

CONTEMPLATIVE RESOURCES FOR HOPE, HEALING, AND REHABILITATION AFTER BRAIN INJURY AND STROKE

Free Prayer, Meditation, and Yoga Groups Online to Benefit Your Brain and Your Heart – Non-Brain-Injury-Focused Unless Otherwise Indicated

Consider checking with your church, synagogue, or temple, if you have one, to see if they have any online offerings during the pandemic. Here are online practices we've found that represent varying traditions.

Centering New Mexico

A spiritual network serving New Mexico through the teaching and practice of Christian Centering Prayer.

Website: <https://www.centeringnm.com/>

Contemplative Outreach

Online Meditation Chapel

A global, ecumenical, interfaith community.

Website: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/online-meditation-chapel/>

Gethsemane Ministries

A lay Catholic movement offering live streaming prayer groups.

Website: <https://gethsemaneministries.com/>

LoveYourBrain Foundation

Website: <https://www.loveyourbrain.com/>

This organization was founded in 2014 by Olympic snowboarder Kevin Pearce and his brother Adam Pearce, after Kevin suffered a severe traumatic brain injury while preparing for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. Love Your Brain offers yoga, meditation, and mindfulness classes in 35 states and Canada. It has helped 4,000 people affected by traumatic brain injury. During the pandemic, it offers virtual (online) classes for free.

LoveYourBrain Mindset Program

Website: <https://www.loveyourbrain.com/mindset>

This program was developed specifically for online connection during the pandemic.

Love Your Brain Recorded Guided Meditation (Brain Injury Focused)

By Marisol Enriquez of Albuquerque

Website: <https://www.loveyourbrain.com/meditation-movement-podcast/awareness-gratitude-and-empowerment>

Meditation and Modern Buddhism

Website: <https://www.meditationinnewmexico.org/>

Meditation Offerings from a Wide Variety of Teachers of Every Tradition – Find Yours

Website: <https://insightla.org/>

Meditate Together

Free, drop-in, online meditations on the hour, every hour five days per week. Supported by 100 worldwide volunteers.

Website: <https://www.mindfulleader.org/meditate-together>

Online Yoga Classes Offered by Mount Madonna Center

<https://www.mountmadonna.org/online-offerings>

Saturday morning meditation class

Tuesday morning Yoga Sutra class

Thursday morning Bhagavad Gita class

Online Yoga Classes Offered by Saltspring Centre of Yoga

Some classes are offered online.

<https://salspringcentre.com/programs-retreats/yoga-classes/>

Silent Unity

Worldwide Online Prayer Vigil (Christian)

Website: https://www.unityprayervigil.org/?_ga=2.35071201.110887211.1616992093-1901517352.1616992093

The 12 Steps Through Buddhism

Website: <https://www.recoveryconnection.com/12-steps-buddhism/>

Theravada Buddhism, Taos

Website: <https://taosmountainsangha.org/>

Zen Buddhism, Santa Fe

Website: <https://www.mountaincloud.org/>

More Information

Margot Feldvebel, LCSW, shares a little about the how these practices may fit with your faith tradition and also a little on the state of the research. The following represents the views of the author only and does not represent the views of the Brain Injury Alliance of New Mexico or its staff or board members.

Every major world religion has a tradition of contemplative prayer or meditation. Each religion varies in the particular methods of practice and the importance it gives to such traditions.

Some traditions include meditation and contemplation more for monks and nuns than for laypeople, while others make these practices central for all adherents.

