

Five times a year, Acem Meditation eNews gives you an update on activities, publications and developments in Acem International School of Meditation. The eNews also brings articles on meditation for Acem meditators and others with an interest in meditation.

Content in this issue: Meditation reduces rumination | - I communicate better with patients and families | New discoveries about myself

Meditation reduces rumination

by Øyvind Ellingsen

Studies indicate that meditation increases activity in areas of the brain that regulate attention and emotions. Forty years of research have shown that the result is thorough relaxation and the reduction of stress ailments. According to more recent studies, the long-term effects are improved concentration, greater self-awareness and an increased ability to master psychological challenges. The explanation may be that people who meditate become more adept at handling disturbing thoughts.

The gold standard of meditation research

In 2007 a 472-page report on meditation research and health was published,(1) commissioned and paid for by the (American) National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a public institution that evaluates new forms of treatment to improve healthcare in the United States. This research report is a gold mine. It contains comprehensive, independent and reliable information on common methods of meditation and how they work. An independent group of experts spent two years evaluating medical and psychological meditation research findings, including seven articles on Acem Meditation by Dr. Erik E. Solberg. The eleven experts were established specialists with no financial or other attachments to meditation organisations. As might be expected,



they reached a cautious conclusion regarding the efficacy of meditation as a form of medical treatment, stating that some methods can lower blood pressure and reduce stress ailments.

Awareness and negative thoughts

A more recent and less comprehensive overview article attempts to explain how meditation affects the brain on the basis of hundreds of scientific

studies conducted in the last 10-15 years.(2) It is not as scientifically rigorous as the 2007 report but it provides an interesting picture of the results to date.

Meditation often produces a positive experience of relaxation and peace of mind. Several meditation techniques differ from ordinary relaxation in that the electric brain waves slow down. This means more alpha-waves, which indicates less tension, and more theta-waves in the frontal part of the brain, which may be due to the attention towards the object of meditation and perhaps also to the working through of emotions.

Studies of the brain using neuroimaging provide a detailed picture of the areas that are active during meditation. Several meditation techniques seem to increase awareness, stimulate the working through of emotions and regulate physical stress reactions. Some of the literature points out that there is more activity in the brain's left hemisphere during meditation, as well as an increase in signal substances or receptors associated with wellbeing. These results are linked to a more positive self-image. Other studies emphasise the reduction of common psychological stress symptoms, especially the tendency to ruminate over negative thoughts and poor self-images. The 2009 article identifies promising results in preliminary studies of the effect of meditation on certain psychological ailments.

Different methods – common understanding

The main conclusion in the report from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is that more and better research is needed to clarify the place of meditation in the health service. In particular, good descriptions are needed of the various meditation techniques and the processes they activate.

The report itself probably provides the first systematic overview of the best-known methods, covering the main elements of the meditation technique; the meditation object; the focusing of awareness; the regulation of breathing; the ideas associated with the method; teaching; and criteria for correct practice. Similarities and differences between various meditation techniques are also

described in the book Fighting stress (3).

The working group also attempted to clarify the definition of meditation and distinguish it more accurately from pure relaxation techniques. After four comprehensive rounds of discussion, the experts were divided about the importance of ridding the mind of spontaneous thoughts – a question that differentiates meditation techniques involving a free mental attitude from those involving concentration.

References

1. Ospina MB et al. 2007. Meditation practices for health: state of the research. AHQR Publication No. 07-E010. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare and Quality.
2. Rubia K 2009. The neurobiology of meditation and its clinical effectiveness in psychiatric disorders. *Biol Psychol* 82: 1-11.
3. Fighting Stress. Reviews of meditation research. Eds. Davanger S, Eifring H, Hersoug AG. Acem Publishing, Oslo 2008.

Acem on YouTube



The following new videos are now available on YouTube:

Why meditate?

with Acem's founder Dr. Are Holen

The goal of Acem Meditation

with Dr. Are Holen

Retreats Around the World

Search for Acem Meditation at www.youtube.com

Jacqueline Robert, Alicante, Spain:

