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# 8 Ways Meditation Will Help You Become Calmer and Happier

By Cary Barbor

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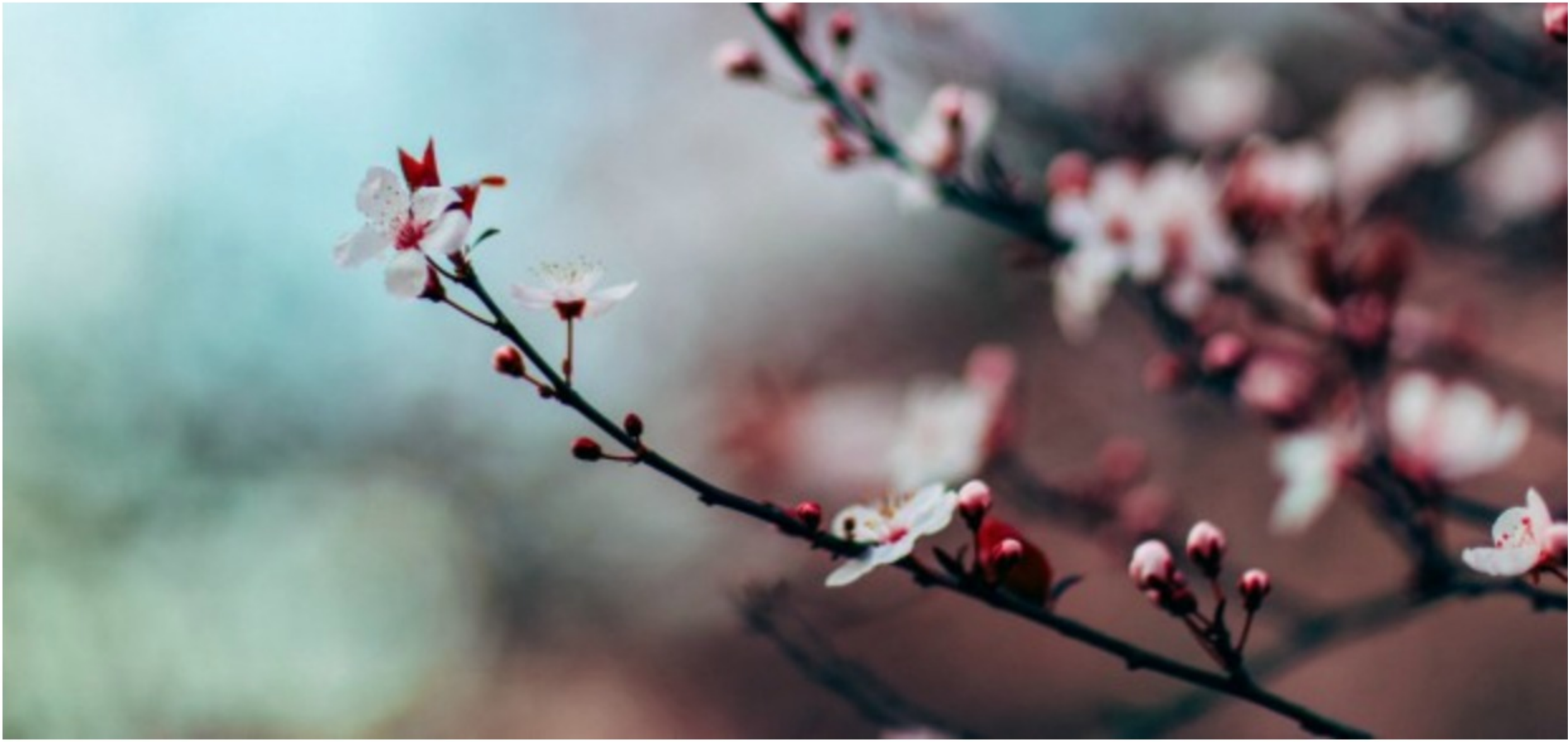
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If you've been unhappy and anxious lately, you might be thinking you need to **make a big change**. Perhaps you need a new job, a different place to live, or even a new partner. But hold on a minute. Before you make any big life changes, consider trying a daily meditation practice. There's plenty of evidence that with a relatively small investment of time and effort, we can become reliably calmer and happier, regardless of circumstances. A new book by two meditation experts, journalist Daniel Goleman and researcher Richard Davidson, *Altered Traits*, gathers the research and lays it out in a clear manner. Here's what was proven most helpful in improving daily life:

## Decrease Stress, Increase Compassion

Schoolteachers who underwent an eight-week meditation program were less depressed, anxious, or **stressed**, and more compassionate and aware of others' feelings, according to a study. "The study is particularly important because opportunities for reflection and contemplation seem to be fading in our fast-paced, technology-driven culture," said lead author **Margaret Kemeny** of UCSF.

