



MEDITATION GOES MAINSTREAM



In an often-chaotic world, more people are finding a calm center through this contemplative practice.

Simone Billings of Cleveland had meditated before. But it had been a while, so she went to a meditation studio called Selfspace, which opened last year. “It was nice to have a refresher,” says Billings, 28, who works for a non-profit organization. “It was a really peaceful experience.”

Like Billings, an increasing number

of people are turning to meditation, which involves focusing the mind, to reduce stress and increase well-being. According to a federal government survey, the number of US practitioners rose from 4% in 2012 to 14% in 2017.

What’s more, that rise has spurred the development of an industry. SAGE Business Researcher reports that med-

itation generated \$1.2 billion in 2017 from not only walk-in studios such as Selfspace but also residential centers, media such as CDs and magazines, and digital resources, including websites and, increasingly, apps (see page 22).

One source of meditation’s popularity has been research linking it to a number of potential benefits, although

MEDITATION GOES MAINSTREAM

“the research is still in its infancy,” says Christy Cassisa of the Center for Mindfulness at the University of California, San Diego. However, she adds, “We have quite a lot of exciting results, and a lot of the neuroscience studies are showing structural changes in the brain.” For example, Cassisa notes, shrinkage of the *amygdala*—a part of the brain that can trigger emotional overreactions to stress—has been seen after eight weeks of meditation.

This helps explain why the American Heart Association states that “studies of meditation suggest a possible benefit on cardiovascular risk,” noting that because of its low cost and risk of side effects, the practice “may be considered” as part of a program focused on

cardiovascular risk reduction. Other studies have linked meditation to possible reductions in chronic pain and inflammation, among other conditions.

One of the most popular reasons for

starting a meditation practice is help in maintaining emotional balance.

“The biggest thing I hear is people wanting to cope with depression and anxiety, people wanting to get off of



Meditation Helps First Responders Manage Trauma

In 2002, Eric Provow’s joint service team unit was pinned down in a fire-fight in Afghanistan. He didn’t think he’d make it out alive.

The event triggered years of nightmares, flashbacks, mood swings and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. In 2017, the retired Air Force technical sergeant from Fairfax, Virginia, considered taking his own life.

Therapy and meditation saved him, says Provow, 48. “Once I learned how to meditate, I could get my brain to stop racing. In two 20-minute sessions a day, I get a rest; it’s like I hit the reset button.”

Provow, who now works as a firefighter paramedic, learned Transcendental Meditation (page 24) through the Warrior PATHH program at Boulder Crest Retreat in Virginia. It is one of

several programs nationwide designed to teach veterans and first responders how to meditate.

Meditation, according to research, can lower cortisol levels in the body and ease the stress response. This allows first responders to become more deliberate and responsive, rather than reactive and stressed.

“The body of a combat veteran or first responder is always ready to react because of how we are trained and the constant exposure to traumatic incidents and

conflict,” says Dusty Baxley, a combat veteran, executive director at Boulder Crest and a certified Transcendental Meditation teacher.

“Meditation creates space, lets a little air out of the tire to rebalance the nervous system and

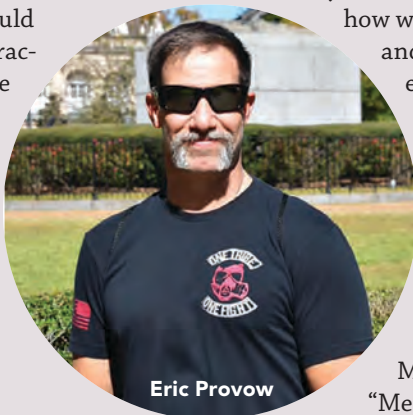
help people self-regulate.” This, he says, results in better sleep and emotion management, and in improved relationships.

Multiple studies, including one in



the journal *Psychiatry Research*, show that mindfulness meditation—the practice of giving attention to the present moment by observing your breath, body and thoughts—can also help emergency personnel better manage anger and aggression, and cultivate resilience.

“With first responders, a transformation occurs,” says meditation



Eric Provow

antidepressants,” says Amy Kraus of the Dallas Meditation Center. “People want to feel like they have control over their minds.”

