

Your Health

 Health Partners

MAY 2024 NEWSLETTER

THE ART OF MEDITATION

*plus articles on
skin health &
stroke awareness*



In this issue of *Your Health*, we start with an in-depth article on meditation – its history, its myriad benefits and how to start if you have never meditated. We then have an article on skin health – the different medical conditions affecting skin, including symptoms and causes, with a focus on how to protect yourself from harmful UVA/UVB rays and substances that can harm your skin. We conclude with an article on strokes for Stroke Awareness Month.

The Soothing Art of Meditation: A Path to Health and Wellbeing

In our day-to-day lives, where the constant buzz of technology and the pressure to perform can lead to overwhelming stress, the ancient practice of meditation is a useful route for some individuals to tranquillity and healing. Rooted in the serene philosophies of the East and having flourished across Western cultures, meditation is a timeless practice that offers a retreat for the mind and a tonic for the soul.

The History of Meditation

The art of meditation is as old as human civilisation itself, with its practice being a cornerstone in the pursuit of enlightenment and inner peace. The earliest records of meditation date back to around 1500 BCE in India, within the sacred Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas. Buddhism, which arose in the sixth century BCE, further propagated meditation, with its founder, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, attaining enlightenment through deep meditation.





“If you're new to meditation, start with just a few minutes each day”

Meanwhile, in the Eastern realms of China and Japan, Taoist and Zen monks refined their own meditation techniques, focusing on the flow of energy or 'Qi' and the awareness of the present moment. These practices emphasised the harmony between the individual and the natural world, fostering a sense of balance and calm.

Meditation made its way to the West through various channels, including trade routes, religious missions and the scholarly pursuits of philosophers. By the 20th century, as Eastern philosophies gained popularity in Western societies, meditation became a subject of scientific interest. Today, it's embraced not only as a spiritual exercise but also as a practical tool for improving health and wellbeing.

The Benefits of Meditation

Meditation has been studied extensively for its myriad health benefits, which include reducing stress, anxiety and depression. It can lower blood pressure, improve concentration and even bolster the immune system. By promoting relaxation and mindfulness, meditation can also enhance sleep quality and aid in the management of chronic pain.

Meditation techniques can be broadly classified into two categories: concentrative and mindfulness meditation. Concentrative meditation involves focusing the mind on a single point, such as the breath, a sound or a visual object. Mindfulness meditation, on the other hand, encourages open monitoring of all aspects of your experience in the present moment, without judgment or attachment.

Getting Started with Meditation

If you're new to meditation, it can be helpful to start with just a few minutes each day. Find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed and sit comfortably with your back straight. Close your eyes and focus on your breath, or listen to a guided meditation if you prefer structure.

It's natural for your mind to wander – meditation is not about achieving a state of blankness, but rather about noticing when your mind has drifted and gently guiding it back to your focus point. With regular practice, you'll find that you can meditate for longer periods and that the calming effects will spill over into other areas of your life

“Meditation offers a sanctuary for the mind and body”




Popular Types of Meditation

- 1. Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR):** Developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn in the 1970s, MBSR combines mindfulness meditation with yoga to improve mental and physical health. It's an eight-week programme that has gained credibility in the medical community for its effectiveness in stress reduction and is widely available in many health centres.
- 2. Transcendental Meditation (TM):** TM is a simple, silent form of meditation introduced by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the mid-20th century. It involves the use of a personal mantra – a word or sound repeated to help settle the mind. Many practitioners and celebrities endorse TM for its simplicity and profound effects on the psyche.
- 3. Zen Meditation (Zazen):** Originating from Buddhist traditions, Zazen requires a sitting posture that promotes alertness and focus. The practice may include counting breaths or simply sitting in quiet observation, allowing thoughts and sensations to pass without engagement.
- 4. Guided Visualisation:** This technique involves forming mental images of places or situations you find relaxing. It's often led by a guide or teacher and is an excellent method for reducing stress and promoting a sense of peace.
- 5. Yoga Meditation:** Yoga is not just a physical practice but also a mental one. Many yoga traditions include meditation as part of their routines, often focusing on the breath or energy centres in the body to enhance spiritual awareness and harmony.