## Sharpen Your Attention...

Attention is in short supply these days, as countless devices and distractions pull our focus in various directions. Participants in a **study** who meditated daily for three months experienced improved, sustained attention.

## ...And Stay More Attentive for Years

Not only did attention improve immediately for the meditators, but those who kept at it enjoyed an **increased ability to pay attention** for seven *years* after the initial training!

## Become Less Critical of Yourself

Self-criticism plays a big role in many peoples' unhappiness. And it's linked with a poor response to brief psychological and pharmacological treatments for depression. A study showed that "loving-kindness" meditation, which helps foster self-compassion, can help people become less self-critical and more self-compassionate. The **study** also suggests that **practicing loving-kindness** may reduce symptoms of depression.

## Increase Your Social Connections

Many people today feel alienated from neighbors, workmates, and society at large. **Research** showed that even a 7-minute exercise in loving-kindness meditation helped participants experience increased feelings of **social connection and positivity toward strangers**.

## Reduce Your Social Anxiety

In a group of 56 people with social anxiety disorder, half were trained in mindfulness meditation and yoga for stress reduction, while the other half were enrolled in an aerobic exercise program also designed to reduce stress. When researchers measured the subjects' social anxiety after eight weeks, the meditators had a significantly **larger reduction than the exercisers**.

## Decrease Your Bias

In an era when people feel free to openly display bias against certain individuals or groups, it is helpful to know that meditation may help decrease this too. A **study** measured prejudice against black and homeless people before and after loving-kindness meditation. The meditation decreased biased attitudes—even those that were subconscious.

## Reduce Inflammation and Stress Response in Your Body

Illness can be a major contributor to unhappiness, and inflammation has been linked to many illnesses. Stress certainly exacerbates symptoms. But **meditation** can help with both the inflammation and the stress that caused it. Researchers induced psychological stress and an inflammation response in 31 experienced meditators and a matched control group. The bodily responses of the meditators were markedly lower. "The mindfulness-based approach to stress reduction may offer a lower-cost alternative or complement to standard treatment, and it can be practiced easily by patients in their own homes, whenever they need," said lead author **Melissa Rosencranz**.

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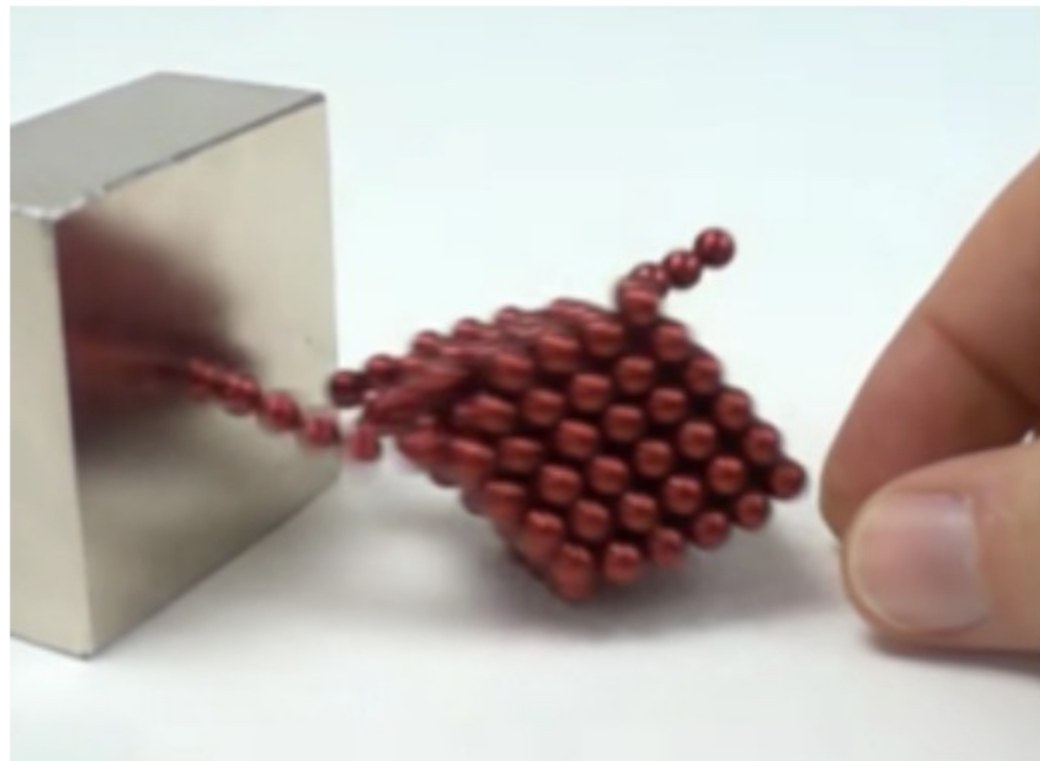
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