

Meditation for Healthy Aging

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Aging

Aging (North American English) or Ageing (UK English) is the accumulation of changes in an organism or object over time. Aging in humans refers to a multidimensional process of physical, mental, psychological, and social change. Aging is an important part of all human societies reflecting the biological-mental changes that occur, but also reflecting cultural and societal conventions. Age is usually measured in full years.

The term "aging" is somewhat ambiguous. Distinctions may be made between "universal aging" (age changes that all people share) and "probabilistic aging" (age changes that may happen to some, but not all people as they grow older, such as the onset of Type Two diabetes). *Chronological aging*, referring to how old a person is, is arguably the most straightforward definition of aging and may be distinguished from "social aging" (society's expectations of how people should act as they grow older) and "biological aging" (an organism's physical state as it ages).

Anti-Aging

Anti-aging refers to interventions intended to prevent, slow, or reverse the effects of aging. Medical research, including efforts in the areas of genetic engineering and tissue engineering, has investigated ways to slow down or reverse the processes of biological senescence. Anti-aging psychology-mentally aims to develop and enhance skills for coping with the psychological-mental stresses that may accompany aging.

The sale of anti-aging products such as nutrition, physical fitness, skin care, hormone replacements, vitamins, supplements and herbs has become a lucrative industry, with the US market generating about \$50 billion of revenue each year. Medical experts state that the use of such products has not been shown to affect the aging process.

Successful Aging

The concept of successful aging can be traced back to the 1950s, and popularized in the 1980s. Previous research into aging exaggerated the extent to which health disabilities, such as diabetes or osteoporosis, could be attributed exclusively to age, and research in gerontology exaggerated the homogeneity of samples of elderly people.

Successful ageing consists of three components:

- Low probability of disease or disability;
- High cognitive and physical function capacity;
- Active engagement with life.

A greater number of people self-report successful aging than those that strictly meet these criteria.

Successful aging may be viewed an interdisciplinary concept, spanning psychology, mental and sociology, where it is seen as the transaction between society and individuals across the life span with specific focus on the later years of life. The terms "healthy aging", "optimal aging" have been proposed as alternatives to successful aging.

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Six suggested dimensions of successful aging include:

- No physical disability over the age of 75 as rated by a physician;
- Good subjective health assessment (i.e. good self-ratings of one's health);
- Length of un-disabled life;
- Good mental faculties;
- Objective social support;
- Self-rated life satisfaction in eight domains, namely marriage, income-related work, children, friendship and social contacts, hobbies, community service activities, religion and recreation/sports.

Meditation as Anti-aging Medicine

One of the hottest topics in research right now is the anti-aging effects of the hormone melatonin, which is also sold as a dietary supplement in health food stores and drug stores. You may have heard of it as a sleep remedy, but it is involved in much more than just - sleep. One of the easiest (and cheapest) ways of boosting melatonin levels naturally is through meditation. Learn about the melatonin-mediation connection and get instructions on how to start meditating today.

Many people who meditate feel that the practice has positive health effects such as improved energy and calmness of mind. But there is also preliminary research that suggests that meditation may boost levels of melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate sleep and appears to influence other hormones in the body. Melatonin is produced by the pineal gland of the brain. The scientific connection between melatonin and meditation was first explored in 1995 by researchers at the University of Massachusetts, Medical Center's Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program. Researchers found that women who meditated had significantly higher levels compared with women who did not. No increases in blood melatonin levels were noted on nights where participants didn't meditate. This suggests that regular practice of meditation is necessary.

Other endocrine glands are especially vulnerable to aging. The pineal gland (located in brain), which produces the sleep hormone melatonin, quickly declines with age, until it generally becomes calcified and completely dysfunctional in most elderly people. It is believed that this decline contributes significantly to the increase in sleep disorders that occurs with aging. Melatonin is also a powerful antioxidant -that can easily cross cell membranes and the blood-brain barrier, and free-radical scavenger so the decline of the pineal also contributes to an overall decrease in health. Melatonin has been shown to be effective in treating one form of depression, seasonal affective disorder, and is being considered for bipolar and other disorders where circadian disturbances are involved.

One of the first systems that wear out is the endocrine system - the glands that secrete hormones. Many researchers believe that the primary reason we deteriorate as we age is due to the degeneration of the endocrine system. Furthermore, the function of the immune system generally follows the function of the endocrine system. For example, the production of critically important hormones, such as growth hormones, begins to drop off around age 30. The implications of this growth hormone decline are very disturbing; HGH (human growth hormone - is synthesized and secreted from the anterior pituitary gland) is vitally important in helping you feel energetic, to repair your muscles and other tissues and to retain strong immunity.

