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## My broken leg healed in half the time... all because I meditated

By [Danny Penman](#)

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Meditation is often touted as a panacea for all manner of ailments, from chronic pain to anxiety, stress and even depression.

Like most sensible people, I'd always taken such sweeping claims with a large pinch of salt. However, five years ago I learned the power of meditation for myself after an accident left me critically injured and in constant pain.

A freak gust of wind caught me off-guard as I was paragliding over the Cotswolds. One moment my paraglider was flying normally, the next its wing had collapsed, sending me tumbling into the hillside 30ft below.



© Alamy

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**Wonder treatment: Meditation has been said to cure ailments, from chronic pain to anxiety, stress and even depression**

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I was struck with the most agonising pain imaginable. The bone in the lower half of my right leg had been driven up through my knee and into my thigh.

I could see the outline of my fractured shin bone sticking through the cloth of my jeans. I went into shock and my body was racked with violent uncontrollable spasms.

As I lay on the hillside, I remembered a form of meditation I'd been taught in the sixth form of my comprehensive school in Neston, Cheshire, as a way of tackling exam nerves.

Over the years I'd used it to deal with the usual stresses and strains of daily life, but never in times of physical pain. But I knew that meditation (and self-hypnosis) had been used for pain relief and, as I lay on the hillside, in sheer desperation I tried them both.

I forced myself to breathe slowly and deeply, to focus on the sensations the breath made as it flowed in and out. I pictured myself in a beautiful garden and imagined myself inhaling its peaceful and tranquil air.

Gradually, breath by breath, the pain became more distant. It felt less 'personal', almost as if I was watching it on TV.

In hospital it became apparent how seriously injured I was — and just how effective a painkiller the meditation had been.



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### Recovering: Dr Danny Penman found peace from meditation

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My leg was so badly broken that I would need three major operations. I also needed a newly invented device, a Taylor Spatial Frame, to be surgically attached to my leg for up to 18 months to repair the damage. Consisting of four equally spaced rings that encircled my lower leg, the frame looked like a cross between a Meccano set and a medieval torture device.

Fourteen metal spokes and two bolts connected these rings to the shards of bone inside my leg, and allowed the surgeon to move the fragments around inside.

Life with the frame was intolerable. Sleep was virtually impossible, and the pain was controlled with powerful drugs that left me washed-out and jaded.

I felt thoroughly wretched — anxious, irritable and highly stressed. So I decided to find an alternative way of coping with the pain and of maximising my chances of recovery.

I discovered the work of Mark Williams, professor of clinical psychology at Oxford University. He and his colleagues at the universities of Cambridge, Toronto, and Massachusetts had spent 20 years studying the phenomenal power of meditation for treating anxiety and even full-blown depression.

They had turned it into a therapy known as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) that was gaining the support of doctors and scientists. It had even been endorsed by the U.S. National Institutes of Health and in Britain by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (Nice).

One study, in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, has shown that it brings about long-term changes in levels of happiness and well-being, while a major study in Psychological Science revealed such changes help regular meditators live longer, healthier lives. It's also been shown to be as effective as drugs for treating depression. In fact, it's now one of the preferred treatments recommended by Nice.

A typical meditation session consists of focusing on breathing and the sensations it creates. This reduces the levels of stress hormones in the body which, in turn, enhances healing and boosts physical health.

It helps partly by teaching you to live in the present moment rather than worrying too much about the past or the future.

Faced with the evidence, I decided to try mindfulness meditation. I began each day with a ten-minute breathing meditation to calm the mind. At bedtime, I would meditate for 30 minutes while visualising a warm, white, healing light sweeping up and down my leg.

## 'Fourteen metal spokes and two bolts were inside my leg'

This simple meditation programme worked to an astonishing degree. My pain gradually subsided and I slashed my intake of painkillers by two-thirds. I also developed a more contented outlook, seeing my injuries as temporary problems that would gradually subside rather than as limb-threatening ones that might confine me to a wheelchair.

The MBCT is, I'm convinced, why I recovered in double-quick time: the leg frame was removed after just 17 weeks rather than the normal six to 18 months.

My progress astonished my doctors. Just after the final operation I joked with my surgeon that maybe my injuries hadn't been as bad as I'd thought. He looked at me aghast and said: 'Your leg was in the Top Five leg injuries I've treated with a Taylor Spatial Frame — and possibly higher.'

I still meditate for 30 minutes each day. So convinced am I by its benefits that I've written a book, with Professor Williams, that teaches mindfulness meditation.

And my recovery continues apace. Two years ago, at the age of 42, I took up running, and I'm currently hiking the 630-mile South West Coast Path in 50-mile sections. Given the severity of my injuries, that's astonishing.

- [Click here for a 3 minute free meditation practice](#)

***Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World, by Professor Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman, is published by Piatkus at £12.99.***

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Hasn't he got a scary face? ....With piecing eyes...?? i bet he found peace!!..

- mythoughts, wandsworth, 17/5/2011 14:39

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Yoga and meditation have worked miracles for me.....i am almost 70 and have the figure AND vigour of someone 15 years younger than me.....I am so grateful for discovering both

- Linda, Sheffield England, 17/5/2011 13:57

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Now break the other leg, and don't meditate, as a controlled experiment.

- Sherry, Kent, 17/5/2011 13:01

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Meditating is one of those miracles of life. It's not only something that has immediate effect, it's also cumulative and you can be calmer and healthier in general if you practice it every day. It somehow translates to calmer and less stressed cells in your entire body, so it can really take the edge off of inflammation and that's the cause of so many illnesses and disease. So priming your body to be in the optimum healing state can't hurt.

- Michelle, Los Angeles, CA, 17/5/2011 07:22

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