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New study shows Transcendental Meditation reduces emotional stress and improves academics

CENTER FOR WELLNESS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Research News

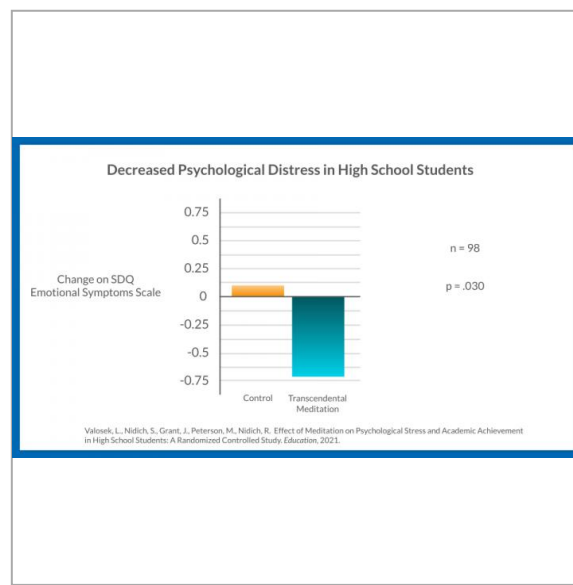


IMAGE: DURING A FOUR-MONTH PERIOD, STUDENTS PRACTICING THE TM TECHNIQUE EXPERIENCED SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN MEASURES OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH AS COMPARED TO STUDENTS WHO ENGAGED IN SUSTAINED SILENT READING. [view more >](#)

CREDIT: CWAE

Students who participated in a meditation-based Quiet Time program utilizing the Transcendental Meditation (TM) technique for four months had significant improvements in overall emotional stress symptoms, quality of sleep, and English Language Arts (ELA) academic achievement according to a new randomized controlled trial published last month in *Education*. The study was conducted by researchers from the Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education and Stanford University. This was the first randomized control trial to investigate the effects of TM on standardized academic tests.

"Students have been experiencing increased levels of stress and it's impacting their academic performance," said Laurent Valosek, lead author of the study and Executive Director of the Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education. "This research shows the impact of meditation on the mental and physical health of high school students, and shows that meditation plays a vital role in promoting improved academic outcomes, even when compared to more time spent reading."

Student emotional well-being and its impact on academic outcomes

According to the American Psychological Association, teens report stress well above what they believe to be healthy. 31% of teens report feeling overwhelmed and 36% report feeling fatigued as a result of stress. Over a third of teens report that their stress level has increased in the past year, while around half of teens don't feel they are doing enough to manage their stress.

This increased stress is linked to poor academics, as well as a number of other measures including lower attendance, and unhealthy behaviors around sleep, eating, and substance use. Stress also increases negative affect, resulting in strained relationships with classmates and teachers, as well as rule infractions and suspensions.

Transcendental Meditation improves emotional balance and academic performance

A new randomized control study published in *Education* involved 98 ninth grade students at a West Coast public high school. The study found that during a four-month period, the students practicing the TM technique experienced significant improvements in measures of health and academics as compared to students who engaged in sustained silent reading.

These findings are consistent with past research on TM showing benefits related to emotional health and intelligence. This was the first randomized control trial to investigate the effects of a meditation-based school program on standardized tests.

"As a former high school administrator, I have seen first-hand the effects of stress, anxiety, and fatigue on students' mental and physical well-being. High levels of psychological distress not only lead to lower academic performance, but cause serious consequences for the whole child," said Margaret Peterson, co-author of the study and Executive Director of the California World Language Project at Stanford Graduate School of Education. "In my 30 years as an educator, Transcendental Meditation has been the single, most effective tool I have seen to help reduce stress and improve performance in students."

Within students who were below proficiency at baseline, 69% of the meditation students improved at least one performance level at posttest compared to 33% of the control students. This is particularly noteworthy because the control group was doing sustained silent reading, suggesting that introducing meditation to the school day may be more effective in improving academic outcomes than additional time spent reading.

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Valosek, L., Nidich, S., Grant, J., Peterson, M., Nidich, R. Effect of Meditation on Psychological Stress and Academic Achievement in High School Students: A Randomized Controlled Study. *Education*, Volume 141, Number 4, 15 June 2021, pp. 192-200(9).

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About the Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education

The Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education (CWAE) is a San Francisco Bay Area-based non-profit organization. CWAE's mission is to optimize educational performance, reduce violence, stress, and substance abuse, and improve the psychological wellness of students, faculty, and administrators by strengthening the underlying neurophysiology of perception, learning and behavior. CWAE has served more than 15,000 youth, teachers and administrators in the San Francisco Bay Area. Among the youth served, 98% are students of color and 62% live in low-income homes.

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