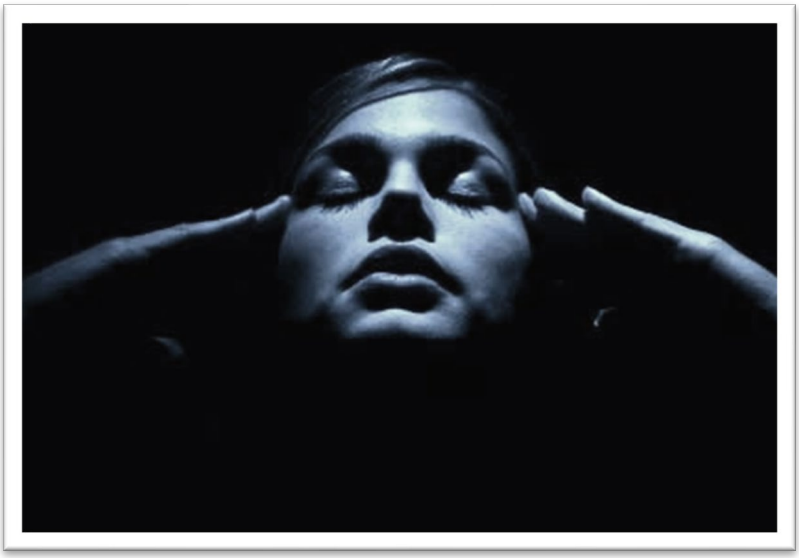
Mind Body Massage



The latest evidence-based research that points to massage therapy as being useful in combating the negative effects of stress that will help the person connect with the body they were meant to have that they might have forgot about

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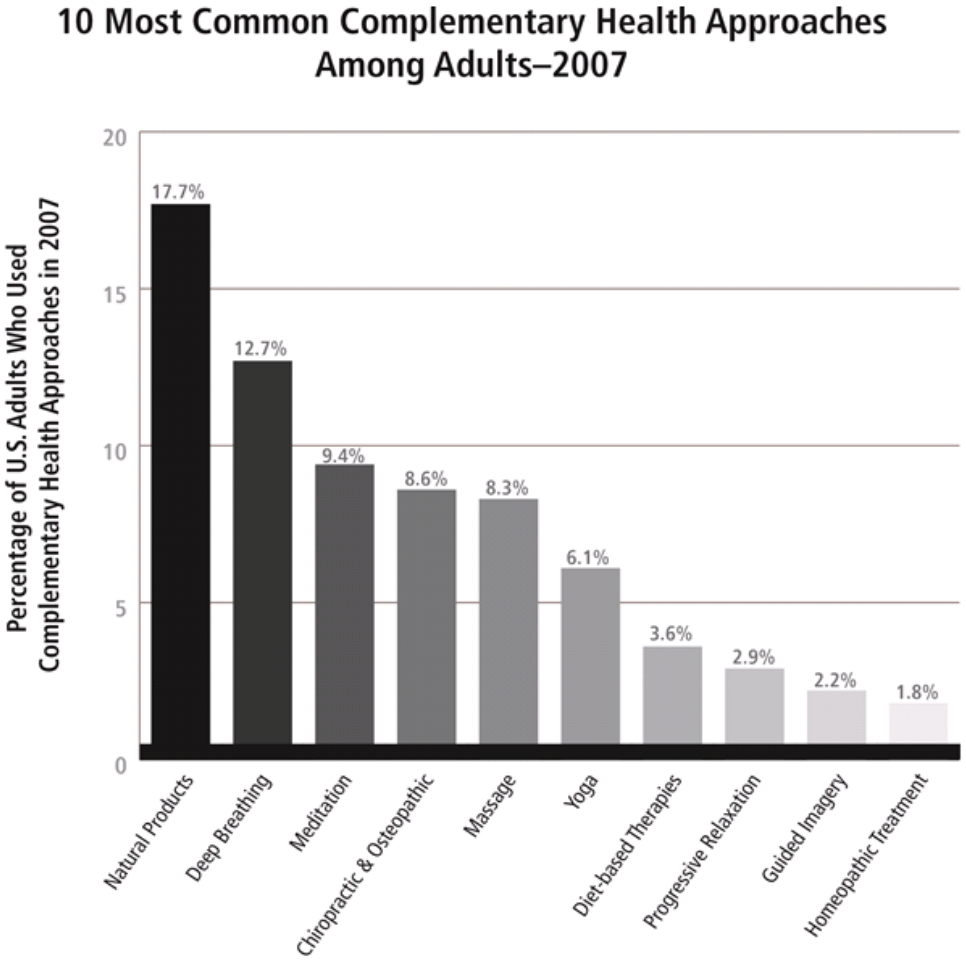
Mind Body Massage