Cassisa agrees. “We find people coming to our classes looking for help with family stress or work stress or technology stress,” she says.

“Meditation has become an extension of a movement toward self-care,” adds Khajak Keledjian, founder of a New York City meditation studio (see page 24). “It is a facet of modern wellness and a tool toward living a contemporary, balanced life.”

One aspect of the increased interest in meditation is a growing number of studios dedicated to the practice. Lindsay Stefans, the owner of Self-space, says that one reason newcomers are drawn to her studio is that “they spend so much time on their phones

and devices that they need another way of being. The focus of my studio is being with other meditators. A different type of community—people crave that.”

That has been Kraus’s experience as well. “You hear a lot of the time that it’s hard to do it on your own. It’s just a lot more inviting to have people with you,” she says. “Every week there’s at least five or 10 new people walking in here.”

Kraus adds that she has also fielded institutional calls: “The juvenile justice center called us to help the boys in this detention center. We’ve had people from places that take care of people with mental illness.” She notes that once meditation was simply about individuals wanting to establish personal practices, but “now it’s what we can do in our community to get people involved.”

The more scientists study meditation, the more there is to know. “The rigorous studies—we definitely need randomized, controlled studies,” Cassisa says. However, the need for more knowledge shouldn’t stop anyone from beginning a meditation practice now. As Cassisa puts it, “Any meditation is better than none. Even five minutes a day can help people feel calmer.”

This helps explain why Billings has made meditation a regular part of her life. “It helps me to set my intention for the day,” she says.

That attention to practice has paid off. Billings sees herself as now “having more compassion for other people, basically meeting people where they are. Being aware that if on your commute to work something nasty happens, saying to yourself, ‘That isn’t me, that is the other person,’ instead

of putting too much of my own emotion into it.” She adds that meditation “helps me understand that emotions are not permanent, they’re fleeting and ever-changing.”

“The more people who are meditating, the better,” says Kraus. “We can see that every moment is an opportunity to be joyful. You don’t have to be consumed by stress.” —LISA JAMES

Meditation On the Job

As meditation gains popularity in the US, some employers—including Google, Nike and HBO—are now setting up on-site meditation programs to help employees reduce stress and stay focused. “In certain workplaces [meditation has] been around for a while but I’ve only been seeing it in the main-



stream since about 2012,” says Stuart Sidle, an industrial organizational psychology professor from the University of New Haven in Connecticut. In one 2017 survey, 35% of the responding firms had employed mindfulness training in the workplace.

Sidle believes this recent increase in popularity is due in part to greater exposure to mindfulness techniques online, as well as people seeking the benefits of sleep or anti-anxiety medication but without the side effects. “These are stressful times,” he says, adding that many people want strategies to help them feel more balanced.

Of course, meditation instruction

teacher Brant Rogers, owner of the Stress Reduction Clinic at Yoga Hillsboro in Hillsboro, Oregon. “They become more present and responsive and more skillful in their interactions. Less sharp-edged.”

With meditation, Provow also learned to release the reoccurring thoughts that contributed to his PTSD.

“I used to be on a hamster wheel with my thoughts,” Provow explains. “My brain never got a break. With meditation, I learned I don’t have to replay those thoughts over and over. Now, I’m able to give my mind a break and just relax.”

—POLLY CAMPBELL



MEDITATION GOES MAINSTREAM

or space doesn't just benefit employees; it can pay dividends to employers, too. "A healthy workplace helps the bottom line because of the problems too much stress creates," Sidle says. High stress can result in lost productivity, reduced morale, unnecessary healthcare costs and high turnover—none of which any employer wants.

While some companies provide on-site instruction in meditation techniques, other workplaces provide dedicated space for employees to use for solo meditation or reflection as needed. Marketing software company HubSpot has dimly lit meditation rooms at nearly all of its offices. The

idea came from Samantha Masabny, a customer growth specialist at HubSpot's Cambridge, Massachusetts headquarters.

When Masabny tried out medita-



tion for ten days on vacation, she felt more relaxed. But once she returned to work, she found it tricky to carve out time in her hectic schedule, even

when she booked a conference room for a short meditation. Wanting space to incorporate the practice into her regular routine, Masabny worked with HubSpot's director of facilities to create that space in 2017.

