

Meditation calms the mind, lengthens life: study

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By Charnicia E. Huggins

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Increasing evidence suggests that transcendental meditation may not only reduce stress, but also may help adults with high blood pressure to live longer, according to a new study.

"There are many non-drug techniques for reducing blood pressure, but none...extend life," study author Dr. Robert H. Schneider, of the Maharishi University of Management in Iowa, told Reuters Health.

He added that the current study shows that "you can live longer with a mind-body intervention."

Transcendental meditation is a technique for calming the body and mind, to allow individuals to enter a state of "restful alertness," in which the body is awake but the mind is not engaged in conscious thought. It is a method of "waking up the body's own self-repair mechanisms," Schneider said.

The new report, published in this month's American Journal of Cardiology, is based on a review of data from two studies that showed that transcendental meditation helped decrease blood pressure among white and African-American adults, respectively. Schneider and his team evaluated the association between the meditation technique and risk of death among the study participants.

The two studies included 202 men and women, about 72 years old on average, who had pre-hypertension or mild hypertension. They were assigned to a transcendental meditation group, or to various comparison groups of other relaxation techniques.

Participants in the two studies were followed for about eight years on average -- a maximum of nearly 19 years -- during which 101 individuals died.

Overall, men and women who practiced transcendental meditation not only had lower blood pressures than those in the other groups, but were also 23 percent less likely to die from any cause, Schneider and his team report. In particular, they were 30 percent less likely to die from cardiovascular disease and 49 percent less likely to die from cancer.

The "integrated holistic" transcendental meditation technique does not have any harmful side effects, Schneider said.

Schneider is the director of the Institute for Natural Medicine and Prevention, funded by the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

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