Relax the mind and the body will follow

Belief systems of Mind Body Medicine

Current common knowledge of Mind Body Medicine is “complementary and alternative medicine” that can be used with, a replacement for Western, or conventional medicine that the physical body functions and symptoms can be influenced or affected by the mind. According to The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), many people use non-mainstream approaches along with conventional treatments. And the boundaries between complementary and conventional medicine overlap and change with time. For example, guided imagery and massage, both once considered complementary or alternative, are used regularly in some hospitals to help with pain management.[1]

NCCAM generally uses the term “complementary health approaches” when discussing the practices and products they study for various health conditions. When thinking about their research portfolio, they often find it useful to consider these approaches as generally falling into one of two subgroups—*natural products or mind and body practices.*



Source: Barnes PM, Bloom B, Nahin RL. Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Adults and Children: United States, 2007. *CDC National Health Statistics Report #12*. 2008.

Natural Products group includes a variety of products, such as herbs (also known as botanicals), vitamins and minerals, and probiotics. They are widely marketed, readily available to consumers, and often sold as dietary supplements.

Mind and body practices include a large and diverse group of procedures or techniques administered or taught by a trained practitioner or teacher. According to the 2007 NHIS, several mind and body practices ranked among the top complementary health approaches used by adults.

The mind and body practices most commonly used included deep breathing, meditation, chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation, massage, yoga, progressive relaxation, and guided imagery. However, some approaches may not neatly fit into either of these groups—for example, Ayurvedic medicine from India, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, and naturopathy.

In December 2008, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) and the National Center for Health Statistics (part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) released new findings on Americans' use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). The findings are from the 2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), an annual in-person survey of Americans regarding their health and illness-related experiences. The CAM section gathered information on 23,393 adults aged 18 years or older and 9,417 children aged 17 years and under.

Physicians are deeply divided over the efficacy of complementary health approaches. Many believe that such treatments have a place within everyday medical treatment; others feel that prescribing or condoning them is not responsible medicine. Whatever their own belief, doctors are regularly faced with patients who are using or who ask for complementary or alternative treatments, and many physicians are trying to keep an open mind.

A recent study done in 2011 on conventional medical providers recommend unconventional medicine led by Aditi Nerurkar, MD, Assistant Medical Director at the Cheng and Tsui Center for Integrative Care at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston found that nearly 1 in 30 Americans (2.9% of survey respondents), representing 6.36 million Americans, reported using "mind/body therapies" (MBTs) in the prior 12 months because their provider recommended that they do so (compared with 15.5% who self-referred for such therapies). Deep-breathing exercises were the most commonly used provider-recommended MBT (84.4%), followed by meditation (49.3%), yoga (22.6%), progressive muscle relaxation (19.9%), and guided imagery (13.9%); similar trends were seen in the self-referred MBT group.[2]

The Mind and Stress

Stress is simply a reaction to a stimulus that disturbs our mental or physical equilibrium. The hypothalamus sounds an alarm to the rest of the body called the Hypothalamic Pituitary Axis. The hypothalamus stimulates the pituitary gland, which secretes adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH). ACTH stimulates the adrenal glands to produce the hormone corticosteroid and then the adrenal cortex releases stress hormones called cortisol. The adrenal medulla secretes the hormone adrenaline which gets the body ready for a fight or flight response.

When people are under constant (or perceived) stress, their bodies react as though they are always in some kind of danger. The fight-or-flight response constantly stays on, and the relaxation response isn't fully activated. During periods of increased stress, cortisol suppresses the immune system and inflammatory pathways, rendering the body more susceptible to disease. This constant barrage of hormones can lead to other health conditions. These include anxiety, depression, digestive problems, heart disease, sleep problems, weight gain, and memory and concentration impairment.[3]

Everyone suffers from stress at one time or another—from infants to elderly adults. Stress also affects people in different ways, in the way that a person reacts to a stressful situation and the emotions that it evokes. Some people seem to be more affected by stress than others. While some people can be prone to stress and find many daily tasks and events stressful, others appear to cope better with pressure and stressful situations. Just as negative events can trigger stress, good, happy times can induce stress, too.

