

# balance

*...a better you*

**Supercharge**  
your diet  
on a budget

**5** Your insomnia  
**WEAPON**  
ways to  
ensure  
**ZZZZZZ**

**WIN**

A FABULOUS  
SPA BREAK

Five decades  
of exercise

The best  
techniques  
for **YOU**

*Lisa Snowden*

talks Clooney, staying in shape  
and recovering from meningitis

# Everybody say 'OM'



Sometimes we just need to breathe. **Ladan Soltani** demonstrates how we can all find a moment of peace over the festive season.

**S**ometimes we just need to breathe. Ladan Soltani demonstrates how we can all find a moment of peace over the festive season.

As the Christmas rush is fast creeping upon us, the panic starts to kick in with all the last minute shopping. Our head goes beyond its usual routine of nonstop chitter chatter, as the sounds of endless, monotonous lists amplify furthermore. We think we are going out of our minds and our head is about to explode. We yearn for even one minute of precious peace.

Well, that minute of silence and freedom is available to us if we allow it. At this time of year, giving yourself a space where you can be centred and regain mental balance to stop your thoughts wandering so far away into the future, (which stops you living and even enjoying the present moment) is the best Christmas gift you can give yourself.

Meditation is not always a discipline which needs to be

practiced solely in a seated, upright posture. From experience, the mind can be silent in the noisiest shopping mall or the loudest party. This doesn't mean we just miraculously stop thinking. It is almost impossible to completely curb our thoughts, even for a regular practitioner of meditation.

Meditation is the ability to simply acknowledge our thoughts and let them go without getting engaged or attached to them. A yoga instructor once advised to imagine each thought tied to a balloon, and simply let it drift away. Once you cultivate this practice and strengthen your mind muscle, eventually you will have longer gaps and spaces within your thinking. Those are the moments of blissful peace we experience. From my own ritualistic practice of this discipline, I could go as far as saying, every single meditation session feels different to the next, and therefore, I couldn't define a conventional way to meditate. We may look, sit, stand and walk the same in practice, however, what is happening in our inner worlds is never identical.

## Meditation Benefits



Many people approach me and share they are far too busy to dedicate a time during the day which they can commit to being still. These are the people who need it the most. Meditation gives you freedom in your mind and a real sense of clarity. If you have a calm mind, the decisions and choices you make are clearer. Have you ever turned up a stereo to its maximum volume and been deafened by the distorted sounds? How can one hear a quality note amongst the sound of chaos? I know my mind and thoughts become so fragmented when I don't devote the time to be still. We work out in the gym to look physically in shape, so we can look our best at the Christmas party. Surely, if the mind had the same amount of attention as our body, we would have mastery over our lives? Not only does my practice help me to connect to who I am, to others and my surroundings, it also sets me up for the day and anchors me so I truly enjoy and cherish living in the moment.



## Health Benefits

### Alleviate depression

Transcendental meditation has been shown to significantly reduce depressive symptoms. One study of 36 patients with clinical depression found that symptoms almost halved after just three months and the benefits were maintained over a year-long period.

Another study of 112 patients at high risk of depression found that depressive symptoms fell by a third over the initial three-month period.

### Improve memory

People who meditate in the long-term have 'significantly larger' hippocampi – the part of the brain associated with memory and learning – a study found. The research on 44 people, half of whom had practised meditation for between five and 46 years, found those who had meditated also had increased grey matter.

### Reduce blood pressure and stroke risk

Researchers who tracked 201 people as they underwent either Transcendental Meditation or health education classes found that those who meditated had lower blood pressure and a 47% reduction in strokes, deaths and heart attacks, which they calculated together as one result.

### Relieve pain

Meditation can have greater pain relieving effects than morphine, a study earlier this year found. Researchers found that just one hour of meditation training could reduce pain by nearly half.

Study participants' brain activity was examined as they were subjected to a painful heat-emitting device applied to one of their legs. They were monitored both before and after meditation training and pain ratings were reduced by between 11 and 93 per cent while meditating.

