

alternating sitting and walking meditations. They were chosen for their extreme rehabilitation needs and because, really, who else are you going to get to bear with 11-hour meditation sessions? Approximately 56% of the newly enlightened prisoners returned to jail within two years, compared with a 75% recidivism rate among nonmeditators. The meditating cons also used fewer drugs, drank less and experienced less depression. At Cambridge University, John Teasdale found that mindfulness helped chronically depressed patients, reducing their relapse rate by half. Wendy Weisel, the daughter of two Holocaust survivors and author of *Daughters of Absence*, took anxiety medication for most of her life until she started meditating two years ago. "There's an astounding difference," she reports. "You don't need medication for depression or for tension. I'm on nothing for the first time in my life."

Contentment and inner peace are nice, but think how many Americans would start meditating if you could convince them they would live longer without having to jog or eat broccoli rabe. More than a decade ago, Dr. Dean Ornish argued that meditation, along with yoga and dieting, reversed the buildup of plaque in coronary arteries. Last April, at a meeting of the American Urological Association, he announced his most recent findings that meditation may slow prostate cancer. While his results were interesting, it's important to note that those patients were also dieting and doing yoga. Jon Kabat-Zinn, who studied Buddhism in the '60s and founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the UMass Medical Center in 1979, has been trying to find a more scientific demonstration of the healing power of meditation. Over the years, he has helped more than 14,000 people manage their pain without medication by teaching them to focus on what their pain feels like and accept it rather than fight it. "These people have cancer, AIDS, chronic pain," he says. "If we think we can do something for them, we're in deep trouble. But if you switch frames of reference and entertain the notion that they may be able to do something for themselves if we put very powerful tools at their disposal, things shift extraordinarily."

Lately Kabat-Zinn has been studying a group of patients with psoriasis, an incurable skin disease that is often treated by asking patients to go to a hospital, put goggles on and stand naked in a hot, loud ultraviolet light box. Apparently, many people find this stressful. So Kabat-Zinn randomly picked half the patients and taught them to meditate in order to reduce their stress levels in the light box. In two experiments, the meditators' skin cleared up at four times the rate of the nonmeditators. In another study, conducted with Wisconsin's Richard Davidson, Kabat-Zinn gave a group of newly taught meditators and nonmeditators flu shots and measured the antibody levels in their blood. Researchers also measured their brain activity to see how much the meditators' mental activity shifted from the right brain to the left. Not only did the meditators have more antibodies at both four weeks and eight weeks after the shots, but the people whose activity shifted the most had even more antibodies. The better your meditation technique, Kabat-Zinn suggests, the healthier your immune system.

Meanwhile, the evidence from meditation researchers continues to mount. One study, for example, shows that women who meditate and use guided imagery have higher levels of the immune cells known to combat tumors in the breast. This comes after many studies have established that meditation can significantly reduce blood pressure. Given that 60% of doctor visits are the result of stress-related conditions, this isn't surprising. Nor is it surprising that meditation can sometimes be used to replace Viagra.