Stress can also be broken into two main categories. *External* which would include major life changes, environment, unpredictable events, or workplace related. Or *Internal* that which is self-induced like fears, thinking negatively or even setting unrealistic expectations.

According to the American Institute of Stress, job stress is a leading cause of stress in America. They cite two studies that provide statistics about the stress of working Americans—one by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and one study called the Attitudes in the American Work place VII. Those studies provided some interesting statistics. For example:

- 40 percent of workers reported their job was very or extremely stressful
- 25 percent of those surveyed consider their job to be the No. 1 stressor in their lives
- 80 percent of workers feel stress on the job, and nearly half say they need help learning how to manage stress[4,5]

Stress and the Powers of the Placebo

People would agree and most research supports the idea that prolonged stress is detrimental to the body except for Psychologist Kelly McGonigal. According to a study by the University of Wisconsin-Madison interviewing almost 30,000 people. During the study people were asked how much stress have you experienced in the last year and do you believe that stress is harmful to your health. The second part of the 8 year study was to check public death records of the participants.

Of the people who reported a large amount of stress and believed that stress is harmful to your health had a 43% increase risk of dying. The other group of people that had a high amount of stress but did not believe stress was harmful had the lowest risk of dying in the study including people who had almost no stress. The researchers estimated in an 8 year period 182,000 died prematurely, not from stress, but from the belief that stress is bad for them. Dr. McGonigal believes how we think and act can transform the experience of stress. She feels when we see stress as helpful we create the biology of courage and when we choose to connect with others socially during stress we can create resilience to handle life's challenges.[6]

The Mind Body in Response to Stress

One school of thought or sub division of Mind Body Medicine can be broken down into physical symptoms in response to day to day stress and how relaxation techniques are helpful in bringing the body back into a more balanced state by reducing the levels of stress hormones in the body, so that your immune system is better able to fight off illness. Studies have shown during the relaxation response our blood pressure lowers, blood sugar levels balance out, breathing rate decreases, brain function becomes more optimal, regenerates cells better, slows aging on a genetic expression level.

But management of stress is only a part of what a person can do when they start integrating their thoughts and feelings with their body. Stress management is more about getting rid of emotional distress and mental anxiety. Cognitive behavioral therapy when administered by a professional has been shown to help people recognize and change harmful thoughts.

Another sub division of Mind Body Medicine is physical symptoms due to unresolved emotions in response to stress and with counseling or self-help techniques understand the underlying cause in addition with relaxation techniques have been proven effective in chronic pain.

A Michigan doctor that provides treatment due to unresolved emotions in response to stress is Howard Schubiner, MD. He is currently performing the first randomized, controlled research study in the field of Mind Body Syndrome or Tension Myositis Syndrome for individuals diagnosed with fibromyalgia. Dr. Schubiner is the founder and director of the Mind Body

Medicine Program at Providence Hospital in Michigan. This program uses the most current research methodologies to treat individuals who suffer from the Mind Body Syndrome (MBS) or Tension Myositis Syndrome (TMS) as described by Dr. John Sarno, MD.[7, 8]

Dr. Sarno states that he has successfully treated over ten thousand patients at the Rusk Institute by educating them on his beliefs of a psychological and emotional basis to their pain and symptoms. Sarno's theory is, in part, that the pain or symptoms are an unconscious "distraction" to aid in the repression of deep unconscious emotional issues. Sarno believes that when patients think about what may be upsetting them in their unconscious they can defeat their minds strategy to repress these powerful emotions in this manner, the symptoms are seen for what they are and the symptoms then serve no purpose, and they go away.

The Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine further complicates this by saying that their treatment model takes into account that physical health is influenced by thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and conversely, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can be influenced by physical symptoms.[9]

Cellular change

To make matters worse science has determined that now it appears that our diets and lifestyles can change the expression of our genes and neural pathways and brain synapses.

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Neuroplasticity allows the neurons (nerve cells) in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment. A recent example of this is the TV commercial you might have seen for the website on brain training games called: http://www.lumosity.com/.