In Conclusion

Meditation is a bridge between the wisdom of ancient cultures and the modern quest for health and wellbeing. Whether you're drawn to it for spiritual reasons or as a way to cope with the stresses of everyday life, meditation offers a sanctuary for the mind and a healing touch for the body. By engaging with this practice, you're participating in a tradition that has nurtured humanity's search for peace and balance for thousands of years. Embrace the stillness, and you may discover a deeper connection to the world around you and an inner resilience you never knew you had. 

Try: Meditation for Beginners on the NHS's Every Mind Matters website.

Love The Skin You're In

The human skin is our largest organ. It has up to seven layers and guards the underlying bones, ligaments and internal organs.

It protects the body from harmful effects including ultraviolet radiation emitted by the sun and works closely with the immune system to fight off bacteria and viruses. The skin also supports our temperature regulation, and is an important organ for our sense of touch, pressure and pain. The function and integrity skin can be threatened by trauma or a number of medical conditions.

DERMATITIS

Dermatitis is just one of a number of Occupational Skin Disorders (OSDs) which collectively pose a threat to:

- ▶ Health, safety and efficiency in the workplace;
- ▶ Mental, physical and social wellbeing of the individuals affected.

95%

of work-related dermatitis occurs on hands and forearms, but the face can also be affected.

Symptoms

- ▶ Dryness initially
- ▶ Red or swollen hands or fingers
- ▶ Cracked or itchy skin
- ▶ Inflammation or a rash at the affected area
- ▶ Blisters, burns, ulcers or flaking skin
- ▶ First, second or third-degree burns or skin ulcers

Dermatitis is a form of eczema. There are many forms of dermatitis, but in relation to the workplace, problems can occur when a substance has contacted the skin and overcome the skin's natural defences causing damage and inflammation (irritant contact dermatitis). It can also be where an employee has an allergic reaction to a



substance that contacts the skin. Always report any skin problems early.

IRRITANT CONTACT DERMATITIS

- ▶ Caused by substances in contact with the skin
- ▶ No history of allergies necessary
- ▶ Can occur at any time of life
- ▶ Usually on exposed areas

Symptoms

- ▶ Dryness initially
- ▶ Red or swollen hands or fingers
- ▶ Cracked or itchy skin
- ▶ Inflammation or a rash at the affected area



- ▶ Blisters, burns, ulcers or flaking skin
- ▶ First, second or third-degree burns or skin ulcers

ALLERGIC CONTACT DERMATITIS

- ▶ It can occur at any time
- ▶ Relates to exposure to allergenic chemicals
- ▶ Relates to the concentration of the chemical
- ▶ Individual's susceptibility

The skin has a number of functions that continuously protect us from threats but, taking care of our skin can help to support its ability to do this.

CARING FOR YOUR SKIN

- ▶ Always use disposable gloves to protect your skin from coming into contact with substances that may damage it.
- ▶ If your skin becomes clammy with the use of gloves and this irritates you, you can try using a different type of glove or use cotton liner gloves inside the disposable glove.
- ▶ Moisturise the skin regularly, at the start and end of the working day and before bed.
- ▶ Using a moisturiser or emollient before work makes cleaning the skin easier at the end of the day.
- ▶ Use skin cleansers to clean up with, rather than solvents or anything abrasive.
- ▶ If your skin is already inflamed, emollients may be more gentle to clean the skin.
- ▶ Rinse carefully and always dry the skin well.
- ▶ Never work with wet feet for long periods of time.
- ▶ Make sure that you wear waterproof boots if work activity means your feet could become wet. If sweating is a problem, keep clean socks spare and change at times during the day.
- ▶ Quickly remove clothing contaminated by irritants.
- ▶ Wash affected skin immediately with large amounts of cool, clean water.

