



The Mind-Body Fitness Connection

BY Terri West

There is nothing more empowering than taking the body on a mindful, physical journey.

It's easy to become complacent and forget that fitness is cause and effect. When it comes to working out, many of us wander mindlessly through the gym - machine to machine, weight rack to weight rack - failing to consciously connect with our workout.

It is important to note that when you begin a workout program, you are making a conscious physiological change to your body that will yield results far beyond a nice-looking physique; it will ensure longevity and wellbeing in overall daily life.

Though there are several ways to connect with your workout, yoga, meditation, and pilates can help you connect with your body's physical sensations through breathing and elongation of the muscles. Increased flexibility will stimulate a relaxed body and mind, and the tranquility that evolves will serve as a refreshing physiological reaction. That's the mind-body-fitness connection.

When exercising, consider the similarities between yourself and the exotic lotus flower that grows in murky water and rises above the surface, rebirthed, to bloom with beauty despite its previous state. Similarly, a workout can seem daunting and muddied with layers of negative self-talk that can make your fitness goals seem unattainable. By challenging yourself, however, and freeing yourself of negative thinking, you can flourish and exceed your own expectations.

For example, a bodybuilder spends months piling on lean muscle mass preparing for a competition. He constantly critiques his body, offering himself constructive feedback from a healthy mindset. He tirelessly constructs his body by lifting weights, eating clean foods, hydrating regularly, and getting plenty of sleep. Six weeks before the competition, observing body fat and water retention, he challenges himself even further, chiseling away at his structure by decreasing carbohydrates, performing high-rep weight-lifting, and increasing cardiovascular activity.

Ultimately, working out should not just strengthen our body but our mind as well. Our resolve should be to be present and avoid negative influences like late-night eating, smoking, drinking, and succumbing to peer pressure.

There's truth to the adage that the body is a "temple." There are certain things that can be done to curtail potential problems: Avoid filling the body with toxins and other impurities that can cause cancer and other diseases. Consume antioxidants, like berries, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds which help rid the body of free radicals.

Mind-body awareness can yield lifelong effects. Have compassion for your body.

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