Epigenetics is defined as mechanisms of gene expression that can be maintained across cell divisions, and thus the life of the organism, without changing the DNA sequence by influencing a network of chemical switches within our cells collectively known as the epigenome. This new understanding may lead us to potent new medical therapies. Epigenetic cancer therapy, for one, already seems to be yielding promising results. Recent research has identified important epigenetic mechanisms that play essential roles in normal and abnormal development. Of special significance for psychology are the findings that environmental and psychosocial factors can change the epigenome.[10]

Massage Therapy and Negative Effects of Stress

In the health and wellness field many are aware of the two most publicized benefits of massage therapy, relaxation and increased blood circulation. But there is so much more.

Tiffany Field, Ph.D. is recognized as the premier expert in, and advocate for touch research. In 1992 she established the Touch Research Institute (TRI) at the University of Miami, School of Medicine, with a start-up grant from Johnson & Johnson. The research that put Field, and TRI, on the map showed that massage caused premature infants to gain more weight than their non-massaged peers, thereby improving the infants' health and potentially saving millions of dollars each year in health-care costs. That study was published in 1988.

Today, more than 100 studies and 350 medical-journal articles later, the Touch Research Institute published a 2012 study in the journal of Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice showed that adults with rheumatoid arthritis reported a decrease in pain, as well as greater grip strength and range of motion in wrists in large upper joints. These results were achieved after receiving regular moderate-pressure massages during a four-week period.[11]

Dr. Field and the Touch Research Institute have found that massage therapy enhances attentiveness, alleviates depressive symptoms, reduces pain, reduces stress hormones and improves immune function. Many interesting studies the group has done with massage therapy range from Anorexia, Anxiety, Back pain, Blood pressure, Burns, Depression, Elderly, Headaches, Multiple Sclerosis, Pregnancy, Premenstrual Syndrome and Sexual Abuse.[12]

Common knowledge in research during stress is increased cortisol production; a landmark study on reduced cortisol levels was performed in 2005 by the Touch Research Institute. The study determined the stress-alleviating effects (decreased cortisol) and the activating effects (increased serotonin and dopamine) of massage therapy on a variety of medical conditions and stressful experiences.[13]

In 2011 a study that was funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine compared the effects of Structural massage and Relaxation massage on chronic low back pain. It found that patients receiving both types of massage therapy may be effective for treatment of chronic back pain.[14]

Additionally, a study done at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in 2011 found that general massage effects on cortisol is generally very small and, in most cases, not statistically distinguishable from zero. As such, it cannot be the cause of massage therapies well-established and statistically larger beneficial effects on anxiety, depression, and pain.[15]

One of the latest studies conducted in 2012 that is receiving much attention is by Mark H. Rapaport, MD., the chairman of psychiatry and behavioral neurosciences at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. The study included 53 adults, 29 of whom had a 45-minute Swedish massage

either once a week or twice a week for a five-week period. The other 24 adults underwent a similar massage schedule, but with a light-touch massage instead.

Researchers found that compared to the light-touch massage, study participants who underwent the Swedish massage twice a week experienced decreases in cortisol levels, increased oxytocin levels (also known as the "trust hormone"), and slight evidence of increased white blood cell counts. They also experienced decreased levels of the hormone arginine vasopressin, which is linked with cortisol rises.[16]

Mind Body Massage

Armed with the tools of an understanding of how the stress response, fight or flight happens in the body, the knowledge that the mind can change the internal environment of our physiology along with people having the ability to absorb internal or external stressors and with ongoing research that points to massage therapy as being useful in combating the negative effects of stress, how might we combine this knowledge to become even more effective? In many cases, people that were untreatable or no signs of a reduction of symptoms seem to improve.

I first became aware of the Mind Body connection many years ago by putting into practice Mindful meditation after reading Wherever You Go, There You Are by Jon Kabet-Zinn, Ph.D. He is a Professor of Medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society. In his book he states, “Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to be present; inviting ourselves to interface with this moment in full awareness, with the intention to embody as best we can an orientation of calmness, mindfulness, and equanimity right here and right now.”[17]

My understanding is that being mindful, ever though it is classified as meditation is really a tool to become more focused on what a person is doing in the present moment.

The mind creates over 50,000 thoughts a day. It is commonly referred to as the Monkey Mind, which is defined as a mind that jumps from thought to thought like a monkey jumps from tree to tree. The monkey mind is not content with existing in the present moment, but rather is constantly distracted by the thoughts that pass through. Dr. Zinn feels that by practicing being in the present moment we have moments of mindfulness, sometimes more sometimes less, but over time the monkey mind can be trained to be quiet.

