



Miguel Farias: The Science of Meditation: Myths and Facts



Miguel Farias is an experimental psychologist, founding director of the Brain, Belief and Behaviour Lab at Coventry University. Explore the history and beliefs about meditation and what it has been demonstrated so far.

TOP EMBODIMENT TIP: Being aware of your breathing.

Why do We Meditate?

- To **Experience Pure Awareness**; a special or unique state of mind.
- To experience **cognitive benefits, mental health benefits, physical health benefits, existential benefits and increased compassion, empathy and wellbeing.**
- Traditional meditation goals were mainly related to **ideas of self-transformation.**
- There was additional interest in **physical benefits or wellbeing.**

How Long have Humans been Meditating?

- There is no recorded evidence that meditation practices have been longer than 3-4000 years.
- However, the experiences recorded within meditation, have **similarities with earlier spiritual practices** such as the states of consciousness recorded in Shamanic Ecstatic Practices

Is Meditation Different from Relaxation?

- In The Relaxation Response, Herbert Benson in 1975 explained that the positive **effects that meditation and relaxation techniques achieved were identical.**
- Later studies with control groups using relaxation techniques have demonstrated mixed results.

Does Meditation Produce a Unique State of Consciousness?

- Brain imaging studies in different categories of meditation, demonstrate common **activations in the middle and anterior insula**, which is associated with **interoceptive awareness**, or awareness of internal processes.
- Most philosophical and religious traditions seek to move beyond the present, rather than focus on the 'here and now'. The focus of the present moment is a more recent development.

Can Meditation have Negative Effects?

- Early accounts of '**meditation sickness**' date back to the 5th century CE.
- Systemic Review (2020) suggests negative effects in meditation practices could have a prevalence of 8.3%.

Resources

- ❖ **Books:** *The Buddha Pill: Can Meditation Change you?* Watkins, 2015. *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation; In Development.*
- ❖ **Websites:** [Miguel Farias; The Psychology of Belief](#), [Meditating in Safety](#)
- ❖ **Research:** [Adverse events in meditation practices and meditation based therapies; a systematic review](#)



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