

MIND-BODY MEDICINE PROGRAM

PRACTICE

Daily practice is essential for lasting positive results in health and well-being. Research shows a minimum of about 10 minutes/day can lead to lasting positive changes in the brain. And it doesn't all have to be at once! We recommend taking several 1-5 minute "mini-breaks" throughout the day to strengthen well-being and resilience.

1) RELAXATION RESPONSE

These techniques help us to elicit a physiological shift in our nervous system from stress to balance. This can help reduce pain, anxiety, sleep problems, blood pressure, and anger. Examples of techniques:

a. THREE-PART BREATH

Breathe deeply and gently through the nostrils. On the inhale, feel the belly expand, the ribcage spread, and the chest lift; on the exhale, feel the chest lower, the ribcage and abdomen contract. If it's helpful, count silently and rhythmically 4-in, hold for 2, 6-out, hold for 2, and repeat. Continue for as long as you want.

b. CONSCIOUS RELAXATION

This practice involves using the power of the mind to relax the body. Scan through the body, sending mental messages and visualizing each part of the body softening and releasing. If helpful, you can imagine breathing into each part of the body, gathering up all the tension on the inhale and releasing the tension on the exhale. Don't try to force relaxation, simply invite it and focus on any sense of letting go in the body.

2) POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Recent research in neuroscience has proven that we have neuroplasticity, which means that the brain is constantly changing in response to new information and stimuli. Therefore, what we focus on and think about most gets hardwired in our brain. By intentionally eliciting and focusing on positive mind states, like love, joy, and compassion, we can strengthen this neural circuitry, thus 'hardwiring happiness.'

Examples of techniques:

a. TRACKING WELL-BEING

Get as comfortable as possible. Bring attention into the body and focus on sensations that are pleasant or neutral. Notice where in the body you feel these sensations and simply feel them without thinking or analyzing. If your mind wanders to less comfortable sensations or gets distracted, simply notice and bring it back to the more comfortable sensations. Our minds tend to fixate more on what is wrong. In this practice, we are training our attention to focus on what is ok.

b. RESOURCING

Identify a positive resource, something that brings a sense of security, well-being, or joy. It could be an external resource (such as a good friend, pet, or favorite place), or an internal resource (such as a feeling of relaxation in the body, the breath, or a positive quality you possess). Bring your resource to mind and focus on it as fully as you can with all of your senses. As you focus on it, notice and welcome any positive sensations that arise in the body. Practice as long as you like to feel better.

c. SELF-COMPASSION

Adopt an attitude of gentleness and care towards yourself. Acknowledge with unconditional acceptance the places in you that are hurt, lonely, afraid, confused. Allow yourself to witness them with a mind that is full of care and compassion. Let go of judgment and criticism. Let go of trying to change anything. Just be with what is here. And if helpful, you may place a hand over heart and imagine breathing in healing, loving energy on the inhale and letting go on the exhale. With every in-breath open your whole being to receiving this healing energy.

3) MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness means paying attention to present moment experience (thoughts, feelings, sensations, sights, sounds) with unbiased curiosity. With mindfulness, we are not trying to change our experience. Instead, we are shifting our response to it, from habitual reactivity to non-judgmental awareness. Through regular practice, we can gain greater insight into our experience and learn to be more present and calm in the midst of any circumstance. Examples of techniques:

a. MINDFUL CHECK-IN

Find a relaxed but alert position. Close your eyes or have a soft gaze and turn your attention inward. Become aware of the inner space – mentally, physically, emotionally. Notice what most wants your attention. Greet whatever arises with unbiased curiosity. Let go of trying to change anything and practice being a friendly witness of experience as it is.

b. TEN BREATHS

Take 10 mindful breaths. Count each inhale/exhale pair as one breath. Pay attention to the sensations of the body breathing, such as the feel of the breath entering/ leaving the nostrils, rising/falling in the chest, expanding/contracting the belly, or the feel of the whole body breathing. When your attention wanders, patiently bring it back to the breath. Let the breath be an anchor for your mind.

c. CONTACT POINTS MEDITATION

Use sensations of contact as the object of your attention (such as the feet on the floor or back against the chair). You may spend a few minutes in one area then move to another area or stay in one area the whole time. Let go of thinking about sensations, just feel the sensations of contact. When attention wanders, patiently return to the contact point. If the experience gets overwhelming, shift your attention to a positive resource or relaxation practice.

d. FIVE THINGS

Open your senses (such as sight, sound, smell) to your environment and notice five things. Take a few moments with each. Not thinking about it or analyzing it, just noticing it with curiosity. For example, you may notice the light emanating from a lampshade or the sound of a heater humming. This is a helpful practice for grounding yourself in the present moment, especially when your thoughts and feelings seem overwhelming.

4) YOGA

Yoga, commonly known in the Western world as a set of postures, is more deeply understood from ancient teachings as a practice of self-healing and self-realization. The primary practice of yoga is to restore wholeness to the entire body and mind. This practice involves breathing exercises, postures, sensory awareness, and meditation.

Modern day research has shown yoga to be beneficial for relieving muscle tension, chronic pain and insomnia. Yoga has also been known to contribute to the healing of hypertension, heart disease, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, menopause, arthritis and addictions. More significantly, a steady practice of yoga is powerful for releasing held patterns of anxiety, depression and anger commonly related to both acute and chronic disease.

To learn more about yoga, we suggest attending a beginner, adaptive, gentle, or therapeutic yoga class, purchasing a book or DVD and/or checking out web resources.

To schedule a Mind-Body appointment in General Internal Medicine, call 301-295-0105

To schedule a Mind-Body appointment in the Warrior Clinic, call 301-400-1012

THANK YOU