

Treat yourself to silence

From leaf blowers to car alarms and cell phones to CNN, noise accompanies us everywhere we go.

According to Dr. Blair Justice, professor emeritus of psychology at The University of Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health at Houston, "Sound is addictive. And like any addiction or habit, the more continuous the exposure, the greater the unease when it is withdrawn, even if we feel better without it. We now prefer the jarring stimulation of noise to the calm and tranquility of quiet."

In contrast, it is a medical fact that our brains (and therefore our whole bodies) crave silence. Treat yourself to a few moments of meditation on a regular basis and reap the rewards. Justice reports numerous benefits for meditators, including a greater sense of self worth, improved ability to make decisions, significantly fewer stressors and illness symptoms and more frequent bouts of well-being.

Justice and his wife, Rita, a psychologist, have found that while the actual number of stressors is not lower for meditators, they perceive themselves as having fewer and being upset less by stressors they have.

So how do you meditate? It takes just 20 minutes and requires only a quiet room and a comfortable place to sit. The idea is to calm the mind, letting go of superficial thoughts (grocery lists, phone calls to make).

"It takes some getting used to, and just like exercising, it becomes self-reinforcing. The more you try it, the more you want to do it so you can experience the benefits," says Rita. "It's tough to start on your own. Go to a



Just a few moments of silence clears the mind.

workshop and attend a group practice to get the hang of it."

While many religions use meditation, it need not be a religious or spiritual experience. The goal is simply finding peace. Try one of these area meditation practices to help you get started and perhaps ease the year-end and holiday chaos.

University of St. Thomas. The Science of Spirituality meditation practice takes place weekly in Robertson Hall, room 213. Sundays at 9 a.m. Call Dottie Williams, (713) 686-0642.

Twelve Moments: A Year of Mediation at Rothko Chapel. This monthly program offers a survey of meditation practices from cultures and religions around the world. Nov. 8 features Hindu meditation, and Dec. 13 features Jewish meditation. 1409 Sul Ross St., (713) 524-9839, www.rothkochapel.org.

Chung Tai Zen Center of Houston. This Buddhist Temple in southwest Houston offers many meditation courses throughout the year. 12129 Bellaire Blvd., (281) 568-1568, www.cthouston.org. — SC