

## Does Transcendental Meditation Actually Work?

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is easily one of the most hyped forms of meditation. Since The Beatles first tried it decades ago, it's garnered the following of a bevy of celebrities and high profile individuals, like Russell Simmons and Jerry Seinfeld.

TM also has one of the largest libraries of scientific research supporting it, substantiating claims of everything from increased cardiovascular health to decreased violence to increased creativity. But celebrity endorsements and even the best academic studies can hardly be relied on as conclusive proof.

So why has this method of meditation endured the test of time and received a stamp of approval from doctors and celebrities alike?

In short, because it works.

This writer recently learned the technique at the New York City TM Center and has been pleased with the results. Here's one reason why it may work so well.

Without going too in-depth, the TM technique is relatively simple. One sits comfortably, closes his or her eyes, and repeats a mantra (in Sanskrit) without moving the lips or making a sound for about 20 minutes, two times a day. Yes, that's just about it. The only other crucial piece of information one must know to do the technique correctly is to not 'force' anything. That is, allow thoughts to come and go - and if one realizes he's stopped repeating the mantra in his head, to just gently come back to it.

**[Read: [3 Meditation Techniques for Beginners.](#)]**

But wait - that can't be all there is to it, right!? Actually, that really is most of what it boils down to. So how can this simple method improve cardiovascular health? And how could it possibly make you more creative?

The key here is conditioning, and in fact, the TM technique can be thought of as a conditioning technique.

Conditioning, or programming, is a phenomenon that must take place in order for us to

live our lives. Conditioning can happen over time, or in an instant. We learn that a flame is hot, for instance, and condition ourselves to fear making contact with flames. We develop what we believe are "natural responses" to specific stimuli - not all that different from Pavlov's dogs.

When we practice TM, we're conditioning our minds to have a completely new response to thought itself. When we have a thought, we'll usually have one of two reactions, or a combination of the two:

1) Emotion: We'll think of something that triggers some type of emotion. This reaction isn't necessarily extreme, but it's always there. For example, we may think of a relationship or business deal gone bad, and as a result - even if only mild and temporary - we'll have a shift in emotional state. In this example it could perhaps be sadness or anger.

2) Action: Another reaction to thought is action or planned action. The simplest example: You think "I'm hungry," and as a result, get something to eat or make a plan to get something to eat. Note that the action needn't be immediate. For instance, haven't you ever, out of nowhere, thought about an old friend and made a mental note to call her at a later point? "Action" here can also mean internal physiological responses, tied to emotion, such as elevated blood pressure, sweating, increased heart rate and so on.

**[Read: [Got Five Minutes? Meditate in a Garden.](#)]**

Now, if you're practicing TM correctly and have an upsetting thought, how will you react? If you answered "You won't," bingo!

As mentioned above, when one practices TM, she gently returns to the mantra once she realizes she has drifted to a thought. This means no reaction. One doesn't dwell on the thought, take the time to invest emotion or carry out action - one simply just returns to the mantra.

And, again, what does this do? It completely changes our standard reaction to thoughts - our 'conditioning' or 'programming,' if you will.

We are reconditioning or reprogramming ourselves to *not* be reactive to thought.

**[Read: [Best Foods to Eat for Your Mood - and a Few Bad Ones.](#)]**

The two 20-minute sessions of TM one practices daily are no different than practicing for a particular sport. If you've ever tried a combat sport for instance, you have to completely recondition your "natural" response of turning away from - or turning your back to - an attacker. This takes time and repetition, but after a while, you've completely reconditioned a "naturally programmed" response.

TM helps in much the same way: If our "naturally programmed" response is to be reactive, either with emotion or action, TM helps us practice being non-reactive to thoughts.

And this is exactly why it can help lower blood pressure or even increase creativity.

Just think, if you're able to either eliminate or mitigate your action (internal or external) or emotional reaction to thought, wouldn't that [lower your blood pressure](#)? If you've been practicing TM consistently, when a thought that may spike blood pressure or the emotions or actions that lead to a spike in blood pressure comes along, your reconditioned, non-reactive response should ensue, thereby averting the emotion or action response that would normally take place.

In the case of creativity, imagine thoughts not disrupting the creative process when you're trying to write, paint or play music. Again, the reconditioned non-response allows you to focus on what you're doing, and not get distracted by thought - for example, "Will people like this song?"

The good news and the bad news is we're not so different from Pavlov's dogs. If we use the ability to condition our response to thought, we can reap tremendous benefits; if we allow ourselves to simply play into existing conditioning, we know just how detrimental that can be. From a neuro-psychological perspective we can see why TM really does work. And while learning the method can be a bit on the expensive side, it may be well worth the long-term return.

**[Read: [Try One of These Quirky Stress-Busters.](#)]**

**Hungry for more?** Write to [eatandrun@usnews.com](mailto:eatandrun@usnews.com) with your questions, concerns and feedback.

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