If the monkey mind is left to run free all of the time it can keep us from performing a particular task we set out to do. An example would be “writers block” or having trouble falling asleep at night. The worst aspect of a free running monkey mind is lack of awareness of our bodies. We will conveniently build up a tolerance for things in order to make our lives easier. Physically ignoring the pain of an injury will eventually cause the area to become hyper-sensitive when the area is addressed by the therapist.

The simplest path to being more mindful or self-awareness is focused breathing. This will temporarily suppress the monkey mind. This can be used during any activity at any part of the day or night. The one thing to remember is that the monkey mind will only remain quiet for an instant. When the monkey mind starts racing around, just allow it to do its thing and eventually as it slows down come back to the focused breathing. Try this simple exercise:

As you breathe in, silently say to yourself the number one, allow a momentary pause and then exhale silently saying the number one. On the next breath say the number two and so on.

What has happened is the mind has something to focus on which quiets the monkey mind. The mind is not worried about future or past events or over analyzing; it is in the present moment.

The most important part of this is whatever we are doing when we practice this, we are more aware of ourselves with no distraction and we are breathing, that's it. The more a person is aware, the easier it is to react to something that needs our attention. The more we practice this life generally slows down. People have even commented to me that during my lectures I tend to speak slower than I did before, taking a breath in between sentences which ultimately made my presentations easier to understand and more enjoyable.

As I continued to practice "moments of mindfulness" the most amazing thing happened. I became more aware of external events as they happened in my life and I had a realization that I was in control for the first time of my emotions and actions. Now there are times where this is not the case, like being in a car accident and feeling angry that the other person did not see me and stop before they hit me. For the most part, before I react, something inside of me says how would you like to react to this, it is your decision.

It reminds me of working on a computer with multiple programs open at the same time. Now you can only focus working on one program at time, but the other ones are still running in the background using processing power. An example might be driving your car going to work, in your mind you are thinking about what to have for dinner, an argument you had, or why is traffic so bad today. By not being focused on the task at hand you are using precious resources and you run the risk of being distracted so much that you miss your turn or even worst, an accident.

With me working on a computer, as in life I try to focus on the task at hand and when finished, then I can address the next task. Why try to do ten things poorly when you can do one or two things really well?

This became clear to me working with a woman that I have known for years being her therapist trying to address her physical problems all stemming from repetitive strain injury. During our many sessions she confided to me about the stresses she had dealing with her family, her job and at times was more than she could bare but she managed to always make it though, only to have something else pop up. She always had multiple programs running all of the time.

One day while treating her I finished working on her shoulder and then moved to her hip to access the joint range of motion. Without using any force to speak of while grasping her leg, she startled me by jerking her leg back telling me no, it doesn't want to go that way! I tried again being oh so gentle but she did not want any part of it, her hip became rigid. Even to this day it is difficult for her to relax that hip. When I questioned her about her sore hip she was not aware of any injury in the past but was afraid to move it too much at the risk of making it worst.

I came to three conclusions about her. First, she was so unaware of her hip injury that when I tried to move her leg it shocked her. A good part of her adult life was spent being reactive instead of proactive. Second, I spoke to an associate of Dr. Schubiner, Lisa Joy Gordon about her and she told me that it was a classic case of dealing with everyone else's stuff so you do not have to address your own. She was so busy putting out everyone else's fires she forgot about her own. And third, even though that hip was sore from lack of mobility and sitting too much, the hip really was not the only issue, it was her thoughts about her limitations that were the real issue.

The case with this woman may be extreme but it taught me to add a few questions about stress on a person's intake form or the Hidden Stress Screening Test. If the questions are answered with a high level of stress with the person, then I include stress relieving exercises as homework and a referral to a licensed professional that can address these issues. If the person during the session appears to be out of touch or unaware of certain areas of their body I stop what I'm doing and show them mindful exercises or progressive relaxation (These exercises and the Hidden Stress Screening Test can be found at the end of this manual).

Three areas of the human body that are consistently found to lack awareness by the person are the Neck, the Jaw, and the Stomach. Addressing these highly sensitive areas will go a long way with helping the person connect with the body they were meant to have that they might have forgot about.

Working "With" Instead of Working "On"

While having a conversation with Gladys Gonzalez, LMT, LCSW, Research Support Coordinator for the Department of Pediatrics at the Mailman Center and the Touch Research Institute, she reminded me that when dealing with people with a history of abuse or hypersensitivity it is always the best practice to receive permission to work on a particular area of the body first.

