



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Meditation

This information describes the common uses of Meditation, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

The most researched form of meditation is mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). It is typically offered as an 8-week program and uses *sitting meditation*, a sensing practice called *body scan* to reestablish the connection of mind to body and breath, and *walking meditation* to apply these practices in moving form.

MBSR can help reduce distress, fatigue, and pain. It improves mental functioning, mood, and well-being, including in cancer patients undergoing treatment.

Meditation may also help reduce blood pressure and heart disease risks, and can also benefit children, helping to improve self-confidence and coping skills.

Repeated practice and patience are important mechanisms to allow for optimal benefits.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **Anxiety**
Several studies show that meditation reduces anxiety associated with many diseases including cancer.
- **Cognitive impairment**
MBSR practice resulted in improvements in cognitive impairment resulting from cancer and its treatments.
- **Depression**
Many clinical trials indicate that MBSR can help reduce depression.
- **Fatigue**
Studies in breast cancer survivors show that MBSR practice decreases fatigue severity.
- **Insomnia**
MBSR may help relieve insomnia and improve sleep quality.
- **Lifestyle modification**
Meditation practice may help support making lifestyle changes or modifying behaviors.
- **Mood disturbance**
MBSR practice helps improve mood disturbance in patients including those with cancer.
- **Pain**
A few studies indicate that MBSR is useful in relieving chronic pain. Larger trials are needed.

What else do I need to know?

What Is It:

Meditation has been practiced for ages in many traditions around the world. It is often described as a state in which the practitioner is relaxed but focused and alert.

Most meditation practices include key features like attention to breathing, letting go of judgements, and developing awareness. Common goals include inner calmness, relaxation, psychological balance, and improved vitality and coping. The most researched form of meditation is mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), typically offered as an 8-week program.

Both the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) and the Society of Integrative Oncology (SIO) recommend meditation as part of a multidisciplinary approach to reduce stress, depression, and mood disturbance, and to improve the quality of life in cancer patients. The American Heart Association also recommends meditation as a lifestyle tool to help reduce heart disease risk.

Special Point:

It is important to note that regular meditation practice is essential for continued benefits.

Is It Safe:

Meditation is generally considered safe, and few cases of adverse effects have been reported. Various medical panels have endorsed meditation as a useful lifestyle tool, including the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), the Society of Integrative Oncology, and the American Heart Association.

Who Can Provide this Service:

Practitioners who teach MBSR go through a certification process. They may also have specific training and experience with certain patient populations, such as cardiac or cancer patients.

Where Can I Get Treatment:

Meditation classes are offered in communities, at hospitals, and at universities. Cancer centers across the country also offer programs that are led by experienced teachers.

MSK offers free meditations online and with our *[Integrative Medicine at Home](#)*

program. Both offer an opportunity to try guided meditations geared towards concerns relevant to cancer patients.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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