



MEDITATION: BREATHE EASY & RELAX

LOGISTICS

- **Big Idea:** *Lifestyle Choices to Reduce Stress*
- **Type of Activity:** *Meditation and Relaxation*
- **Length of Activity:** *10-30 minutes*
- **Group Size:** *any size*
- **Space Needed:**
An ideal space for this activity is a quiet room where one person can easily be heard, and all the participants can sit or lie in a comfortable position. If you need to do this in a large auditorium, make sure to have a microphone.
- **Special Space Considerations:**
If you are in a classroom or gymnasium setting with hard floors and chairs, bring carpet squares, gym mats or cushions. If you can, ask participants to bring their own.
- **Grades:** *Middle school – adult*

PREPARATION:

Set-Up

- Print enough copies of the meditation activity for each person to take home afterwards. There are two available in the Printing Resources section of this activity. Before you do this with participants, try it by yourself. This will help determine how long you need to spend on each part of the activity.
- If you are doing “Mindful Eating,” purchase a bag of raisins or other food item.

Core Concepts:

This activity is helpful for people who want to reduce the amount of stress in their lives. Meditation is one way to calm ourselves and gain mental clarity.

Safety Note:

Some students may feel uncomfortable closing their eyes in a group of students. If so, they can look in their laps, face a wall, stare out a window, etc.



Special Supplies:

Item Description	Quantity	Approx. cost per unit	Notes
None			

Easy To Obtain Supplies:

Item Description	Quantity	Approx. cost per unit	Notes
Raisin	2 per person	\$3 per bag of raisins	See "Printing Resources" for "Mindful Eating" description. This will describe the purpose and variation of using the raisin.

PERFORMING THE ACTIVITY

Activity Outline:

Engage (*Question 2 can be printed from the Printing Resources section.*)

1. What kinds of stressful things happen in your lives?
2. What do you do to manage your stress?

Question

Have you heard of meditation? What images do you see in your mind when I say the word "meditation"?

Explore

1. Encourage participants to find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. Read one of the meditation exercises from "Printing Resources."

Evaluate

1. How did that make you feel?
2. Do you notice anything now that you did not notice before? (how deep you breathe, how relaxed your muscles feel)

Notes

Not everyone will feel relaxed after this activity. Meditation takes practice, and is not for everyone. However, it's a great way to talk with people about activities they do to relax.

Adaptations

For physical activity groups: Make sure that there are no other activities happening in the gym while you are doing this activity.

Learning Links

If they enjoy this activity, they may be interested in healing or counseling professions.



BACKGROUND

Scientists have performed studies on humans, determining how much meditation affects empathy, distress, depression, anxiety, melatonin levels, etc. The studies reveal that it helps alleviate the stresses in life, and increase levels of melatonin. (Melatonin is the hormone that increases during our sleep cycles.) At this point, there have been no studies on the effects of meditation on children's stress levels or overall health, but empirical evidence and stories show that some young people will benefit from a daily practice of meditation.

Stress

Young people, especially teens, experience stress. It can be caused by changes (a different school, moving to a new town, family member having surgery, puberty), being over-scheduled (too much homework, too many activities), unrealistically high expectations from elders (grade performance, having a lot of friends), feelings of loss (death, divorce), poor self esteem, financial problems at home, etc.

Parents can encourage their children to eat well, exercise, get plenty of sleep, set realistic expectations, schedule more free time, and spend quality time together discussing solutions to problems.

Meditation

"Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment. We feel more alive. We also gain immediate access to our own powerful inner resources for insight, transformation, and healing."

– Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1998

Meditation is one means of coping with stress. The two types of meditation covered in this activity are *Mindfulness Meditation* and *Mindful Eating*.

Mindfulness Meditation is a practice of focusing on the physical sensation of each breath, observing the way the body moves as a result of breathing. Through *Mindfulness Meditation*, we are encouraged to, without judgment, curiously explore how our body feels in the present moment. Because we tend to move away from negative feelings, we often remove our focus from painful experiences. *Mindfulness Meditation* encourages us to acknowledge these feelings as temporary. It is natural for our mind to wander from our breath. With an ongoing practice of *Mindfulness Meditation*, we can become better at maintaining our focus on the present moment. *Mindful Eating* is a type of *Mindfulness Meditation*. It encourages us to focus on a piece of food that we are eating: its smell, taste, texture, appearance. Instead of focusing on our breath, we are focusing on a daily experience that we often ignore.