- I communicate better with patients and families



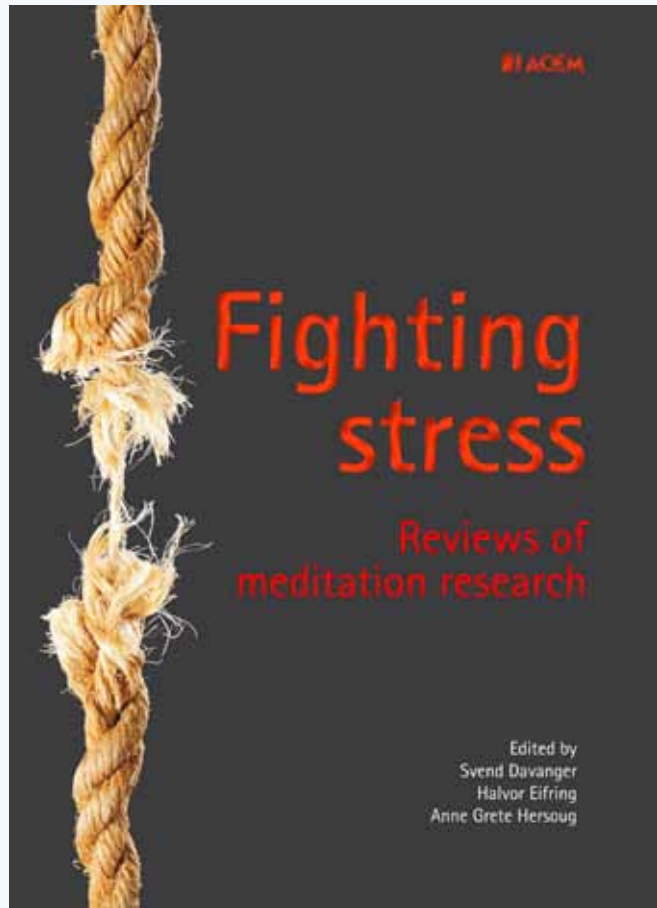
What does a middle-aged female doctor do when she is unhappy with her life? Jacqueline Robert from Alicante, Spain decided to learn Acem Meditation. In the six years since then, the method has changed her life in unexpected ways.

“It has been a long process,” says Jacqueline. “When I started meditating in 2003, I was quite unhappy with myself, but didn’t know how to change. I googled ‘meditación Alicante’, found Acem, and liked what I saw. Down to earth and with no religious strings attached. To begin with, I didn’t practise every day – I was too preoccupied with the problems in my life. But as I began to discover the long-term benefits of the method, I started meditating regularly.”

Retreat experience

In 2007 Jacqueline went to her first Acem retreat in Norway, largely out of curiosity. How would it feel to devote an entire week to meditation? She also wanted to see the Norwegian countryside, which is quite different from the arid landscapes near her home in Spain. The retreat was a new experience, unlike anything she had ever known.

“It went deeper than I had expected. Since then I have been back every year, for regular retreats, deepening retreats and a communication course. Some of the best things in my current life are, directly or indirectly, effects of meditation.”



Fighting Stress – Reviews of meditation research

Edited by Svend Davanger, Halvor Eifring & Anne Grete Hersoug

A must read for everyone who wants an update on what science knows about meditation today.

In modern society, meditation and yoga are among the most widely used remedies for stress. In this book, researchers and healthcare professionals with personal experience of Acem Meditation present reviews of current meditation research. Some of the articles focus explicitly on Acem Meditation, while others have a broad, general scope. The book provides accessible information on what scientific studies can tell us about the effects of meditating. 192 pages

Order from www.acem.com

Good for work

In the last 2-3 years, meditation has had a positive influence on Jacqueline's work.

"I don't get so stressed when decisions about diagnoses and treatments are difficult. By trusting my intuition, I often find it easier to determine what is the problem. I have become more interested in the patient as a person, not only his or her disease. I even get along better with my boss!"

She also finds she communicates better with patients and families, especially in situations where she has to tell them bad news - apparently something even doctors never quite get used to.

Simple, but powerful

"Acem Meditation is a simple method, but a very powerful one. It is not always easy, but always interesting. New personal issues emerge from time to time, and although I eventually have to face them on my own, this is much easier in a setting where others are having the same experience."

Jacqueline really values and appreciates the people she has met through Acem.

"I am very grateful for the guidance I have received, and I also enjoy talking to fellow meditators. I feel I am being treated with respect and interest. Some of these people know more about me than my family."

Retreats for Acem meditators

See www.acem.com for upcoming retreats

Svein Strømberg at the Acem communication course:

New discoveries about myself



“The insights from this course are directly applicable to social situations at home and at work.” Svein Strømberg grew up in Norway, but has spent the past 16 years with his wife and two girls in Switzerland, where he works in sales of industrial raw materials. This year he participated in the Acem International Training Course in Interpersonal Communication.

“I had read about the communication course before I came here, so I thought I knew what to expect. But the open structure of the group sessions took me by surprise. I had imagined there would be a fixed agenda for the group activities. Instead, it was left to us, the participants, to find a way to start communicating. It was fascinating, but also slightly unsettling. In the beginning there was quite a lot of silence. But gradually we found ways of relating to each other. And in the process, with only a little help from the leaders and the other participants, I made quite a few new discoveries about myself. I began to identify patterns that I had only vaguely perceived before, such as my tendency – and even need – to adapt to external structures.”

Svein decided to attend the communication course on the strength of recommendations from previous participants. He was curious.

“The course was extremely intense. In the group sessions, I could always rely on good support from the leaders whenever I approached difficult topics. The evening lectures were of a very high standard and helped us understand the processes we were going through. I learnt a lot about myself, and the course has also helped me to understand other people better. My communication with family and colleagues has become more meaningful. Insights from the communication course are useful in many social settings.”

Svein found the course location an extra bonus. “The Halvorsbøle retreat centre has some stunning scenery. It reminds me of my childhood. You can hear the wind blowing through the pine trees, and you can see the beautiful lake and the hills on the other side. It is a high-quality centre with great facilities and wonderful food.”