Similarly, the extremely important steroid hormone, DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone), drops off considerably with time, and this decline causes innumerable problems. This particular hormone helps protect the body from stress and is vitally important for maintaining a good mood, a normal sex drive, a stable body fat ratio and a high level of energy. It is also important to protect against the ravages of the

stress hormone cortisone, which when elevated can lead to a decline in immunity, memory loss and accelerated aging.

Unbalanced stress in your life also causes the hypothalamus, a gland thought of by many doctors as the "brain's brain," to decline in function. As the hypothalamus declines it becomes far less adept at perfectly responding to minor imbalances. Sometimes it calls for the production of too few hormones and sometimes too many. In effect, it loses its elasticity and flexibility. Moreover, this degeneration triggers dysfunction of the rest of the endocrine system, which causes damage to the body and the mind. Fat clings to the abdomen. Skin loses its suppleness. Memories fade. Viruses go unopposed. Eye muscles lose their focus. Immunity wanes. Sex drive declines. Aging runs rampant.

Here is one of the most simplified versions of meditation[†] techniques that are based on those used in the research studies. This meditation has nothing to do with any system/ism of any organized religion and hence could be practiced by people of all faiths. For maximal benefit, try to meditate for twenty minutes to an hour before you go to sleep. This meditation is "Mindfulness with Breathing":

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place. Sit in a chair or on the floor with your head, neck and back straight not stiff – but relaxed! Try to put your attention at the present moment by putting aside all thoughts of the past and the future and stay in the present.
2. Focus your attention on your breathing as air moves in and out of your body. Feel your belly rise and fall, the air enter and leave your nostrils. Pay attention to the way each breath changes and is different.
3. Watch every thought come and go, whether it is a worry, fear, anxiety or hope. When thoughts come up in your mind, don't ignore or suppress them but simply note them, remain calm and use your breathing as an anchor.
4. If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts, observe where your mind went off to, without judging, and simply return to your breathing. Remember not to be hard on yourself if this happens.
5. As the time comes to a close, sit for a minute or two, becoming aware of where you are. Get up gradually.

Turn Back the Clock Naturally

Imagine being able to rid yourself of a host of physical or mental maladies without drugs or psychotherapy. Imagine being able to turn back the clock naturally. That's right without taking chemical drugs and you can get anti-aging medicine just by meditating for twenty minutes to an hour a day. Meditation is a time proven therapy for thousands of years and it is one of the treasures of the East that westerners are adopting most recently.

Time is rushing into the future. You can't deny the truth of it. And with each passing year, month, week, day, minute and even a second you age. There is no way out. Every morning perhaps you notice a sign – a wrinkle here, a gray hair there, an ache, a pain or a little bulge somewhere. While you see the visible signs of aging on the surface of your body, beneath the skin there are telltale signs as well. Physiological studies have shown that cardiac, pulmonary, musculoskeletal and brain function, all declines as you become older. With the passage of time, minor damage mounts up as cells, organs and systems simply wear out.

Aging though is not the only problem caused by the decline of the endocrine system. The same factors that cause aging reduce quality of life and health in young people. You don't need to be old to have poor

[†] The spiritual and psychic attainment that could be achieved by practicing intensive meditation has not been dealt herewith since it is not within the scope of this paper. The readers who wish to practice meditation for health reason or for spiritual ground are welcome to contact the author.

immunity, impaired eyesight, low energy, depression, insomnia, decreased sex drive, poor muscle tone, hypoglycemia, obesity, muscle pain, impaired cognitive function or any other of the many problems associated with endocrine decline. These problems are more prevalent among the elderly but are also common among young people. Unfortunately, many of them appear to be increasingly common among younger patients in the affluent society. Two of the most obvious are depression and obesity, which are now at their highest rates in history among the young who leads a sedentary life. Remember, old age doesn't suddenly swoop down at 60; aging starts early, especially if you subject your body and brain to one physical and emotional assault after another.

