Meditation May Benefit the Immune System

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People with HIV who completed an intensive eight-week course in meditation lost fewer CD4 cells than people who took only a one-day course, according to a study conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

Meditation encourages people to focus their minds and attention on their bodies, their breathing and their immediate environment in the present moment and to avoid thinking about the past or the future. The practice has been proposed as a useful intervention for people with many life-threatening illnesses, including heart disease and cancer.

David Creswell, PhD, and his colleagues at the Cousins Center for Psychoneurimmunology at UCLA enrolled 48 HIV-positive adults in a study that compared an eight-week intensive course in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) with a one-day MBSR workshop. Creswell's team checked CD4 counts before the class and two months later, just after it ended. The researchers found that people who completed the eight-week course had no decreases in CD4 count, whereas people who completed the one-day workshop did.

The authors did not specify whether the difference in CD4 counts was statistically significant. If the difference was not statistically significant, then it's possible it could have occurred by chance. Creswell's team is conducting further research using brain imaging, genetics and other immune system markers to explore the possible benefits of meditation.

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