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Meditate on This Getting the Edge on Trading — and on Longevity, Too?

THERE'S RARELY A SHORTAGE OF AGITATION among traders, and with the market going every which-way lately, no doubt it's been in more than abundant supply.

But even as the American Heart Association disclosed that obesity, a major cause of heart disease, is growing fastest among people earning over \$60,000 a year, another study showed a possible antidote to the high blood pressure that afflicts many who ply their trade on Wall Street: Transcendental Meditation.

According to a study published in the latest issue of the American Journal of Cardiology, the meditation technique brought to the U.S. in 1959 by the Indian teacher and physicist Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, people with high blood pressure who were taught TM had a 23% lower death rate from all causes, and 30% lower from heart disease, than those who learned other relaxation techniques or used drugs.

The five-year study, largely funded by the National Institutes of Health and led by Robert Schneider, director of the Center for Natural Medicine and Prevention at Maharishi University of Management in Iowa, examined death rates of participants in two studies an average of eight years later. Schneider, who noted that there are about 600 studies that show TM causes "consistent improvements in psychological and physical health," said the latest results should cause policy makers and health-care reimbursers to view TM "as an effective prevention modality."

Though that may not be the current conventional wisdom, it is already being employed to treat patients with cardiovascular disease. The American Journal of Cardiology study "is consistent with what we have observed in our research," says Noel Bairey Merz, medical director of the Preventive Cardiac Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in L.A. "We came to meditation as a last resort," she says, but it is "something that certainly can be considered complementary to other good health-care therapies." And, as Barron's observed last year ("Mind Over Markets," April 19, 2004), the technique may have other fringe benefits, including helping some traders improve their performance.

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