



Meditation & stress: help for people with ET

Meditation has long been a part of Eastern religious practice. Now, studies conducted by such prestigious research centers as Harvard Medical School, the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center, and the University of Wisconsin have found that meditation, or what some neuroscientists call mindfulness, brings about feelings of well-being and emotional balance, increases the mind's ability to focus, and reduces stress, anxiety and pain.

Stress and anxiety present challenges for most people. They are particularly troublesome, however, for people with ET because of the tremor-aggravating effects of adrenaline, the neurochemical released by the body during stress. Any method of reducing the effect of stress on the body and so limiting the effects of adrenaline is beneficial for people with ET.

According to the Society of Neuroscience, 10 million Americans currently practice some form of meditation. Historically associated with the attainment of higher spiritual goals, secular meditation practices use techniques that focus or cultivate one's attention or awareness through the repetition of a word, sound or phrase or through breathing.

Specific research findings on the positive effects of meditation over a long period include:

- Higher level of gamma band rhythms, brain impulses associated with higher mental activity such as attention, learning and conscious perception.
- Increased attention skills and the ability to stabilize the mind.
- Thickening of the brain in regions involved with attention and sensory processing.
- Thickening of the brain's outer cortex, an area involved in the integration of emotional and cognitive processes.
- Increase in antibodies.

Although no clinical research has been conducted on the effects of meditation on the tremor of ET, Elan D. Louis, MD, MS, professor of neurology and epidemiology, College of Physicians and Surgeons and Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, says meditation may help.

"Stress and anxiety can certainly temporarily exacerbate an underlying tremor disorder," Louis says. "To my knowledge, it has not been rigorously tested whether stress reduction through meditation temporarily lessens tremor. That is, I know of no clinical trials. However, meditation could, at least in theory, provide some mild temporary reduction in tremor."

Learn more about the effects of meditation and how to incorporate meditation or mindfulness into your daily life as a coping strategy against stress and anxiety through the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society (CFM) Stress Reduction Program, University of Massachusetts Medical School. The Center's mission is to further the practice and integration of mindfulness in the lives of individuals, institutions, and in society through health care, education, and research. <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm>

Contact the CFM at 508.856.2656 or mindfulness@umassmed.edu



Our Mission:

The IETF funds research to find the cause of essential tremor (ET) that leads to treatments and a cure, increases awareness, and provides educational materials, tools, and support for healthcare providers, the public, and those affected by ET.