

# Stress management by meditation



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## An application of social cognitive theory

### Introduction

Meditation is about balancing your inner and outer world. The power of meditation is felt rather than read. As per the RAJA YOGA meditation Guide developed by Brahma kumaris in 1994, when your attention is focused more on your surroundings than in your inner qualities, your situations become stronger than you which distract you and make you feel lack of concentration and clarity.

Social cognitive theory is based on observational learning. Social cognitive theory focus on the person's self-regulation to achieve goal directed behaviour. It considers the unique way in which a person acquire and maintain behavior over a period of time, while also considering the social environment that influence a person to perform the behavior. The theory considers person's past experiences which determine the probability of adoption of behaviour.

Meditation is good for relieving stress and anxiety as many researches have shown but I was notable[SS1]to perceive that behaviour because I am living in an environment where I cannot spend time for myself. The study stress and workload was affecting my eating habits as well. So I thought I should start doing meditation which was again a challenging behaviour for me as I was thinking, I would not be able to spend time for myself and focus living in a small 1bedroom room apartment with so much of work load. Therefore I selected meditation as a challenging behavior to help me lowering my mental stress and keeping my self away from environmental influences.

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In this regard, There was a need to learn doing meditation and keep myself calm. Social cognitive theory would help forming strategies to improve Behavioral Capability, Observational Learning, Expectations, Self-efficacy and self-control to perform meditation regularly. As per the theory, I could learn better if I observe a model doing same behaviour. Looking in to literature, there is no study with a meditation intervention applying social cognitive theory[SS2]but there is a published research study in MEDLINE data base by Mehta and Sharma (2012) who have conducted a Yoga intervention of 10 week to reduce anxiety using the social cognitive theory based strategies. Though I could not find full text study, looking in to abstract I found meditation and yoga almost similar behaviours and chose the social leaning theory to plan my behaviour challenge 3 week intervention.

Broad Objective: To adopt a healthy lifestyle behaviour by engaging in 15 minutes of meditation every day with a view to manage stress.

Specific Objectives:

1. To help balance hormonal levels of my body.
2. To obtain more focus in my study than my busy personal life.
3. To improve my self-efficacy, concentration and peace of mind.
4. To feel the joy of the thoughtless state obtained during meditation.
5. To help myself getting free from emotional attachments.

Methods and Tools: strategies were made using social cognitive theory to perform the behaviour and tools were selected to measure the outcome. An alarm was set in the cellphone to remind me of performing the behaviour

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and a record was kept every day after performing the behaviour in the record keeping sheet attached on the wall in my bedroom where I performed meditation every day.

Strategies for learning meditation:

1. Download and read guide by brahma kumaris-how to perform meditation
2. Watch online video of meditation

Strategies for performing behaviour:

1. Choose a Convenient Time
2. Choose A Quiet Place
3. Sit in a comfortable posture
4. Keep a relatively Empty Stomach[SS3]
5. Choose one object to focus i. e. the video of meditation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHDQBSWXqZg>)
6. Listen the audio instructions for meditation[SS4]

Measurement of outcome: A scale was developed to rate the self- efficacy from 0-100. Examples of everyday possible difficult situations were written on the scale and marked any applicable situation followed by rating.

The scale used for measuring self-efficacy is given below:

Rate your self-efficacy

Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 to 100 using the

Scale given below:

0 102030405060708090100

Cannot Moderately Highly certain

do at all can do can do

Mark the applicable situation you felt for today:

When I am feeling tired \_\_\_\_\_

When I am feeling under pressure from study \_\_\_\_\_

During or after experiencing personal problems \_\_\_\_\_

When I am feeling depressed \_\_\_\_\_

When I am feeling anxious \_\_\_\_\_

When I feel physical discomfort when I meditate \_\_\_\_\_

When I have too much work to do at home \_\_\_\_\_

When there are other interesting things to do \_\_\_\_\_

When I have other time commitments \_\_\_\_\_

After experiencing family problems \_\_\_\_\_

As a self-monitoring, everyday record was kept for the following outcomes by rating them out of 10.

1. Rate your concentration: how much you achieved today

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2. Rate your breathing rhythm
3. Rate your mental calmness after meditation
4. State any barrier in your performance

Barriers or challenges: In total I did not perform the meditation for 4 days.

The reasons were following:

- I was feeling sleepy due to my menstrual cramps.
- I was very busy with my submission and could not even afford to spend half an hour to perform meditation followed by record keeping
- I was very happy and did not feel like doing meditation
- I just focused on breathing for 5 minutes to save my time

Whereas in all other days I performed meditation because it was really helping me. I was feeling very relaxed after doing it at least for a night. Record keeping was a challenging because sometimes I had to think how much successful I was in my behaviour? An alarm at 10 o'clock was very annoying for my husband in the weekends because he had to leave the bedroom while I perform meditation. I did not find so much challenging to do meditation because I started enjoying it any may be because I knew I had to make a report and I need to record my points to make a good report. Though it is challenging on the previous day of any submission, I have planned to continue this behaviour as much as possible throughout my master's program. Overall the experience of meditation is great because it taught me to love and care for myself which I forgot after getting married and living with my in laws. Meditation helped me spend time for myself alone in the room even when my husband is at home. That was because he knew it is a part of my submission. Meditation help feeling an inner ability that you are the

best and you have power to do every task. I was feeling so positive after doing meditation. I did meditation 2times before my facilitation in Nick's class and I was so confident.

Application of my experience as a Nutrition communicator: Since my behaviour is more of changing lifestyle, it can be applied as an intervention to reduce stress and anxiety in someone's everyday life. This behaviour can be very beneficial for working women, university students and those who suffer with anxiety and sleep disorders. If meditation is performed on a regular basis for a longer time, it regulates your hormonal imbalances and change your overall personality and mood. This behaviour can also be useful for people who tend to eat more when they are stressed. So indirectly meditation would help losing weight. As a nutrition communicator I would recommend not only healthy eating but also healthy lifestyle which regulate an overall metabolism of the body. If the behaviour is challenging to adopt, I would recommend to learn and perform using Video because the music and audio instructions help focusing and learning and saves time because a person can do it at home without joining classes or workshop.

Utility of theory and strategies to change my behaviour: A social cognitive theory helped me creating strategies to perform and learn the meditation. For example, choosing a convenient time and quite place driven me to perform the behaviour every day. It improved my self-regulation in my home environment. I performed behaviour at night around 10pm because I study every night until late and meditation helped me focusing more in study and I taught me how to keep myself away from the social life. A strategy of focusing on video and listening to their instructions helped me learn

meditation and focusing. Focusing without a music was very difficult as I tried it on the first observational day of my behaviour. A record keeping helped me measuring my self- efficacy and also it was a motivation to reach to a maximum rating.

## References

Mehta, P., & Sharma, M. (2012-13). Evaluation of a social cognitive theory based yoga intervention to reduce anxiety. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*. 32(3), 205-217.

Raja Yoga. (1994). *Meditation step by step guide by brahma kumaris* available at <http://brahmakumaris.info/download/BK%207%20Days%20Course/RY-Meditation-Teachers-Guide-1994.pdf> retrieved on 17th September 2014

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHDQBSWXqZg>)

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[SS1]Rational of my behaviour

[SS2]Application of theory in my behaviour with example of similar research

[SS3]First 4 strategies help improving self-regulation over behaviour

[SS4]Last 2 strategies help develop

Observational learning