"The idea of bringing a meditation culture room to HubSpot was born out of a need to have a dedicated space to take time during the day to pause," she says. Masabny adds that her goal is "to give myself and my fellow HubSpotters a space to give our overflowing minds a short, valuable break. To offer a bookable, private room where we can relax our brains and offer our bodies a rest—and a chance to recharge

so we're more present and whole for our families, our coworkers, our customers and ourselves."

—SUSAN JOHNSTON TAYLOR

TIPS FOR NEW MEDITATORS

While many people have taken up meditation, many others are intimidated by the idea.

"It's outside of their comfort zone," says meditation teacher and author Susan Shumsky. What's more, she says, some think it would take too much time, while others think it's a skill they can't learn.

People who believe they can't meditate are wrong, says Shumsky. She calls meditation "a very simple way to get comfortable, to become more quiet, more relaxed, more connected, more at ease. If you can follow very simple instructions, then you can meditate."

Shumsky's suggestions include:

Don't allow yourself to be interrupted. "Turn off your phone and put a 'do not

disturb' sign on the door."

Sit comfortably—you don't have to be cross-legged on a cushion. However, don't lie down, which could result in sleepiness. And don't worry about staying absolutely still; scratch itches, etc.

Start by closing your eyes and taking a few deep breaths.

State what you'd like to get from a meditation session, such as "inner peace, healing, creative ideas." Then, "take another deep breath, and do nothing, nothing and less than nothing. Keep a neutral attitude, but be open to receive."

Don't try to consciously "stop thinking thoughts. It's impossible to control your mind in that way. Thoughts are continually going through your mind."

When you're finished, "Say an affirmation such as, 'I am alert, I am awake.'"



MEDITATION GOES MAINSTREAM

Easing Student Anxiety Through Meditation

More and more schools across the country have introduced meditation to the classroom. Elementary and high schools nationwide employ meditation to address stress among their students, and to increase productivity and creativity. And although all students can benefit from it, consistent practice has been found to be particularly helpful for those dealing with anxiety or trauma issues.

What's more, an ever-increasing number of schools are replacing their



established detention programs with meditation, which allows students to silence themselves, check in with their emotional status and self-regulate their behavior. While research is ongoing, studies have linked meditation practice with fewer suspension days as well as fewer class absences and improvements in testing for attention skills.

No one organization, private or public, oversees school meditation programs, so numbers are hard to come by. But a dozen or so private groups have developed such programs, including those headed by director David Lynch, with his foundation's Quiet Time program, and actress Goldie Hawn, with her MindUP program. As Hawn says on the group's website, "I created MindUP because I was compelled to help all children learn the tools and knowledge they need to thrive, live compassionately and be happy."

—SAMANTHA HUNTER

There's an App for That

Jenny Nybro Peterson, 55, first tried meditation more than 15 years ago to help her get a handle on anxiety and panic attacks. But the practice didn't really stick until she was diagnosed with breast cancer, when, as she puts it, "I got more serious about my overall wellness—mind, body and spirit."

Meditation has helped the Austin resident. "I don't have panic attacks anymore. On occasions when I do have some anxiety, it's helped me recognize that it's just an anxious thought and to let it go," Peterson says. It also helps her be more present in her daily life.

And while many people struggle with maintaining a regular practice, Peterson recently ended a meditation streak of over 600 consecutive days. Her secret? An app.

As scientific research quantifying meditation's benefits has grown, coupled with today's always-on work culture, people are looking for more effective ways to chill out—and more than 1,000 smartphone apps have been developed in response. The largest of

them, Headspace, raised \$36.7 million in funding in 2017, according to a SAGE Business Researcher report.

These apps have helped meditation become more accessible. Now, you don't have to attend a retreat or a class to learn to meditate; you can just turn on your phone, whenever and wherever you want. Apps guide you through a meditation practice, ranging from three minutes to 30 minutes or more. After learning the basics, you can move on to practices designed to help with productivity, anxiety, grief, relationships and even political stress. Following a free trial, most apps require a subscription.

