



Just Breathe: The Benefits of Meditation

There is a reason why many people try meditation and few stick with it: Mastering meditation is difficult. It requires you to focus 100 percent of your attention for an extended period of time. Anyone who has tried to focus all of their attention on anything for more than a few minutes knows how challenging it can be, especially today when distractions abound. Of course, meditation can help reduce stress, combat disease, boost creativity, fight depression, and provide other significant benefits, and that makes meditation worth the time and effort.

- **Meditation has spiritual and scientific aspects**

Meditation has played an important role in culture and religion since ancient times. In the 1920s, archeologist Sir John Marshall discovered a carved seal featuring the figure of a person sitting in a pose suggesting meditation. The seal was found during excavations of Mohenjo-daro, the capital city of the Indus Valley civilization, which dates back to 2,500 to 1,700 BCE¹ and is found in present-day Pakistan.

Although approaches to meditation vary from culture to culture, people around the world believe it is an essential cornerstone of spiritual development. It also can play an important role in mental and emotional health. Scientists studying neuroplasticity – the adult brain's ability to change its structure or function in an enduring way – have found mindful meditation, which requires the objective, non-judgmental observation of thoughts and feelings, helps improve emotional resilience by strengthening the left prefrontal cortex. Recent studies released by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Internal Medicine have found meditation may be as effective as antidepressants in reducing anxiety, depression, and pain.

- **Practicing meditation**

There are many different ways to practice meditation. Mindful meditation involves finding a comfortable position and then quietly observing your breath. If you want to try it, it's a good idea to read a book, watch an instructional video, or attend a class. Here are some other tips that may help:

- Practice in a quiet space at the same time each day
- Use counting to focus your efforts (count your breaths up to 5 silently and then start over again) or focus on your intent (to find balance, calm, etc.)
- Be aware when your mind wanders, accept the frustration, and refocus

Pulitzer prize-winning author Alice Walker described her experience with meditation like this: “At one point I learned transcendental meditation. This was 30-something years ago. It took me back to the way that I naturally was as a child growing up way in the country, rarely seeing people. I was in that state of oneness with creation and it was as if I didn't exist except as a part of everything.”

Top Secret Chocolate Mousse

National Public Radio's show, *All Things Considered*, has a special series called 'Found Recipes.' It features dishes that have surprised or delighted cooks, bakers, and food writers. Even better, it offers the recipes for these dishes online! This recipe for Chocolate Mousse is simple and delicious and serves four.

Chocolate Mousse

3½ ounces bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped

3 large eggs, separated, at room temperature

Pinch of salt

1½ teaspoons sugar

Whipped cream or crème fraiche (optional)

Gently melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water or in a microwave oven on medium power. If necessary, transfer the chocolate to a bowl that can hold all the ingredients. Using a whisk, stir the egg yolks into the chocolate one at a time.

In the bowl of a stand mixer that is fitted with a whisk attachment (or in a bowl with a hand mixer), beat the egg whites with the salt until they start to form peaks. While still beating the mixture, gradually add the sugar. Continue to beat until the whites are shiny and hold medium-firm peaks.

Spoon about one-quarter of the whites over the melted chocolate and stir with the whisk until the mixture is almost smooth. (Stirring in a bit of the whites lightens the chocolate and makes the next step

easier.) Spoon the rest of the whites over the chocolate. Using the whisk or a large rubber spatula, very carefully fold in the whites. Be as thorough as you can without overworking the mixture – it's better to have a few white streaks than to beat the bubbles out of the mousse by mixing too much.

Spoon the mousse into a serving bowl or individual bowls and serve it now, or cover and keep it in the refrigerator until you're ready for dessert. (Covered well, the mousse will keep overnight in the refrigerator, although it will get denser as it stands.)

What Do You Know About French Cooking?

France has a long and well-respected culinary tradition. Perhaps the thought of French food brings to mind Le Cordon Bleu cooking school, a favorite French restaurant, or a fabulous patisserie. See what you know about French cuisine by taking this quiz.

1. In America, we call them zucchini. What do the French call them?
 - a. La courgettes
 - b. Le fromage
 - c. Le carotte
 - d. Le céleri

2. At what stage of the meal would you eat a charlotte?
 - a. Appetizer
 - b. Salad
 - c. Main course
 - d. Dessert

3. What is Coquille St. Jacques a fancy name for?
 - a. Chicken
 - b. Scallops
 - c. Beef medallions
 - d. Pork chops

4. What name is given to a ham and cheese sandwich dipped in beaten egg and deep-fried?
 - a. Croque Monsieur
 - b. Alsacienne
 - c. Jambon et fromage
 - d. Des amuse-bouche

College: It's a Game Changer

America is known as the land of opportunity; a place where anyone can pursue the American dream. That dream often includes achieving social equality and accumulating material wealth. So, what is the secret behind the American dream? According to the *Pew Research Center*, higher education is a game changer. Its February 2014 report found:

- **A college education is worth more today than it was in the past.** Millennials (Americans born between 1980 and 1991) who graduated from college earned \$15,500 to \$17,500 more than their less educated peers during 2012. That's a wider earnings gap than previous generations have experienced.
- **College-educated Millennials experience a myriad of benefits.** They have lower unemployment, lower poverty rates, and are less likely to live in their parents' homes than their less-educated peers.
- **College graduates tend to be more satisfied with their jobs.** They are more likely to see themselves as being on a career path.

A separate Pew study found higher education also offers some protection from economic displacement. The number of adults with high school diplomas who described themselves as being in the lower class increased by 9 percentage points from 2008 to 2012. The share of those with some college who said they were lower class rose by 12 percentage points, and the change for those with college degrees was just 2 points.

Quiz Answers:

1. **A** – La courgettes
2. **D** – Dessert
3. **B** – Scallops
4. **A** – Croque Monsieur

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¹ BCE stands for Before Common/Current/Christian Era, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Era

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