Meditation had the effect of reducing activity in an area of the brain that processes pain stimuli, while increasing activity in areas where the brain stores its experience of pain and comes up with coping mechanisms.

### Relaxation

Meditation has always been touted as a way to relax, but a study last year found evidence to show that it really does work. Increased neuron connectivity was found in parts of the brain that were important for regulating emotional behaviour and dealing with conflict.

### Reduce anxiety

Another study found that meditation decreases the levels of the stress-causing hormone, cortisol. Study subjects who were taught to meditate for 20 minutes a day for five days had measurably less anxiety and lower levels of the hormone than a group who were taught other relaxation techniques. Those who meditated also had lower levels of anger and fatigue.

## Celebrities who meditate

### Gwyneth Paltrow

In January, the actress said: 'My New Year's resolution is to learn how to meditate. It's always sounded like something I should do, but I don't know how to. My friends who do it say it's really freakin' brilliant. They say you can't know the peace/awareness/contentment until you do it'.

### Tina Turner

The singing legend credited her Buddhist beliefs and her regular practice of meditation for giving her the strength to leave her abusive marriage to Ike Turner in the 1970s.

### Steven Seagal

The actor has long been a devotee of meditation, since moving to Japan at the age of 17 to study acupuncture, martial arts and Zen. He was once reported as saying he had done serious meditation in his 'own pitiful way' for about 27 years.

### Orlando Bloom

The star of films such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* credits meditation and the philosophies behind it for helping him to keep away from the self-destructive path so common in Hollywood. He follows a practical approach to meditation and incorporating meditation into his daily life so that it strengthens him, as well as helping him find peace.

### Sting

Sting and his wife Trudie Styler both practice yoga and meditation. The singer said: 'Yoga introduced me to a style of meditation. The only meditation I would have done before would be in the writing of songs'.

### Rivers Cuomo

The front man for the rock band Weezer takes meditation to the next level. He's currently at a 45-day meditation retreat, and before he left said that 'one of the things that happens to me in these courses is that my memory gets razor-sharp'.

### Herbie Hancock

One of the most revered contributors to modern jazz, Herbie practises a form of meditation with a heavy emphasis on chanting. He turned to

meditation after seeing its effect on the performing abilities of fellow jazz players and believes that it has played an integral part in his own artistic development. He says meditation enables him to explore outside his comfort zone and find the courage to try new things.

### Gisele Bündchen

The supermodel believes passionately in meditation and credits it with keeping her healthy, especially during her pregnancy with her son. It may even have helped with pain control during her natural water birth.

### Richard Gere

The star of Hollywood hits such as *Pretty Woman* and *Chicago*, Richard Gere is a devout Buddhist and passionate advocate for human rights. He meditates daily, claiming that it helps him to get motivated.

### David Lynch

Not only has the director been meditating for over thirty-five years but he's also written a book about it, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*. Last year he launched the David Lynch Foundation, dedicated to providing students with the opportunity to learn how to meditate.

### Russell Simmons

The entrepreneur, impresario and author has been meditating for over twelve years. Simmons says the following about meditation: 'It has given me energy, strength, health, wisdom, and access to my own inner stillness, inner silence, and inner bliss. It is my connection to myself; it is my connection to the universe'

### And it's not just for humans

A study found that cats that were unwell became less stressed when they listened to yoga meditation music. The ill felines calmed down and began to breathe more slowly when they were played the tunes. **B**

## Meditation on the go

✦ Whilst you're standing at a check-out of the supermarket or waiting on the street for a friend, take your legs slightly apart and feel where your heels are touching the ground.

✦ This will make you drop down into your body and gets you out of the analytical head.

✦ Be present and aware of how your body is feeling whilst observing your breath.

✦ Visualize growing roots like a tree from the soles of your feet and plug them deep down into the earth and draw the earth's energy back into your body.

✦ This simple, yet powerful technique will not only ground you by bringing your awareness back into your own centre. It will also connect your mind and body. *Namaste.*

