

Study: Meditation Aids Teen Blood Pressure

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ATLANTA (AP) — A study by the Medical College of Georgia found that two 15-minute meditation sessions each day — once at home, the other at school — helped teenage students lower their blood pressure over four months. Their blood pressure even continued to drop for four months after the meditation sessions ended, researchers said Friday.

One high school senior who benefited from the study was Nick Fitts. Fitts had a lot on his mind going into the research — two jobs, no car and rocky relations with his mother.

The stress raised his blood pressure enough to put him at risk for developing hypertension, even though he kept active with track, band and junior ROTC.

When college officials asked Fitts to join a study of whether meditation could lower blood pressure, he thought they were out of their minds. But getting into his mind was the key.

Fitts says the program helped him. "The meditation calms me down and makes me think better about things," said Fitts, now a nursing student at the University of South Carolina at Aiken.

Researchers screened 5,000 students and found 156 had blood pressure similar to Fitts. Half of that group received the meditation sessions and the other half, a control group, were placed in health education classes. All students wore blood pressure monitors 24 hours a day.

The control group did not have any reduction in blood pressure, according to the study in the American Journal of Hypertension.

One in four adults have hypertension, which is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and health officials say teens who have higher-than-normal blood pressure are more likely to develop the chronic disease when they're older.

"It's no longer considered to be an adult disease," said Vernon Barnes, a physiologist at the medical college and lead author of the study.

Meditation is just one of several things — including healthy eating, exercise and even medication — that can help lower blood pressure, said Dr. Elizabeth Ofili, chief of cardiology at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta.

She added that people regularly need to have their blood pressure checked: "It's never too early to be aware of the risk of blood pressure."

Besides reducing their blood pressure, students who meditated also had lower rates of absenteeism, school rule violations and suspensions than those in the control group, Barnes said.

"It's noteworthy for educators — meditation might be included in the school day as a program for reducing stress in the schools," Barnes said.

Fitts said he now meditates 45 minutes each morning.

"I make peace with me," he said.