There are two approaches applied by therapists: "working *on* the person" and "working *with* the person." Working *on* the person pre-supposes that the person cannot help themselves;

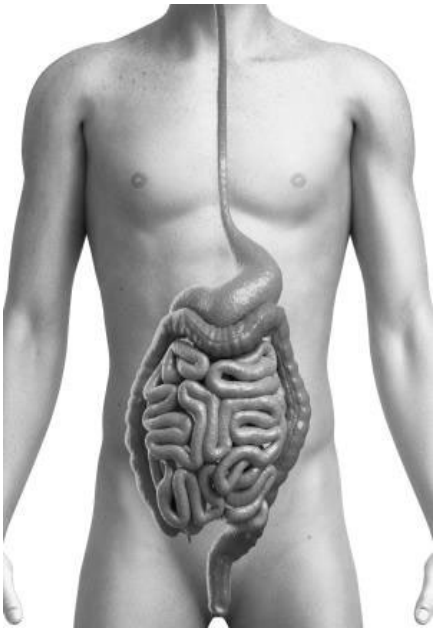
working *with* the person pre-supposes that the person has some practical responsibility for, and ability to change, their own condition. Every massage stroke is one or the other: doing it *to* the person or doing it *with* them; it is either forcing them to relax or helping them discover that they are contracting and teaching them to relax when, until then, they had forgotten how.

Done passively, tissue manipulation evokes (calls forward) a gradual deepening of the person's awareness and control of their muscular actions, but this deepening is greatly limited by the lack of sensory feedback that active movement provides. Tissue manipulation done with active participation by the person evokes more than relaxation and flexibility. Because the person has enhanced awareness of the connection between sensation and movement, their control of movement (e.g., strength, resting tension level, and coordination) improves much faster. This tissue manipulation done with active participation by the person is called "Dynamic Extension Release".

The Second Brain

Embedded in the wall of the gut, the enteric nervous system (ENS) has long been known to control digestion. Now it seems it also plays an important role in our physical and mental well-being. For decades, researchers have known of the connection between the brain and the gut.

Anxiety often causes nausea and diarrhea, and depression can change appetite. The connection may have been established, but scientists thought communication was one way: it traveled from the brain to the gut, and not the other way around. Research has found that more than half of psychiatric complaints were associated with problems in the gut and in some patients, have been remedied by using solely high-dose probiotics, along with normalizing eating.



UCLA researchers now have the first evidence that bacteria ingested in food can affect brain function in humans. In an early proof-of-concept study of healthy women, they found that women who regularly consumed beneficial bacteria known as probiotics through yogurt showed altered brain function, both while in a resting state and in response to an emotion-recognition task.[18]

The study showed that healthy women who consumed a drink with four added probiotic strains twice daily for four weeks showed significantly altered brain functioning on an MRI brain scan. The women's brains were scanned while they looked at photos of angry or sad faces, and then asked to match those with other faces showing similar emotions. Those who had consumed the probiotic drink showed significantly lower brain activity in the neural networks that help drive responses to sensory and emotional behavior.

Another aspect of the ENS that has intrigued researchers is the reverse nature of the signaling between the brain and the ENS through the Vagus nerve. Traditionally, the brain is expected to signal the rest of the body. However, research has found that the ENS more commonly sends signals to the brain. Over 90% of the nerve fibers in the vagus nerve carry information from the gut to the brain. As a result of these signals sent from the stomach to the brain, sadness, stress, memory, learning, and decision-making are affected, reports a recent article in Psychology Today[19]. This reverse signaling may explain why the idea of a "gut instinct" may actually be a scientific fact.

Researchers are also taking a new look at stomach upset. For example, the enteric nervous system reacts promptly to changes in the availability of serotonin. Most of the body's serotonin is produced by the digestive system. That is why mood-altering drugs that change serotonin levels are likely to affect the digestive system as well as regulation of appetite, and sleep.

Pierre Pallardy, D.O., is certain that the roots of depression lie in the stomach. Pallardy states that although depression is first and foremost a state of mind, "it is also an abdominal condition." He believes that scientific evidence points to a symbiotic relationship between the two brains. When the 'first' brain is distressed, the abdomen suffers, disappointments, disagreements, or any form of emotional upheaval will "tie the abdomen in knots." Negative thoughts weigh heavily on the abdomen and disrupt its proper functioning.[20]

Neurogasteroenterology is now one of the cutting edge fields in the world of science. Although we are only just beginning to understand the interactions between the two brains, already the gut offers a window into the pathology of the brain, says Pankaj Pasricha, M.D., at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

A Bundle of Nerves

Along with connecting the first and second brain the Vagus nerve lowers the heart rate and controls the function of the parasympathetic nervous system. To stimulate this area will go a long way in jump starting the relaxation response; this can be achieved by simply breathing.

