



*Summary of the IONS Transformation Study by
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A year-long study of ITP practitioners investigating the relationship between ITP practice and health and well-being outcomes has been completed. The results have been submitted for publication in an academic journal. Beginning in September 2006, 53 ITP practitioners were asked to complete questionnaires three times – at the beginning of the year, half-way through, and at the end of the year. The questionnaires asked about demographics, religious and spiritual background, amount and type of ITP practices engaged in, and self-report measures of physical health, psychological health, perceived stress, quality of life, daily spiritual experiences, and self-transcendence. Self-transcendence can be defined as (a) a desire to discover meaning in human existence, (b) growing spirituality involving both an expansion of boundaries of the self and an increased appreciation for present moment experience, or (c) a developmental process of growth in wisdom as described in the contemplative traditions. At the end of the study, the data were analyzed for trends over the year.

In a nutshell, we discovered that participants demonstrated statistically significant improvements in general physical health, quality of life, and in psychological well-being, specifically in the areas of vitality, self-control, and positive well-being. Participants also reported significant reductions in physical health symptoms, even though they had an average age of 55 years. When we investigated possible relationships to explain these encouraging results, we found that the amount of time and involvement with ITP practice was related to greater psychological well-being and self-transcendence, but, unexpectedly, not to improved physical health. However, increased self-transcendence predicted improved physical health, and this was accounted for by improvements in psychological well-being. Our results suggest that involvement in ITP may lead to greater self-transcendence, greater psychological well-being, and in turn improved physical health. This concept challenges traditional logic that improving physical health should be first attained, with subsequent increases in psychological and existential well-being, and is supported by some prior theory and research.

Our findings are far from generalizable, but rather point the way for future research on the promise of ITP to enhance human potential. Possible projects on the horizon are investigation of ITP practice on extraordinary functioning, and research on objective biological outcomes and mechanisms, such as effects of ITP on aging and telomerase activity or effects of ITP practice on gene expression. The IONS research team is grateful to those individuals who donated their time and contributed to this exciting project.