically different. I slept normally, I slept for a protracted length of time. Instead of waking up every few hours and getting never more than three or four hours’ sleep a night, I would have a normal night’s sleep. My wife thought I looked ten years younger...”

London-based financial advisor Michael Andrew, on learning TM to help with sleep problems

Find out more

■ For details of local TM teachers and introductory talks around the UK, go to the website: (www.uk.tm.org) or call 01695 51213.