



[Susan Reynolds Prime Your Gray Cells](#)

Yoga and Kirtan Kriya Meditation Bolster Brain Functioning

Fire up your brain: 7 steps to performing Kirtan Kriya in 15 minutes a day

A study published in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease in April confirmed that yoga and a form of [meditation](#) known as Kirtan Kriya improved [brain](#) functioning by increasing connectivity, improving [memory](#), and decreasing mood aberration. See an excerpt where I discuss Kirtan Kriya in *Fire Up Your Writing Brain* below.

Over the course of twelve weeks adults - age fifty-five+, who reported mild [anxiety](#) about their memory and showed some mild [cognitive](#) impairment - focused on improving brain function. For one hour a week, one group of fourteen attended a Kundalini yoga class, a beginner-level form of yoga focused on breathing exercises and meditation. For fifteen minutes each day, they practiced a form of meditation known as Kirtan Kriya, the repeating of sounds combined with repetitive hand movements (See Improve Brain Function excerpt below).

The “brain game” group of eleven attended an hour a week of classroom instruction in a well established brain-training program and spent fifteen minutes a day performing a series of mental exercises designed to bolster their brain functioning.

Both groups showed improved communication in the regions of the brain involved in memory and language, but those who practiced yoga also showed more activity in the regions involved in the brain’s ability to focus and to multitask. The yoga group showed a statistically significant improvement in mood and visuospatial memory performance, reflecting increased connectivity and improved verbal memory.

Here’s what I wrote about Kirtan Kriya in *Fire Up Your Writing Brain*:

IMPROVE BRAIN FUNCTIONING WITH KIRTAN KRIYA

The Alzheimer’s Research & Prevention Foundation in Tucson, Arizona, has been studying

the effects yoga meditation has on the brain and discovered (confirmed, really) that a certain form of yoga meditation, known as Kirtan Kriya, can have immediate, long-term positive benefits for the brain. Practicing this simple twelve-minute yoga meditation has been shown to bring about the following benefits:

- Improve cerebral blood flow (help you think better).
- Improve blood flow to the posterior cingulated gyrus (improve memory retrieval).
- Increase activity in the frontal lobe (sharpen attention, [concentration](#), and focus).
- Replenish vital neurotransmitters and brain chemicals, such as acetylcholine, norepinephrine, and [dopamine](#) (which help the brain function more smoothly).
- Increase energy levels, improve [sleep](#) quality, reduce [stress](#) (lower cortisol levels).
- Improve both short- and long-term psychological [health](#) and [spiritual](#) well being.

Kirtan Kriya is an ancient yoga practice that involves the combination of focused breath work, singing or chanting (and whispering), finger movements (called “mudras”), and [visualization](#). To perform it properly, you use or activate all of your senses, awakening your brain and rejuvenating your energy.

How Does Kirtan Kriya Work?

According to yogi practitioners, Kirtan Kriya meditation stimulates all of your senses and the areas of the brain associated with them. The use of the tongue stimulates the eighty-four acupuncture meridian points on the roof of the mouth, sending a signal to the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and other areas of the brain. The dense nerve endings in the fingertips, lips, and tongue activate the motor and sensory areas of the brain. Using the fingertips to accompany the sounds activates the occipital lobe of the brain, which improves vision (as in “having a vision”) or clarity of purpose—short- and long-term. Like all meditation, this practice can have powerful and positive effects on brain function.

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Instructions for Performing Kirtan Kriya

Variations exist, but here’s a simple meditation you can do at home:

1. Begin by sitting comfortably with your feet flat on the floor (you can sit in a yoga pose with your legs crossed if you like). Straighten your spine above your hips; breathe naturally, close your eyes.
2. Breathe in and out a few times, until your breath flows easily.
3. Begin by softly chanting “Saa, Taa, Naa, Maa” (together these sounds represent your highest self or true [identity](#)). You can use the familiar children’s song, Mary Had a Little Lamb, using only the first four notes: Mar-y-had-a.
4. Add the finger movements (known as mudras). With your arms [lying](#) loosely against your torso, raise both hands, palm up (you can rest your hands on your lap if you like),

and, one-at-a-time, press and release each fingertip, in sequence, to your thumb. On “Saa,” touch the tip of your index finger to your thumb; on “Taa,” the tip of your middle finger, and so on.

5. As you continue the chants, visualize energy coming down from above (from the universe, or spirit, if you like) into your head, proceeding down through your brain and then dropping and pausing at your “third eye” (considered the site of [intuition](#), located just between your eyes) before beaming the energy out through your third eye (visualize a capital L, if that helps you keep the energy flowing down and through).
6. Imagine the sound you are generating flowing through the same path.
7. Begin by singing the sounds out loud for approximately two minutes (listening and feeling the resonance of the sound as you sing or chant); then sing softly for two minutes; “say” the sound softly to yourself for four minutes; whisper the sounds for two minutes; and then sing out loud again for two minutes. You can use a timer, if you like, but soon you’ll be able to gauge the length that works best for you.

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When you’ve completed the exercise, inhale deeply, drawing air into your lungs, stretch your arms and hands above your head (gently stretch your spine), and then lower them down each side, in a sweeping motion, as you exhale.

Don’t be discouraged if it feels incredibly awkward at first. Over time, your coordination will dramatically improve, and you’ll likely find yourself looking forward to these meditation sessions as a way to start, or refresh, your mind, body, and spirit.

Click on [audio](#) to download an example.

Susan Reynolds is the author of *Fire Up Your Writing Brain: How to Use Proven Neuroscience to Become a More Creative, Productive, and Successful Writer*. She also coauthored *Train Your Brain to Get Happy*, and *Train Your Brain to Get Rich*.

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Susan Reynolds is the author of *Fire Up Your Writing Brain: How to Use Proven Neuroscience to Become a More Creative, Productive, and Successful Writer* and coauthor of *Train Your Brain to Get Happy*.

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In Print:

[Train Your Brain to Get Happy: The Simple Program That Primes Your Grey Cells for Joy, Optimism, and Serenity](#)

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