Misconceptions

Many people, when they hear the word “meditation,” they imagine a Buddhist monk sitting cross-legged and saying “OM” over and over again. This activity can help expand the definition and meaning of meditation. Meditation can take many forms, but ultimately increases our present moment awareness, and often relaxes us.

Find Out More

Teens and Stress by Vincent Iannelli, M.D.,

http://pediatrics.about.com/od/mentalhealth/a/0107_stress.htm

Mindfulness Meditation in Pediatric Clinical Practice

by Mary Jane Ott, Susan Longobucco-Hynes, Victoria Amanda Hynes

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FSZ/is_5_28/ai_n18614346

National Standards

This activity is not intended to align with the national standards in science. Its purpose is to help students deal with the stresses we experience in our daily lives.



PRINTING RESOURCES

Mindful Meditation

- Pick a warm spot where you will not be disturbed. Lie on your back on a bed, carpet, blanket on the lawn, or a warm sandy beach.
- Rest your arms near your sides; legs relaxed and slightly apart. Close your eyes. You may want to cover yourself with a light blanket in case you cool down while relaxing.
- Imagine sinking lower and lower into the surface. Enjoy the relaxed feeling in your body that is lying so quietly; begin to feel comfortable all over.
- Breathe in and out easily and evenly. To help focus, you could try counting your breath, i.e. breathe in 1 count; breathe out 1 count; breathe in 2 count; and continue...
- While lying still, begin to listen to the sound of your breathing. This calms and rests your body and mind.
- Pay attention to how your body moves with each breath. Think about how each body part feels (feet, legs, back, arms).
- When your body is relaxed and your mind is calm it is easier to work out any problems you may be having at home, school, or with friends.
- After some time, begin to come back to your everyday self by taking a deep breath, opening your eyes, stretching out your arms and legs.
- Keep this relaxation meditation as a handy tool for whenever you have a few minutes to yourself and need a break, or just some rest.
- Practiced at bedtime, relaxation meditation closes the day in a positive way.

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***Mindful Eating**

- You are each going to get two raisins**. I'd like you to eat one and set the other one in front of you.
- For the next part, we're going to use our imagination. Take a deep breath in; now exhale all your air.
- Take the other raisin in your hand and look at it carefully. Pretend it is an object you have never seen before. Without speaking, think about how it looks and feels. Notice its color, its size, its shape, how it feels in your hands and between your fingers.
- Still, without speaking, compare one end to the other, see if it makes any sound, and imagine it growing and gathering energy from the sun above it and from the dirt below it.
- Now, keeping it in your hand, think about what it will be like to eat it. Notice any changes in your mouth or your body when you think about eating it.
- Next, bring it just to your lips. Notice how you feel thinking about eating it.
- Now place it in your mouth. Slowly chewing it, carefully notice how it tastes and feels inside your mouth.
- Now swallow it, noticing how it feels in your throat and stomach.

Follow up Questions:

"How could the raisin be described to someone who's never seen one before?"

"How was eating the second raisin different from eating the first?"

*This exercise is closely modeled after a mindful eating exercise described by Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD in Full Catastrophe Living (1990, pp. 27–29). Kabat-Zinn (1990) states that this is a good mindfulness exercise to use when introducing meditation to those who have no previous experience. Even those who do not like raisins have responded favorably to this exercise (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Acceptance of this exercise by children has been reported by Ott (2002).

**Raisins may be substituted for grapes or any dried fruit likely to have a wide appeal with children and with a low potential for allergies.



The project described was supported by Grant Number 5R25RR018633-05 from the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR), a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of NCRR or NIH.

Department of Health and Human Services • National Institutes of Health
Supported by a Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA) from the National Center for Research Resources

**WHAT DO YOU DO
TO MANAGE YOUR
STRESS?**