—CHRISTINE YU

Curious? Try one of these meditation apps:

Headspace (headspace.com)

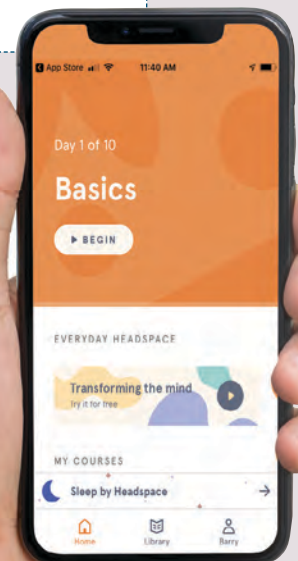
This is the app that helped Peterson stick with meditation. After you've mastered Headspace's basics course (free), which teaches the fundamentals, try the app's themed sessions on subjects that include focus, sleep and anxiety. Monthly subscriptions start at \$12.99.

Calm (calm.com)

Named App of the Year by Apple in 2017, Calm offers 100-plus guided meditations, ranging from three to 25 minutes. There are also breathing exercises, sleep stories, master classes and relaxing music, as well as new 10-minute programs added daily. Monthly subscriptions start at \$12.99.

10% Happier (10perthappier.com)

This app offers a no-nonsense approach to get you started and help you stick with meditation, even if you're a skeptic. There are quick meditations to squeeze in during your commute, and guided meditations to help you cope with stress, anxiety and sleep. Plus, there's new content weekly. Subscriptions start at \$9.99 a month.



MEDITATION GOES MAINSTREAM

Finding Stillness In NYC

The space is womblike, its openwork wooden ceiling, covered with white tenting, branching out from a central oval that looks like a placid, blank eye. Sitting within, you feel as if your cares have shifted onto the back burner without your entirely being aware of it.

A retreat in the woods? By the ocean? On a mountain?

Try Manhattan's Flatiron District. New York may be "the city that never sleeps," but an increasing number of its residents are using meditation to help smooth the rougher edges of urban life.

"Quiet time is so scarce, especially in cities, where overstimulation is the norm," says Khajak Keledjian, who started INSCAPE, the company that operates the Flatiron meditation space, called the Dome, and a similar space at the same site, called the Alcove. "I created INSCAPE to help

people live life to the fullest and better connect with themselves."

Meditation "gives people a greater

from 2017 to 2018, and our studio guests and membership continues to grow regularly." The clientele is diverse; as Keledjian says, "The fashion and creative crowd, psychologists, CEOs, finance professionals, teachers, entrepreneurs, stay-at-home parents."

Gluck states that MNDFL, which operates a video channel and offers meditation teacher training, also provides about 160 businesses in the New York area

with meditation sessions. "We've seen the corporate program grow about 200% in the last year," she says.

Gluck adds, "What we learn on the cushion we take into life, which is inherently uncomfortable." —LISA JAMES



PHOTO BY INSCAPE

ability to not become emotionally hijacked by everything from a nasty e-mail to being body-checked on the subway," says Ellie Burrows Gluck, CEO of MNDFL, which operates two studios in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn. The studio provides a retreat from noise within and without; Gluck notes that clients often say, "I don't feel like I'm in New York City."

Both studios say business is on the rise. According to Keledjian, use of the INSCAPE app "has increased 2.5 times

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TYPES OF MEDITATION

Many different styles of meditation are available. Here are four of the most popular:

Guided Meditation

Uses a narrated visualization (often combined with music) to help the meditator reach deep states of relaxation. Delivered either in person or through media such as CDs or downloads.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Developed by pioneering meditation researcher Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, it involves bringing one's attention

to the present moment. MBSR has been used in numerous studies on



meditation's health benefits.

Transcendental Meditation

This trademarked technique involves repeating a mantra twice a day, 20 minutes at a time. It is taught by authorized instructors.

Walking Meditation

This more active form involves slowly walking with your intention centered on the experience, such as how the soles of your feet feel, as you move. Apps may make it easier to concentrate; you can also walk a labyrinth, a patterned path specifically designed for the purpose.