

fireup

Meditation produced a greater reduction in pain than even morphine or other pain-relieving drugs, which typically reduce pain ratings by about 25 percent.

ON THE INTERNET: MORE AND MORE RESEARCH IS FINDING THAT MEDITATION, EVEN WHEN PRACTICED FOR 20 MINUTES PER DAY, OFFERS SOME HEALTH BENEFITS. FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SOME EASY MEDITATION TIPS, VISIT MAYOCLINIC.COM.

Great information about staying healthy and the role massage therapy can play in your wellness program, all at your fingertips!



fire up

mind the pain

When you're in pain, particularly if you deal with chronic issues, finding practices that give you relief usually means an increase in quality of life. You're able to enjoy activities and sleep better, for example, or return to hobbies you had to give up.

Now, a new study shows that meditation—even when done by beginners who haven't regularly used this practice—helps relieve pain. "This is the first study to show that only a little over an hour of meditation training can dramatically reduce both the experience of pain and pain-related brain activation," explains Fadel Zeidan, Ph.D. and lead author of the study in the April 6 edition of the *Journal of Neuroscience*.

The study comprised 15 healthy volunteers who had never meditated before, each of whom attended four, 20-minute classes to learn focused attention—a common meditation technique. Both before and after meditation training, researchers examined the brain activity of all participants using arterial spin labeling magnetic resonance imaging, a special type of imaging. During this process, participants had a pain-inducing heat device placed on their right leg, heating a small area of skin to 120 F over a period of five minutes.

The results: Every participant's pain ratings were reduced after meditation training, ranging from decreases of 11 percent all the way to 93 percent. "We found a big effect—about 40 percent reduction in pain intensity and a 57 percent reduction in pain unpleasantness," Zeidan reports. "Meditation produced a greater reduction in pain than even morphine or other pain-relieving drugs, which typically reduce pain ratings by about 25 percent."

Researchers also found that meditation significantly reduced activity in the area of the brain involved in creating the feeling of where and how intense pain is. Before meditation training, activity in the primary somatosensory cortex was high. During the scans, however, no activity in this pain-processing region could be detected when participants were meditating.

>> **FOCUSED ATTENTION** IS A TYPE OF MEDITATION THAT ENCOURAGES PRACTITIONERS TO CONCENTRATE ON THEIR BREATH, LETTING GO OF DISTRACTING THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS.



CRASH COURSE: FOCUSED ATTENTION

Although not intended as formal training in meditation, here are a few ways you, too, can practice focused attention.

PICK A FOCAL POINT. You might have a nice picture you want to use, or a favorite memory. You can also choose a sound or smell, like running water or your favorite incense. Select something that's easy for you to focus on in the environment you are in.

GET COMFORTABLE. Find a position that allows you to relax.

FOCUS. Turn your attention to the focal point you chose. Be *present* in the experience, focusing on the smell of the incense, or the sounds of the waves crashing onto the shore. When your mind wanders, let the distracting thought go and consciously return your attention back to your focal point.

QUIET THE CRITIC. Remember that meditation isn't about perfection, so if you find that you're getting easily distracted, don't beat yourself up. Give yourself credit for recognizing the distraction, then return once again to your focus. Over time, your ability to not attend to the outside distractions or intrusive thoughts will improve.