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Transcendental Meditation: A Treatment For Anxiety

Study verifies effectiveness in treating anxiety disorders.

by Dr. Dale Archer

Transcendental Meditation, or TM, is one of the most popular meditation programs to date and is known to be effective for stress relief and relaxation. It was founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi back in 1958.

We all get nervous and anxious—that's a part of life. But approximately 40 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder as defined by the DSM. Even though, as I discuss in my book, "Better Than Normal: How What Makes You Different Can Make You Exceptional," I think this number is grossly exaggerated, that still leaves a lot of people with the diagnosis of generalized anxiety.

Symptoms include not only the classic "excessive and intense worry or anxiety over events and/or situations" but also physical symptoms such as restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, body aches, trembling, insomnia, sweating, nausea, diarrhea, shortness of breath and rapid heartbeat.

Treatment typically involves pharmacotherapy and/or various types of psychotherapy. I consider the combination of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and medication as the gold standard for treating severe anxiety disorders though most cases fall in the mild to moderate range. However, for those with the worst anxiety there is some recent good news with respect to treatment.

According to a report published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, a meta-analysis of TM analyzed 16 trials and 1,295 participants. The conclusion was that TM worked better in reducing severe anxiety than psychotherapy or other relaxation techniques. Medication was not addressed.

Participants with anxiety levels in the 80th to 100th percentile range who practiced transcendental meditation were able to reduce anxiety to the 53rd–62nd percentile range—approaching a 50% reduction in symptoms.

More importantly, though a decrease in anxiety began within the first two weeks, the results were sustained out to three years. This opens up a fascinating field of study as to the mechanism of action and why it is sustained. As a bonus, TM also produced lower blood pressure, better sleep, improved family life, less substance abuse and a better employment situation.

Dale Archer, M.D., is a clinical psychiatrist and author of *The New York Times* bestseller, *Better Than Normal: How What Makes You Different Can Make You Exceptional*.