

[Home](#) > [Why Senior Living?](#) > [Health Benefits of Senior Living](#) > **Senior Meditation: Finding Zen**

Senior Meditation: Finding Zen

BY ERIN BRERETON



Regents Point's weekly meditation class has helped its residents discover a new sense of serenity.

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A couple of years after Mimi Kerr, 82, moved to **Regents Point**, she heard that be.group senior living community in Irvine, California, would be hosting a meditation class. It seemed like a natural fit for the Oregon native, who had practiced yoga since college.

She didn't expect to lead the class—but that's exactly what Kerr, who had taken transcendental meditation classes years before, began doing when the original senior meditation instructor moved to Arizona.

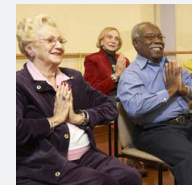
"Those of us who had been taking the class wanted to continue," she says. "So I more or less fell heir to keeping it organized, just from having practiced meditation and yoga for many years and having useful materials."

Now, every Monday morning from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., Kerr gathers with four

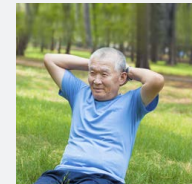
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to 10 residents to help them increase their awareness—and decrease their stress level.

“Mindfulness,” Kerr says, “is about paying attention to what you’re experiencing. The purpose is to focus your attention, and enjoy the moment for what it is.”

Senior Meditation: A Weekly Retreat

The meditation class can involve either silent or guided meditation, which is typically preceded by Kerr or another participant sharing a mindful living-based book, DVD or other item.

“People will sometimes bring in articles they’ve seen, and we’ll read and discuss those prior to meditation time,” she says. “It’s very much a cooperative effort—everybody pitches in, as far as putting chairs away, closing blinds and closing the door.”

Joan Lively, 85, who has been meditating for about 20 years, was thrilled to find out Regents Point had a meditation group. Lively, who has lived in the community for about seven years, also meditates daily on her own—but she enjoys the weekly class and values group contemplation time.

“The energy is much better when you are in silent meditation with a group of people,” she says. “It’s quite powerful.”

Although the class is comprised of Regents Point residents, guests are welcome. Kerr has brought visiting nieces from Oregon and Sacramento. “Both are very much into yoga and meditation and enjoyed it,” she says.

Community Calm

Regents Point’s meditation class isn’t the only place seniors have sought a stronger sense of tranquility.

[Sharon Salzberg](#), author of “Real Happiness: the Power of Meditation” and co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, first noticed a growing number of older practitioners beginning to meditate in the mid-



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1970s, within a few years of when she started to teach meditation.

The effects, Salzberg says, can be profound.

"Meditation practice increases our ability to focus, to be more concentrated and more aware of our experiences," she says, "And it can actually [increase our connection to one another.](#)"

For Kerr, who has suffered from high blood pressure, meditation has served as a way to strengthen her recollection skills and cope with stress. "I feel very relaxed and tranquil after I've meditated," she says. "And I have an excellent memory; it's helped me in that way."

Kerr has found the effects last long after class has ended. "Meditation keeps you focused throughout the day," she says. "Those who come find it really beneficial to help us cope with the challenges we face as we age."

Lively feels meditation—specifically, "training to be quiet, calm and take away stress"—has helped increase her ability to concentrate.

"I'm more aware of what I'm doing at the time; my mind is on what I'm doing," she says. "I feel more organized."

Lively has noticed other positive changes that she attributes to participating in the senior meditation class. She says it makes her feel invigorated in the morning—and helps her sleep better at night.

"It's benefitted me tremendously," she says. "Taking part in the class has proven to be a very nice thing. I'm very grateful for it."

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