

Eight Benefits of OM Supported by Science

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1 — OM produces intense happiness

Nicole Prause and Greg Siegle carried out a psycho-physiological study of 125 couples who were experienced in the OM practice. They concluded that OMing produces an intense positive affect—a feeling of happiness¹.

The researchers asked participants to complete psychological tests before and after completing an OM session. During the session a wide range of physiological indicators were monitored and recorded. The combination of psychological and physiological measures provides a rich resource for understanding the complex effects of OM on the mind, body and—because both partners were monitored at the same time—on the relationship between the partners.

2 — OM increases practitioners' feelings of closeness and connectedness

Prause and Siegle also found that practicing OM increased feelings of closeness and connectedness.

Using a validated and well established psychological test—the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOSS), administered before and after an OM session, they found a significant and substantial increase in closeness between partners. The effect was even stronger in OM partners who were not in a romantic relationship with each other than in those that were romantically involved².

3 — OM may help people with traumatic childhoods regain sexual function

Another finding from Prause and Siegle's study suggested that OM may help people to overcome negative sexual effects as a result of childhood trauma.

People who have experienced what psychologists define as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including sexual abuse, frequently have a diminished ability to become aroused during sexual activity. This can make it difficult for sufferers to form satisfying adult relationships. Prause and

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Siegle found that those participants who had experienced ACEs were able to respond to stimulation in an OM session by becoming aroused. More surprisingly, their physiological responses showed higher levels of arousal than other participants.

The scientists proposed that this effect was due to the OM container, a highly structured protocol that specifies every step of the practice. Embedding sexual stimulation in this controlled and goalless context, they suggested, provided a safe space in which trauma sufferers were able to reconnect with their sexuality without the anxiety and uncertainty that often attends romantic sexual encounters.³

4 — OM reduces negative affect including anxiety and anger

Prause and Siegle's study, found that practicing OM significantly reduced measures of negative emotion, including anxiety and anger.¹

5 — OM modifies emotional states without blunting the capacity to feel emotions

OM appears to change the balance of emotional states for the better, in a lasting way, without reducing the intensity of emotion. This is important since many of the most effective interventions that are widely used for psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety and PTSD are pharmaceuticals (such as SSRIs) that blunt sufferers' ability to feel anything. They often have particularly damaging effects on libido and sexual function.

The potential to improve mood and support the processing of trauma without compromising the ability to feel joy means that OM could be an important addition to the therapeutic toolbox.⁴

6 — OM may improve cognitive performance

Brain imaging studies carried out by Dr Andrew Newberg suggest OM may have long-term benefits for brain health and cognition. Generally, as we age, metabolic activity in the temporal lobes steadily decreases—an aspect of general deterioration in brain health. But Newberg found that, in the population of experienced OM practitioners that he studied, older participants had a much less pronounced reduction in activity.⁴

7 — OM may promote altruistic and pro-social behavior

In his imaging studies, experienced OM practitioners were shown to have lower metabolic activity in the parietal lobe after an OM session compared to before it.^{5,6} Their resting state brain activity also differed significantly from that of non-practitioners, suggesting that lower activity in the parietal lobe is sustained over the long term as a result of consistent practice.⁷

Following a preview of these findings, Roland Griffiths observed that similar changes in parietal lobe activity have been observed in studies of other practices such as meditation. In those cases, he noted, it is associated with a feeling of interconnectedness or a diminished sense of ego, and he suggested that this may mean that OMing, like those practices, may promote pro-social and altruistic behavior.⁸

8 — OM is a safe way to bring about “mystical states”, altered states of consciousness that have been shown to have many benefits

Researchers Vivian Siegel and Ben Emmert-Aronson asked over 780 practitioners of OM to complete the Mystical Experience Questionnaire (MEQ30). They found that 62% of respondents had experiences that met all the criteria for a mystical experience. In a follow-up study reported in the same article, they asked OM partners to complete the questionnaire and discovered that the intensity of mystical experience reported by each member of the pair was highly correlated, suggesting that the experience is shared.⁹

Mystical states are altered states of consciousness, also known as “peak states” that are widely observed in traditional religious and healing practices. They are defined by the distinctive combination of feelings or sensations they produce: a sense of unity with other people and the universe, a sense of sacredness, a feeling of having discovered a deep truth, a feeling of transcending time and space, and finally, an intense positive affect. Mystical states can be brought about by a variety of traditional religious and healing practices as well as by dosing with psychedelics.

Mystical states have been of interest to psychologists because people who have experienced mystical states have been known to undergo drastic transformations in their behavior and perception. It has been proposed that methods of bringing about these states may be helpful interventions for conditions such as treatment-resistant depression and PTSD. However, most of

these techniques involve risks that need to be managed by a hands-on clinical team (e.g., to administer psychedelics), or work best when the patient is embedded in a specific belief system (for example, a religious tradition). OM may provide a safe and reliable alternative that can be practiced without medical supervision.

References

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