

# Meditation, attention and well-being of college students

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Ask any college student today and they would probably say that being in college is one of the most difficult and consuming endeavor that they have had in their lifetime. College life is not only about going to classes, meeting deadlines, writing papers and completing courses. College life is also about developing analytical and critical minds, learning life-skills, building knowledge and applying it to real-life situations.

College students need all the help they could get to make their academic lives a little lighter or more manageable. Many self-help books have advocated changing one's attitude, thinking positively, time-management, building relationships and other methods that one gets a feeling that they do not really provide solutions but just state the obvious. One that has received less attention is in the area of meditation.

Literature has found that meditation has positive effects in reducing stress as a relaxation technique. However, meditation has been associated with new age thinking and referred to as spooky stuff that the present generation of college students may not be aware of. Meditation have existed since man first begun creative thinking, it is often referred in religious and spiritual practices. In the early years of psychological investigation, meditation became a popular subject in terms of the experiences that people have when they meditated as well as how it can be an effective relaxation technique.

Meditation is being able to become more attuned with one's inner self and this takes a great deal of directed attention. Attention refers to the ability of the mind or consciousness to attend to a specific area, event, information or thing. Studies on attention have highlighted the detrimental effects of not being able to hold one's attention, and of how fleeting and short a person's  
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attention p can be especially in a very complex and stimulus overloaded environment we have. Directing attention to a single object or thought can be relaxing since it allows the person to be present in the here and now, it was also espoused that training oneself to become more attentive can develop cognitive functioning and thus help in academic performance.

College students can benefit in learning and being able to use meditation techniques to cope with the many stresses and anxiety of college life and developing attention skills to further enhance academic performance. It is therefore hypothesized that college students who practice meditation will have a longer attention p and will have higher grades and a more positive mental health and hence increased feelings of well-being.

This study will determine if college students who practice meditation techniques on a regular basis have higher attention skills as measured by a behavioral experiment and whether they have more positive feelings of well-being as determined by a well-being inventory.

A discussion of meditation and its application into the enhancement of attention, creativity and consciousness is presented to demonstrate the far reaching effects of meditation as a means of aiding college student's performance in school and their mental health.

## Meditation

Meditation has been defined as process wherein the person achieves an altered state of consciousness by performing certain rituals and exercises. These exercises include controlling and regulating breathing, sharply

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restricting one's field of attention, eliminating external stimuli, assuming yogic body positions and forming mental images of an event or symbol. The result is a pleasant, mildly altered subjective state in which the individual feels mentally and physically relaxed.

Some individuals after extensive meditation practice may have mystical experiences in which they lose self-awareness and gain a sense of being involved in a wider consciousness, however defined. That such meditative techniques may cause a change in consciousness goes back to the ancient times and is represented in every major world religion. Buddhists, Hindus, Sufis, Jews and Christians all have literature describing rituals that induce meditative states (Arambula, Kawakami, Gibney, 2001).

Traditional forms of meditation follow the practices of yoga, a system of thought based on the Hindu religion, or Zen which is derived from Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. The two common techniques of meditation are an opening up meditation and concentrative meditation. In opening-up meditation the subject clears his/her mind for receiving new experiences while in concentrative meditation the benefits are obtained through actively attending to some object, word, or idea.

Experimental studies of meditation provide only limited insight into the alterations of consciousness that a person can achieve when meditative practice and training extend over many years. In his study of the Matramudra, a centuries old Tibetan Buddhist text, Brown (1977) has described the complex training required to master the technique. He has shown that cognitive changes can be expected at different meditative levels.

A somewhat commercialized and popular form of meditation has been promoted as transcendental meditation or TM ( Hanley & Spates, 1978) ).

The technique is easily learned from a qualified teacher who gives the novice mediator a mantra and instructions on how to repeat it over and over to produce the deep rest and awareness characteristic of TM. In TM a person develops a reduced state of physiological arousal; feelings such as peace of mind, a feeling of being at peace with the world and a sense of well-being are reported after engaging in TM. In a now classic study on the effect of TM to college students by Hanley & Spates (1978), it was reported that those who were practicing meditation had more positive personalities.

In this study, meditation in the form of transcendental meditation (TM) will be used as the meditative process which will be given to college students who will participate in this study. The TM is much easier to learn and practice than the traditional forms of mediation and since it produces feelings of peace and well-being that it suits the purpose of this study. Meditation is categorized under altered states of consciousness and since consciousness is the most basic cognitive function that is closely related to attention, the second part of this study is to determine if meditation enhances attention p and accuracy and in effect would lead to greater academic performance.

### Meditation and Attention

Meditation and attention is unquestionably linked together, meditation is the process by which attention is narrowed and focused on one object or event, and without engaging one's attention fully to the immediate task, and then nothing will come out of it. Attention must be acutely directed towards the

mantra, the breathing of the individual and the experiences one will have during the meditative state. Meditation in effect enhances the ability of the person to direct attention and when attention is more keen and developed, a person can have better concentration and can better attend to the critical thinking skills needed in college education (Shear & Jevning, 1999).

Attention has been the earliest subject of the study of psychology, and cognitive science has provided evidence that attention is physiological, that it is limited but can be expanded to become more acute and enable the person to become more aware of his/her environment, more appreciative of nature and life and it causes a general feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Several studies have tried to find evidence that meditation and attention has a relationship. In a study of the effects of opening-up and concentrative meditation to attention in terms of ignoring distractions and focusing attention (Chan, 2003) found that meditation was positively correlated with the ability to direct attention but it was shown that meditation minutes per day was positively correlated with decreased distractions and mistakes, the form of meditation used or how many years a person has been meditating did not have any significant relationship with the owner. In a similar study, concentrative and mindfulness motivation was measured in terms of how effective it contributed to the task of sustained attention.

The study compared the sustained attention of students who had meditation training to those who did not (Valentine & Sweet, 1999). The study found that those who had meditation techniques scored better in the sustained attention task wherein those who practiced mindfulness meditation had better scores than the concentrative mediators. The practical applications of <https://assignbuster.com/meditation-attention-and-well-being-of-college-students/>

an enhanced attention that is not affected by distractions and sustained attention can be directed towards improved academic performance of students.

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### Meditation and Creativity

A new concept put forward by Sarath (2006) advocated the use of meditation techniques to mainstream classroom instruction as it enriches the learning process and enhances the creative process and consciousness of students. Creativity is highly related to the issue of meditation because the experience associated with meditation is similar to the second person approach wherein the student actually creates and produces an output that would enable him/her to have a deeper understanding of the concepts raised in class (Sarath, 2006).

The author had argued that education and learning should be focused on providing actual experience of the lesson, not just learning something in books and not being able to work with it. Creative expression of one's talent and interests should be the main thrust of the school. At the same time, a more sustained attention and inability to be distracted by external stimuli are necessary steps in the practice of creative thinking.

### Conclusion

Meditation is not just for the spiritual and magical but it is also a positive process to develop attention and induce students to relax and communicate with their bodies and their surroundings. College students have to deal with pressures and expectations that they sometimes feel cranky, anxious and <https://assignbuster.com/meditation-attention-and-well-being-of-college-students/>

fed up. Meditation as evidenced by the studies conducted showed that it could positively affect attitudes, attention p and resistance to distractions. Meditation also has been found to be a medium that could enhance the learning process and encourage creativity. As such, this study has found evidence to support the hypothesis mentioned in the first part.

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