By now I imagine you are ready for some good news. There is a powerful mechanism that can revolutionize the havoc of aging and confer youthful vitality at any age. That mechanism is meditation. Meditation is the true anti-aging medicine because it activates our body's own natural anti-aging healing force. There is no cost and it is totally free from dangerous side effects, which have been potentially attributed to some drugs and hormones. Meditation directly rejuvenates the hypothalamus, the pituitary, pineal and other endocrine glands. You can take meditation as an endocrine exercise. In addition, meditation is also the single most effective counter measure against stress and depression. Moreover, meditation is specific for ailments, including those associated with aging such as change of life issues or menopause, Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, cardiovascular disease and stroke, among others.

Let's now scientifically assess meditation. According to the Office of Alternative Medicine of the National Institutes of Health, 1994 Omnibus 25-Year Report on Meditation, the research indicates that meditators achieve the following biological reactions: marked reduction in oxygen use; notably lower secretion of stress hormones; increase in immune factors, including blood leukocyte production; and calm brain wave activity.

I think, by now, you are aware of the benefits of practicing meditation for natural anti aging, aren't we? If not, here's how to rediscover the benefits of meditation. People are now going back to ancient practices because they know that the modern times have been causing them too much stress. Of all the means of relaxation out there, more and more people are looking forward to experience the benefits of meditation. The people in the west are crazy and learning more and more of this exoteric art of the east.

One of the most celebrated benefits of meditation is that it greatly helps the person's physical as well as mental states. Among the physical benefits of meditation involve the heart through a deep rest because it decreases the person's metabolic rate as well as the heart rate, which leads to the reduction of workload for the heart. Aside from that, it is also known to lower the levels of a person's cortisol as well as dissolving the chemicals that are closely associated with everyday stress.

Other physical benefits of meditation also include reduced free radicals in the body by eliminating oxygen molecules that are unstable, decreases a person's high blood pressure, develops the ability to have more resistant skin, lowering or totally dropping the person's level of cholesterol, improve air flow to the lungs to aid easy breathing, delays biological aging and increases the levels of DHEAS in older people.

When it comes to psychological and mental factors, meditation aids in increasing the person's brain wave coherence, decreasing anxiety levels, often irritability, deep-set depression, and swing of moods, improves the person's memory as well as his or her learning ability, increases the person's ability for self-actualization, increases the person's feeling of youthfulness and rejuvenation as well as vitality, leads to positive outlook in life and joyfulness, increases a person's emotional status and stability, and to see things as they really are.

If you want to learn how not to spend hundreds of dollars on useless creams and cosmetics (and famous but costly and ineffective natural skin care products) but how to use meditation to retain youthful vitality,

take years off your appearance, and truly create a beautiful complexion that everyone notices, then here's where you start for the very best in natural skin care. You'll be shocked when you look in the mirror and see how much you've changed from meditating correctly. I guarantee you've never encountered this information before!

Other noted benefits of meditation for an individual and his or her community include:

- ✓ Relaxation to the person's the body and mind.
- ✓ Rejuvenation of energy to face the heavy challenges and stress ahead.
- ✓ Healing of various illnesses that are closely-associated with the mind and the body.
- ✓ Making a more stable person in terms of emotions.
- ✓ Developments of relaxed family life and instilling positive outlooks in life to younger people.
- ✓ Enhances the person's ability to make his or her mind function properly.
- ✓ Letting a person discover his or her inner self, this in turn releases the creativity in them.
- ✓ It helps people to free themselves from various vices and addictions such as alcohol and cigarettes as well as in various medications such as tranquilizers and narcotics.
- ✓ It also helps a person to gain higher self-confidence, thus, resulting to stronger power of the will.
- ✓ It can be an effective and safe way of discovering one's self instead of focusing the attention to other unhealthy practices.
- ✓ It aids in the development of the power of the mind.

Last, but not the least, meditation helps people in taking steps and measures – mentally and spiritually – to face a happy death. It is because no friends or relatives can help at that very moment, unless one prepares oneself before hand, when time comes, to welcome death without pain, agony, remorse and without tears in their eyes.

In a fascinating study on meditation, published over a period of years in different medical journals we find that when a group of researchers measured biological age (how old a person is physiologically rather than chronologically), determinants of blood pressure, vision and hearing were all improved for age with meditation. Those practicing meditation for five years were physiologically twelve years younger than their non-meditating counterparts. Even the short-term participants were physiologically five years younger than the controls.

An even stronger study on aging and meditation was conducted by researchers at Harvard and published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. This study analyzed elderly people who were introduced to meditation. In short they showed numerous beneficial changes and ultimately lived longer on average than patients in the control group that did not practice meditation. In summing up we can say that meditation is an aid for 'healthy aging'.

The end