- Start by having the person place their hand on the stomach just below the sternum and become aware of breathing. Notice the way the air feels as it travels in through the nostrils or mouth and then out.
- Take a long, slow deep breath inward; bringing the breath all the way down into the abdomen (they should feel their hand rising as they inhale.)
- When they have come to the end of a comfortable inhale, pause briefly and then exhale slowly.
- Continue this exercise taking 5–10 slow, deep inhalations and exhalations. It is important to keep the breathing slow and rhythmic.

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Mindfulness Exercises

The development of mindfulness brings about mental and emotional freedom and a decrease in suffering. Mindfulness can help by reminding us that pain is not "the enemy." Pain is the body's naturally evolved ways of letting us know that something needs attention, and can play a vital role in maintaining physical well-being. It's easy to see how important pain is when we consider what life would be without it. There are medical conditions in which people can't experience pain, and those people find that life is very hard indeed.

Imagine, for example, trying to warm yourself at a fire without being able to tell when your skin was overheating: serious burns would be a distinct possibility. So we can see that pain is an essential part of being human. Of course when pain goes on for a long time, or when it's particularly intense, it can be hard to remember that it evolved as a helpful function, and it's easy to see it as an enemy. The meditative approaches outlined below are particularly effective because it "decouples" the physical sensations of pain from mental and emotional processes that heighten suffering. Pain comes to be seen as "just another sensation" and the fear of pain is significantly reduced.

Practice

Begin by practicing for 10 seconds, 1 to 3 times a day; build up to 5 minutes each day or longer, you can practice in any position that allows you to feel physically supported while also staying alert and awake.

Your mind will inevitably wander. That's not a problem; it's part of the process. When you notice your mind wandering, let it point you back to the breath. Each time you notice the mind daydreaming, or planning, or worrying, or whatever the mind does – that is an opportunity to cultivate awareness, and bring your focus back to the present moment experience of breathing in and breathing out.

The intention of this practice is to turn your attention to the breath, notice when the mind wanders, and bring your attention back to the breath.

There are a few different ways to focus on the breath; choose the one that feels right to you.

The first involves labeling the breath. As you inhale, say in your own mind "Inhale." As you exhale, say in your own mind "Exhale."

The second approach is to focus your attention on the sensations of your breath. For example, you might notice the flow of the breath in and out of your nostrils. Or you could focus on feeling your belly expand when you breathe in, and release when your breath out. Let yourself notice whatever sensations of breathing are present.

The last approach is to count your breathing cycles. Each time you exhale, that counts as one cycle. So with your next exhalation, you would mentally count "one." With the second exhalation, "two." With the third exhalation, "three." Continue counting until you reach 10; then begin again at 1. If your mind wanders and you lose count, simply begin again at one.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing specific muscle groups and then relaxing them to create awareness of tension and relaxation. It is termed progressive because it proceeds through all major muscle groups, relaxing them one at a time, and eventually leads to total muscle relaxation and better awareness.

Practice

Assume a comfortable position. You may lie down; loosen any tight clothing, close your eyes and be quiet if possible, or record the instructions beforehand and play them back. Assume a passive attitude. Focus on yourself and on achieving relaxation in specific body muscles. Tune out all other thoughts. Tense and relax each muscle group as follows:

- Forehead - Wrinkle your forehead; try to make your eyebrows touch your hairline for five seconds. Relax.
- Eyes and nose - Close your eyes as tightly as you can for five seconds. Relax.
- Lips, cheeks and jaw - Draw the centers of your mouth back and grimace for five seconds. Relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your face.
- Hands - Extend your arms in front of you. Clench your fists tightly for five seconds. Relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your hands.
- Forearms - Extend your arms out against an invisible wall and push forward with your hands for five seconds. Relax.
- Upper arms - Bend your elbows. Tense your biceps for five seconds. Relax. Feel the tension leave your arms.
- Shoulders - Shrug your shoulders up to your ears for five seconds. Relax.
- Back - Arch your back off the floor for five seconds. Relax. Feel the anxiety and tension disappearing.
- Stomach - Tighten your stomach muscles for five seconds. Relax.
- Hips and buttocks - Tighten your hip and buttock muscles for five seconds. Relax.
- Thighs - Tighten your thigh muscles by pressing your legs together as tightly as you can for five seconds. Relax.
- Feet - Bend your ankles toward your body as far as you can for five seconds. Relax.
- Toes - Curl your toes as tightly as you can for five seconds. Relax.