SUN & SKIN – THE GOOD NEWS

Whilst it is important to take care in the sun, a little bit of sunshine is actually good for you. The aim is to strike a balance between protecting yourself from the sun and getting enough Vitamin D from sunlight. Vitamin D is made in our bodies through the action of the sun's UVB rays on our skin. Vitamin D is essential for absorbing calcium, which keeps our bones healthy and protects against serious chronic diseases later in life.

SLEEP

The sun also reduces the level of the hormone melatonin, which regulates sleep. Having lower levels of this hormone in your body gives you more get up and go, whilst boosting your immune system by encouraging the production of white blood cells.

WHY DO WE NEED PROTECTION?

Everyone needs sunscreen to protect their skin from damaging UV rays from the sun and sunburn. Using sunscreen products decreases the chances for sunburn and can prevent skin cancer.

UVA, UVB, SPF – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The two types of UV rays that penetrate the earth's atmosphere are UVA and UVB.

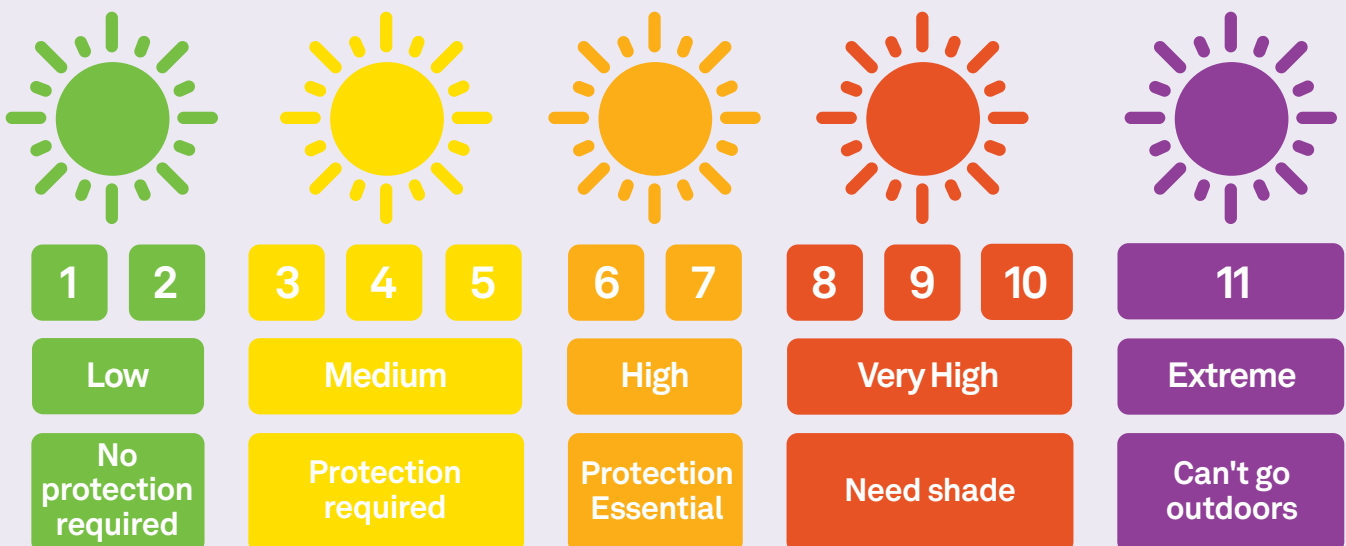
“Vitamin D is essential for absorbing calcium”

UV rays are stronger during the spring and summer months. The UV Sun Index is a good indication of the strength of the UV radiation on a particular day. During the warmer UK months, irrespective of any cloud cover, the UV rating frequently exceeds these levels, exposing outdoor workers to the threat.

