



Meditation

A Path to Pain-Free Living

Meditation is a major player in the healthcare revolution for several reasons, but here's a simple one: for a discipline that requires only a chair or patch of floor, it produces outstanding results. New research shows that mindfulness meditation could help the one in five Australians who suffers from chronic pain, not to mention the countless others who live with irritable-bowel syndrome (IBS). These fresh findings are timely, as traditional treatments bring few lasting results.

In a study published in *The American Journal of Gastroenterology*, mindfulness meditation reduced the severity of subjects' IBS symptoms by an impressive 26%. The way it works is simple: "You focus on being in the present, not on your worries," says study leader Susan A Gaylord, PhD, director of the Mindfulness-Based Stress and Pain Management Program at the University of North Carolina in the US.

In another recent US study from Wake Forest School of Medicine, researchers found that meditation had an equally dramatic impact on pain. Compared with morphine and other

pharmaceutical painkillers (which reduce pain by about 25%), mindfulness meditation decreased the intensity of study participants' pain by 40%—and in some people, by up to 70%. "The dramatic results surprised me," says study leader Fadel Zeidan, PhD.

KEY BENEFITS

- IMPROVES FOCUS
- EASES STRESS
- REDUCES PAIN

What It Means for You Focusing on your breath for just five minutes can help boost mental clarity and lower stress levels. To get into the habit, try it first thing in the morning or just before you go to bed. To use mindfulness meditation to ease pain, Zeidan recommends devoting 20 to 30 minutes a day to this peaceful practice. To learn the technique, find a hospital or medical centre that runs classes, or read *5-Minute Mindfulness* (\$19.99; Adams Media) by David B Dillard-Wright, Heidi E Spear and Paula Munier.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

The Mind-Body Champion Dr Craig Hassed



Dr Craig Hassed, senior lecturer in Melbourne's Monash University Department of General Practice, has had his finger on the pulse of mind-body medicine for more than 20 years. "To me, it doesn't make sense that we put so little money, resources and education into health prevention. We spend so much on treating illnesses that we should have put a stop to in the first place," he says. But change is in the air. "Excellent research

now shows that the therapeutic properties of meditation and mindfulness produce profound changes," says Hassed. And this research supports his work of educating the next generation of GPs about mind-body techniques. These skills are now available to everyone. In his new book, *Mindfulness for Life* (\$29.99; Exisle Publishing), Hassed explains how mindfulness can improve our mental health, reduce chronic pain, create lifestyle change and more.