Using Mindfulness to Live Well

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Stress is...

- the perception of a threat to our physical or psychological well-being
- coupled with the belief that our resources are inadequate to cope with this threat.
- worrying – engaging in the what-ifs – can make us feel stressed
Fight or Flight Response

• When we feel stressed we have a physiological response in the body. We are hard wired for this stress response. It is evolutionary and useful when we are facing a real physical threat.
Fight or Flight Reactivity

- The autonomic nervous system (ANS):
  - The sympathetic branch of the ANS is activated in response to stress, while the parasympathetic branch is suppressed.
Sympathetic Nervous System Activation

- Increased
  - Heart Rate
  - Blood Pressure
  - Breathing Rate
  - Muscle Tension

- Decreased
  - Digestive Function
  - Immune Function
  - Reproductive Function
Stress Response Activation

• We can actually turn on the stress response simply by thinking of something stressful. Stress hormones get released and we have the same physiological response as if we were actually under threat.

Work With the Mind

• If the mind is an important factor in determining if something is experienced as “stressful”...where is the mind?...and what is it up to?
Mind Time Travel

- The mind is often “rehashing,” or “rehearsing.” It’s either in the past or in the future, and rarely are we right here now.
Stress Response

• When the stress response is frequently and/or chronically activated, it can become more damaging than the stressor itself.
Impact of Stress

- Research shows the negative impact of stress on health outcomes in cancer patients.
Stress Reduction

- We can reduce the negative impact of stress by learning to regulate the sympathetic nervous system and promote the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system.
Parasympathetic Nervous System

• The parasympathetic nervous system regulates the relaxation response.
• We are hard-wired for both responses.
• And importantly, we have some control over the autonomic nervous system.
The Relaxation Response

- We can activate the parasympathetic nervous system through certain behaviors, including deep, slow breathing, yoga and other forms of mindful movement, meditation, prayer, laughter, art, etc.
Parasympathetic Nervous System Activation

• Decreased
  • Heart Rate
  • Blood Pressure
  • Breathing Rate
  • Muscle Tension

• Increased
  • Immune functioning
  • Reproductive functioning
Stress Reduction

• Cultivating mindfulness can help us reduce the negative impact of stress.
What is Mindfulness?

• Moment to moment, non-judgmental awareness.

• Cultivated by paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment.
Paying Attention

• Cultivating mindfulness can help us reappraise our situation and learn to cope more effectively with stress.

A Taste of Mindfulness

• Brief practice of paying attention to the present moment, without judgment, with an open and kind attitude
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

- Developed as an outpatient program for heterogeneous patient populations over 30 years ago by Jon Kabat-Zinn and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts.
- Now offered at more than 700 institutions
- Thomas Jefferson University Hospital’s MBSR program founded 1996.
- Typical course: 8 weeks, 2.5 hour classes, plus an all-day silent retreat.
Benefits of Mindfulness

- Many published studies have documented the benefits of MBSR and other mindfulness-based programs:
  - decreased stress symptoms
  - decreased anxiety
  - decreased depressive symptoms
  - improved sleep quality
  - enhanced emotional processing
  - enhanced coping with the effects of chronic illness
  - enhanced immune and brain functioning
Benefits of Mindfulness

• Positive benefits for cancer patients including significant improvements in mood, stress-symptoms, sleep, health related quality of life, immune functioning and even brain function.
Benefits of Mindfulness


Benefits of Mindfulness

- Demonstrated improvements in the immune profiles of people with breast or prostate cancer, which correspond with decreased depressive symptoms


Deep Relaxation
Practice: Using the breath

• Learning to activate the relaxation response through the breath.
• The breath is available to us in each moment.
• Relaxing sighs:
  • Inhale through the nose.
  • Exhale with through an open mouth, sighing gently.
  • Repeat as needed.
• Deep/Diaphragmatic breathing.
Practice: Mindful Attention to Body Sensations

• In the body scan we systematically move our attention through various parts of the body, exploring what is already here.

• The quality of the attention is important – it is open, curious, nonjudgmental and accepting of what is already here in the present moment.
Resources

- The Mindfulness Institute, Jefferson-Myrna Brind Center of Integrative Medicine.

  www.jeffersonhospital.org/mindfulness