SPF (SUN PROTECTION FACTOR)

SPF is the measure of a sunscreen's ability to prevent UVB from damaging the skin. Sunscreen with an SPF 30 protects against UVB rays 30 times longer than unprotected skin before starting to turn red. The SPF also determines how much UVB is blocked when worn. Sunscreen with SPF 15 blocks 93% of the UVB rays, while SPF 30 blocks 97%.

UV Index





UV INDEX

When the UV rating hits level 3 – or ‘Moderate’ – the amount of solar UV radiation reaching the earth’s surface is strong enough to damage the skin.

UVA STAR RATING

The star rating measures the amount of UVA protection. The higher the star rating, the better.

HOW TO APPLY SUNSCREEN

Most people don't apply enough sunscreen. As a guide, adults should aim to apply

around 2 teaspoons of sunscreen if you're just covering your head, arms and neck, or 2 tablespoons if you're covering your entire body while wearing a swimming costume.

Sunscreen should be applied to all exposed skin, including the face, neck, ears and head if you have thinning or no hair – but a wide-brimmed hat is better.

This includes applying it straight after you've been in water – even if it's ‘water resistant’ – and after towel drying, sweating, or when it may have rubbed off.

PROTECT YOURSELF

- ▶ Use minimum SPF 30
- ▶ Use Broad Spectrum Protection (UVA & UVB protection) such as SPF 30 4-star rating
- ▶ Apply to all exposed areas
- ▶ If you plan to be out in the sun long enough to risk burning, sunscreen needs to be applied twice:
 - ▶ 30 minutes before going out;
 - ▶ just before going out.
- ▶ Re-apply as frequently as possible
- ▶ Do not rely on products that offer 8+ hours protection (sweating will remove effectiveness)
- ▶ Make sure the sunscreen has not passed its expiry date
- ▶ Stay out of the sun between 11am-3pm if possible
- ▶ Cover up with suitable clothing (close weave fabrics)
- ▶ Wear sunglasses – with wraparound lenses or wide arms with the CE mark
- ▶ Stay hydrated

WHO SHOULD TAKE EXTRA CARE IN THE SUN?