Contemplative practices are known by varying names including:

- ✚ Christian “Centering Prayer”
- ✚ Catholic, “Contemplative Prayer”
- ✚ Contemplative Judaism
- ✚ Muslim “Daily Ritual Prayer”
- ✚ Sufi “Dhikr,” which means remembrance or recollection
- ✚ Buddhist “Zen,” Vipassana,” or “Sammatha” meditation
- ✚ Taoist Meditation, known as “Xiu Dao”
- ✚ Hindu “Dhyana” which means contemplation and meditation
- ✚ Yogic “Dhyana” or “Prayer” or “Mantra” (sounds or words representing the divine)
- ✚ Mindfulness or awareness practice

Scientists today have obtained research results suggesting meditation has lasting effects on certain brain parts resulting in improved mental health and cognitive control, for example, reducing impulsivity. In addition, some people are learning that they enjoy sitting quietly and peacefully, gently bringing the mind back to the present moment. As a result, many Westerners are seeking to learn about how to practice meditation or contemplation within their own faith tradition.

These psychological and cognitive skills are suggested to improve with meditative practices:

Attention, concentration	Emotion processing and control
Working memory	Reactivity
Judgment	Mood
Decision-making	Conflict management
Impulse control	

The scientific study of prayer, meditation, and mindfulness is in its infancy in the western world. What we do know is that there is a fairly large body of clinical evidence suggesting that these practices lead to positive changes: reductions in depression and anxiety and improvements in mood and sleep. However, to be fair, critics state that mixed results or studies finding no benefits are not published, and this is an

important issue to be addressed by scientists and scientific journals.

Awareness Practices

Many people talk about “mindfulness” these days. Mindfulness is a word that has been adopted widely by Western psychologists to represent paying attention in the moment, on purpose, with a curious and non-judgmental attitude. Another word for mindfulness could be “awareness.”

Researchers have learned that using the mind in this way has important mental health benefits. In fact, mindfulness or awareness interventions have been used to help people living with brain injury as well as people dealing with a wide range of issues including social media overuse and other problematic behaviors.

Traditionally, the practice of mindfulness is a spiritual discipline associated with Buddhism, and ethical and moral obligations are important aspects of the practice. In the West today, many people see it more as a psychological discipline. Nevertheless, there are Buddhist centers that teach various systems of meditative and contemplative practices.

Meditative, Prayer, and Contemplative Practices

Meditation is a term for quieting the mind. We might call it contemplation of God or whatever your name is for something that is greater than you: higher power, spirit, divinity, Self. We’ll use the term “divinity.” Some traditions state that prayer is “talking to” divinity and meditation is “listening to” divinity. You might consider learning about the practices of talking and listening to divinity that are within your faith or religion.

I encourage you to speak with your pastoral or spiritual advisor, if you would like to learn more about contemplation, prayer, or meditation within your faith tradition.

The U.S. Government’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health Weighs In

What do we know about the effectiveness of meditation?

Some research suggests that practicing meditation may reduce blood pressure, symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety and depression, and insomnia. Evidence about its effectiveness for pain and as a smoking-cessation treatment is uncertain.

More to Consider:

- Don’t use meditation to replace conventional care or as a reason to postpone seeing a health care provider about a medical problem.
- Ask about the training and experience of the meditation instructor you are considering.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary or integrative health approaches you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-in-depth>

More Information

Britton, W. B. (2019). Can mindfulness be too much of a good thing? The value of a middle way. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 159–165. https://www.brown.edu/research/labs/britton/sites/britton-lab/files/images/Britton_2019_Can%20mindfulness%20be%20too%20much%20of%20a%20good%20thing.pdf

Davis, D.M. & Hayes, J.A. (2011). What are the benefits of mindfulness? A practice review of psychotherapy-related research. *Psychotherapy*, 48(2), 198-208. https://www.habitualroots.com/uploads/1/2/1/3/121341739/whatarethebenefitsofmindfulness_1.pdf

National Center for Integrative and Complementary Health. Meditation: In Depth
<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-in-depth>

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UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Research Center: You may access a number of studies at this website:
<https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/research>

There apparently have been a lower number of research studies on prayer than on meditation, as there are greater challenges involved in studying prayer (one challenge is that people often move about when praying, whereas people who meditate sit still and are therefore easier to examine). Here is an article on prayer research:

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/the-science-of-prayer-2.html#:~:text=it%20might%20help.%E2%80%9D-,Dr.,negative%20emotions%20and%20less%20angry>