Time to Meditate

Reduces stress, improves sleep, increases focus

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The science on meditation has grown too big to ignore, with the most notable benefits of meditation being the improvement of sleep and reduction of stress. Meditation is an easily implemented and readily available technique that will improve your life. If you think that meditation is too scary to tackle on your own, consider guided meditations that will lead you through a stream of thoughts and breathing techniques, ending with you feeling refreshed and more at peace than when you began. One example is Headspace, a guided meditation app that offers both free, and discounted student subscriptions. It has many meditation categories from stress and anxiety to work productivity to sleeping. A simple practice that you could do on your own is to sit for 1-5 minutes, breathing in through your nose while expanding your stomach, and breathing out through your mouth while drawing your stomach back in; this is diaphragmatic breathing. Breathing practices that focus on the diaphragm have been linked to reduced anxiety and improved mood. Try incorporating meditation into your daily routine!
Lots of people go on diets. They try to eat healthier, generally with some goal in mind – be it aesthetic driven, because of physician recommendations, or simply because they want to feel better physically. However, consider watching what you eat for another reason – better mental health. According to Dr. Eva Selhub, a physician working at Harvard Medical School, “what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood.”

Here’s the scientific reason behind your mom’s nagging to eat your fruits and veggies.

Neurotransmitters are the molecules inside your brain that essentially act as the main form of communication. One such neurotransmitter is serotonin, which is linked functionally to sleep, mood, appetite, and even mitigating pain.

Coincidentally, 95% of serotonin is made in the lining of your gut, AKA your gastrointestinal tract. So as you can imagine, what you eat directly interacts with your GI tract and has a huge impact.

The neurons are the cells functioning in communication with the brain and are responsible for serotonin production in the gut. These particular neurons are influenced heavily via the gut microbiome - or the bacteria living in your GI tract.

In addition to affecting neuron behavior, here’s some of the other stuff the “good” bacteria hanging out in your gut does for you:

- Protect against toxins and bad bacteria
- Protect against inflammation
- Increase nutrient absorption

So how do you take care of this microbiome? Consider adding probiotics to your diet - fermented foods like kombucha, kimchi, etc. Also add PREbiotics - this is found in foods like onions and garlic. Eat lots of plants, lots of fiber, and antioxidant rich foods. And last but not least, watch the refined sugar.

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**HOW TO BOOST YOUR SEROTONIN (MOOD BALANCING MOLECULE)**

- Eliminate sugar and syrups even if they are natural
- Eat fermented foods (vegetable probiotics)
- Eat bright colorful vegetables
- Get sunlight. Take your sunglasses off!
- Eat pineapple
- Eat seeds
- Eat pecans
- Go swimming
- Go for a walk
- Eat vegetable oils
- Eat negative ions: clean air, ocean breeze, cold showers
- Spend time in nature
It's definitely typical for college students to stay up studying to the end hours of the night because that's how we believe we're going to get the most done (and probably because we have zero time to do it during the day). Exam season is truly stressful, but what's worse is that it's never ending. It's a cycle of trying to catch up on sleep, get enough work done, go to classes, and still have time for extracurricular activities and a job.

Something that is frequently overlooked by college students is that this uncertainty always present in our schedules mess with our bodies in more ways than one. As we consume that extra Starbucks coffee or Monster energy drink the night before the big exam, we put our body under stress and endure our brain to mental strain. When the body has to react to this stress, there is a dramatic increase in hormone production and brain activation, which leaves our bodies confused and always ready for action.

This constant activation of the brain leads to hyperactivity and anxiety, which has been shown to decrease test-taking performance. While still under the influence of these stress hormones our brain becomes less effective at problem solving, and is unable to rest in the evenings (affecting our sleep, and ability to feel well-rested the next day).

Next time you have an exam, no matter how horrible your schedule is during that time, take a moment to step back and take a deep breath when you feel slightly overwhelmed. Stop rewriting or rereading your notes over and over again instead:
- Play games with the information you're studying
- Draw out those figures,
- Re-construct those tables
- Talk the content back to yourself or peers.

Your mental health is important, and if you push it to the side due to your stress, your scholastic outcomes will start to take a hit as well. Get in the habit of taking 2 minutes out of your studying routine to de-stress and motivate yourself will improve your cognition, decrease your stress response, help you sleep better, and most importantly better the outcomes on those exams you study so extremely hard for!