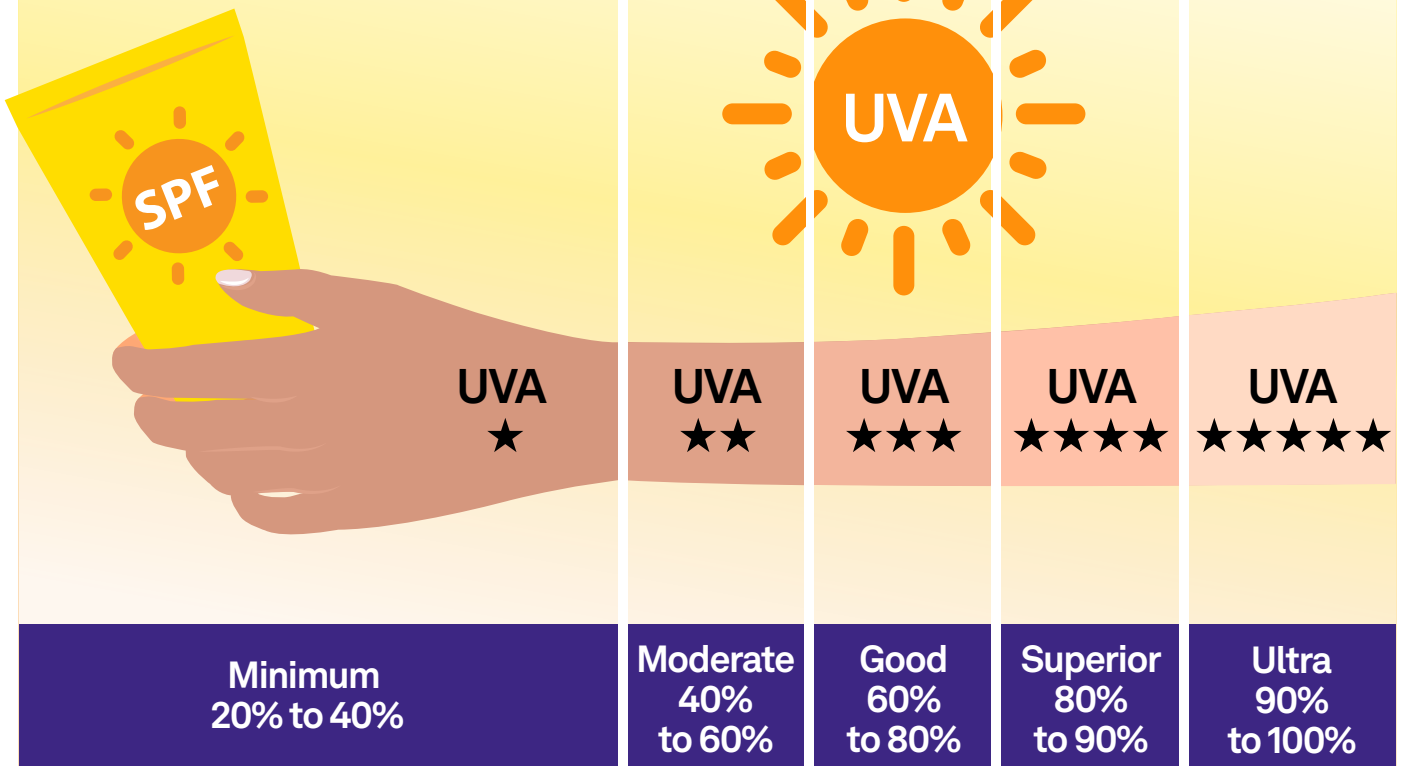
- ▶ People who have pale, white or light brown skin
- ▶ People who have freckles or red or fair hair
- ▶ People who tend to burn rather than tan
- ▶ People who have many moles
- ▶ People who have skin problems relating to a medical condition
- ▶ People who are only exposed to intense sun occasionally – for example, while on holiday
- ▶ People who have a family history of skin cancer

PROTECT YOUR MOLES

If you have lots of moles or freckles, your risk of getting skin cancer is higher than average, so take extra care. Keep an eye out for changes to your skin.

As skin cancers vary, you should tell your doctor about any changes to your skin, even if they are not similar to those mentioned here.

Sunscreen absorbs this percentage of UVA rays compared with UVB





SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF MELANOMA (A TYPE OF SKIN CANCER)

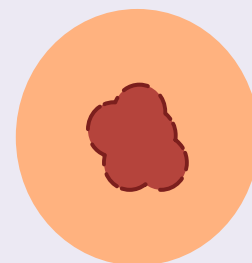
The most common sign of melanoma is the appearance of a new mole or a change in an existing mole.



A – Asymmetry:
The two halves of the area may differ in shape

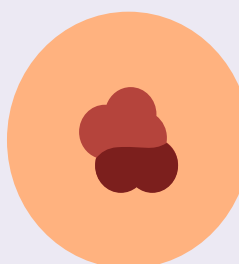
B – Border:

The edges of the area may be irregular or blurred, and sometimes show notches



C – Colour:

This may be uneven. Different shades of black, brown and pink may be seen



D – Diameter:

Most melanomas are at least 6mm in diameter



E – Evolving:

If a mole is changing, it's concerning.

REMEMBER – IF IN DOUBT, CHECK IT OUT!

Contact Occupational Health or your GP if you are concerned about any changes in your skin condition.

Stroke Awareness

Stroke strikes every five minutes. It can happen to anyone, of any age, at any time.

One in four strokes in the UK happen to people of working age, but with the right support and guidance many people successfully return to work after a stroke.

