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Meditation and your Health

Cultivate a Mind-Body Connection to Potentiate Your Life

By Nichole Santoro, Lac LMP

The mind and the body affect each other. If the body is in pain or free of pain there will be consequences for the mind and emotions.

Likewise, the state of the mind affects the physical functioning of our bodies. Most people can think of a time when a stressful event or strong emotion has wrecked their digestion, or a time when fear aroused the need to urinate. These are easy examples that reveal the direct impact of mental activity on the physical body.

What's more, with the right intention, the power of the mind can be harnessed to help heal the body. For one thing, the brain is the number one consumer of glucose (main fuel source of our cells) of all the organs, so by just giving the mind a break from thinking for a while, the body automatically receives more resources. This is where meditation comes in as a tool for learning to slow or quiet the mind effectively so that the body can reintegrate, recharge and rejuvenate.

Generally, a person who is

meditating uses certain techniques, such as a specific posture, focused attention, and an open attitude toward distractions (which means they don't react to thoughts or things happening around them).

With practice and perseverance you may find that you can get more accomplished in 20 minutes of doing and thinking of nothing than you would have in 20 minutes of spinning your mental wheels. Getting back to zero, to square one, to silence—this gives your subconscious the space, time and peace in which to be heard. You will be inspired by the ideas and connections that bubble up when you give yourself the time to reconnect with your true self and your deepest purpose via silence. Save yourself time by learning to hush and listen to your inner voice. Learning to meditate is valuable for these reasons and it is as easy as exercising your power of concentration.

Many varied cultures throughout the ages have developed traditions and cultivated practices of meditation. It is easy to spot some of the common themes that unite them all.

What is Zen Meditation?

If you were to ask a Zen monk what he does in meditation, he would say, “I do nothing, I just sit empty and that's all I do.” The work is in how to achieve a state that is “empty”. A comfortable seated posture is taken and the practice involves any array of mental gymnastics, like counting breaths, staring at focal points, etc. All are used as tools to tame the mind's random thoughts, increase awareness in the present moment, and open up to creative inspiration of the subconscious mind. Simplicity and ritual in daily life are emphasized and mundane tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, are used as means for exercising concentration and meditation. A Zen master smiles, breathes and goes slowly through the world with a clear mind open to all of the possibilities in each moment.

What is Yoga?

The word “Yoga” is a Sanskrit word that means to yoke or bring under control. The aim is to bring the fluctuations of the mind under control by coordinating breath with movement and using various postures to induce deeper body awareness. The body and breath are ultimately vices for the mind to rest upon, meaning that the practice is a tool for shifting focus away from thoughts and onto breath and body. Though it is possible to achieve a clear mind and razor sharp focus on the present moment while doing the physical expression of yoga, the postures are classically meant to be used as a way to clear the mind in preparation for a still meditation. This is why your yoga teacher tells you that Savasana (“Corpse Pose” done at the end of each class) is the most important pose.

Relax! Go to it!

Need to relax? Try using some of these conditions which facilitate the “skill” of relaxation:

- * A quiet environment with as few stimuli as possible
- * A comfortable position with decreased muscle tone
- * Adoption of a passive attitude
- * Returning the focus of concentration gently from distractions as they occur
- * A mental device such as a repeated work, phrase, thought or image; repeated sound, or gazing at an object

How do you know if you are becoming better at this “skill”?

The stages of skill development are:

- * Identification of the relaxed state
- * Recognition of the achievement path
- * Ongoing practice
- * Habit development

Recipe/Craft: Make a Lavender Eye Pillow!

Lavender eye pillows are simple to make, yet luxurious to receive. I have been making lavender eye pillows for my friends and family for years and they are always appreciated. It's been reported back to me that lavender eye pillows have helped people sleep better and reduce tension headaches.

To make a lavender eye pillow you'll need:

- Fabric cut to 8.5" X 8.5" (I like silks and satins, but soft cotton, flannel, and knit also works great.)
- Matching thread
- 3/4 cup of flax seed
- 1/4 cup of dried herbs (My favorite blend is one part lavender to 1/2 part chamomile and 1/2 part wormwood.)
- Sewing machine (optional) Lavender eye pillows can easily be sewn by hand as well. The added time in making them assuredly means a more valued gift.

What is Bio-Feedback?

By Dr. Mohammad Shegeft, ND

Body functions such as heart rate, blood pressure and skin temperature are controlled involuntarily by your nervous system. One technique that can help you gain more control over these normally involuntary functions is called biofeedback. This therapy is used to help prevent or treat conditions including migraines headaches, chronic pain, incontinence, high blood pressure, anxiety and stress management.

The idea behind biofeedback is that, by harnessing the power of your mind and becoming aware of what's going on inside your body, you can gain more control over your health.

Biofeedback can help increase immune responsiveness, water and sodium excretion, blood

circulation to skin, kidneys and gastrointestinal tract, help with peristalsis and resistance to digestive juices, auditory perception and pain tolerance. It can also help decrease muscular tension, heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, perspiration, sugar consumption, cortisone production, cholesterol, triglycerides, and oxidative damage.

Not only can this technique help manage many of our chronic conditions, it is low cost and with a little training, can be done at home. Like many of our skills, Relaxation is a skill which, for many, requires training.

If you are interested in learning more about how bio-feedback can help you achieve the mental and physical balance you desire, please call us to schedule an appointment with Dr. Shegeft today!