A stroke is a brain attack. It happens when the blood supply to part of your brain is cut off. Blood carries essential nutrients and oxygen to your brain, so without blood, your brain cells can be damaged or die.

This damage can have different effects, depending on where it happens in your brain. The injury to the brain caused by a stroke can lead to widespread and long-lasting health problems. Because the brain controls everything we do and how we think, depending on which part of the brain is injured, a stroke can impact on how the body functions and how you communicate, think and learn.

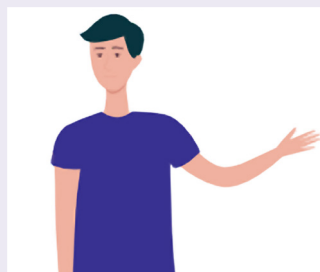
Although some people may recover quite quickly and the effects may be relatively minor, many people who have a stroke need long-term support to help them regain as much independence as possible.



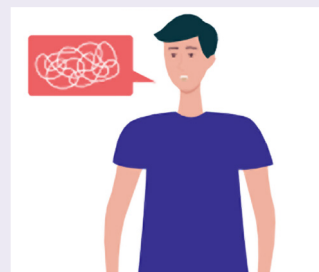
Act FAST on stroke



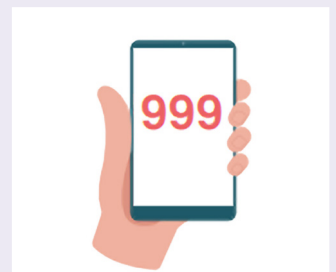
FACE:
Face Drooping



ARMS:
Cannot Raise Arms



SPEECH:
Slurred/Garbled



TIME:
Time to call 999



Unfortunately not everyone survives a stroke; that's why it's so important to be able to recognise the symptoms and get medical help as quickly as possible. The sooner a person receives treatment for a stroke, the less damage is likely to happen.

For many people, a stroke happens suddenly and without warning. A stroke is a medical emergency. If you have any stroke symptoms you need to call 999 immediately.

You may start off in accident and emergency or another assessment ward, but it is likely you will be quickly admitted to an acute stroke unit, which has a range of trained professionals experienced in stroke care. The quicker your stroke is diagnosed and treated, the better your recovery will be.

A brain scan can show what type of stroke you have had. A CT scan or an MRI scan will show whether your stroke has been caused by a blockage or by a bleed. Because a stroke can happen to anyone, of any age, at any time, it is vital to know how to spot the warning signs of a stroke in yourself or someone else.

There are two main types of stroke:

- ▶ **Ischaemic stroke:** This is caused by a blood clot. Ischaemic means a reduced blood and oxygen supply to a part of the body. It is usually caused by blood clot in an artery, which blocks the flow of blood. This occurs in about 85% of cases;

- ▶ **Haemorrhagic stroke:** This is due to bleeding in or around the brain. A haemorrhagic stroke can happen when an artery inside your brain bursts, causing bleeding within your brain. This is known as an intracerebral haemorrhage.

A TIA or transient ischaemic attack (also known as a mini-stroke) is the same as a stroke, except that the symptoms last for a short amount of time. It is caused by a blockage cutting off the blood supply to part of your brain. This can cause sudden symptoms similar to a stroke, such as speech and visual disturbance, and numbness or weakness in the face, arms and legs. However, a TIA usually often only lasts for a few minutes or hours and fully resolves within 24 hours.

You can find out more about strokes at www.stroke.org.uk.

Sources:

Stroke Association, NHS

NEXT ISSUE:

- Diabetes & Weight Management
- Loneliness Awareness
- Men's Health

At Health Partners we offer a full range of tailored health and wellbeing services.

Our thinking is innovative. We constantly develop new responses and tools designed to address the health and wellbeing challenges that face your business and people.

Our commitment is total. We invest in our services, creating new ones and keeping in step with every client. We constantly explore new ways of working and make no compromises in the quality of our services.

Simply put, we are here to help people be their best.