Focus on any muscles which may still be tense. If any muscle remains tense, tighten and relax those specific muscles three or four more times. Fix the feeling of relaxation in your mind. Resolve to repeat the process again.

Mind-Body Relaxation

Stress and tension are the main preventable causes of unhappiness and illness. They poison your relationships, self-esteem, health, and happiness. They are also obstacles to change because when you're tense, you tend to repeat what is familiar and wrong, instead of what's new and right.

Mind-body relaxation is not just a way to relax; it is a way to improve your life. You relax by letting go of negative traits that make you tense. Relaxation is all about letting go. You let go of tension, the past, and negative thinking that contribute to your unhappiness. Letting go is what elevates mind-body relaxation from a technique to a coping skill.

Relax your body and your mind will follow. The key to relaxation is – do not try to relax your mind. Your body and mind relax as a unit. Since it's hard to relax your mind, the approach of mind-body relaxation is to relax your body first. If you relax your body, your mind will follow because they are in constant communication. Try this simple one-minute exercise.

Practice

- **Sit in a chair with both feet resting comfortably on the ground. Imagine your legs and feet becoming heavy. Mentally scan the soles of your feet, and feel each point where your soles touch the ground.**
- **It's important that you feel your skin touching the ground. Don't try to visualize it – *feel* it. Do this for a few breaths before moving on.**
- **Next, imagine your whole body becoming heavy and loose. Mentally scan the points where your skin touches the chair. Feel your seat and hips touching the ground. Do this for a few more breaths before reading further.**

If you did this simple exercise, you're already breathing more slowly and feeling more relaxed. What's amazing is how quickly you can relax once you know how. This exercise has shown you how to become grounded and centered. You become grounded by scanning your body, and feeling your skin on the ground. You become centered by turning your focus into your body and away from your tension.

A typical relaxation session is 20 to 40 minutes. Start with 10 minutes a day, and try adding 10 minutes a week. You can divide sessions into two. If 20 to 40 minutes sounds like a long time, consider how much time you waste feeling anxious or angry on a daily basis. There are three basic relaxation postures. You can relax lying down, sitting on the floor, or sitting in a chair. The same technique works with each posture.

If you reduce your stress, you will feel happier, and that feeling will spill over into the rest of your life.

PPDA
Psychophysiologic Disorders Association

Hidden Stress Screening Test

1. How much stress have you experienced in your life recently? (Choose one answer)

None	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Score = 0	Score = 1	Score = 2	Score = 3

2. How often do you neglect your own needs because you are taking care of others? (Choose one answer)

Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Nearly Always
Score = 0	Score = 1	Score = 2	Score = 3

3. Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? (For each row, choose the one box that applies best to you)

	Not at All Score = 0	Several Days Score = 1	More than Half the Days Score = 2	Nearly Every Day Score = 3
A. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge.				
B. Not being able to stop or control worrying.				
C. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless.				
D. Little interest or pleasure in doing things.				

4. In the past month, how much have you been bothered by repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, images or dreams of a stressful experience? (Choose one answer)

Not at All	A little Bit	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
Score = 0	Score = 1	Score = 2	Score = 3	Score = 4

5. In the past month, how much have you been bothered by feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience? (Choose one answer)

Not at All	A little Bit	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
Score = 0	Score = 1	Score = 2	Score = 3	Score = 4

6. How would you feel if you discovered that a child you care about was experiencing everything you did as a child? (Choose one answer)

Happy	Neutral	Sad or Angry	Very Sad or Very Angry
Score = 0	Score = 1	Score = 2	Score = 3

Total Hidden Stress Score _____ (range 0 - 29)

Interpreting the Hidden Stress Screening Test

A word of caution: This test is too short to provide more than a screen for hidden stresses. It will not detect all the stresses capable of causing physical illness nor is it capable of reliable diagnosis. If you have concerns about a score greater than zero on any question, a discussion with a medical or mental health professional would be a good next step.

No score proves or disproves the presence of hidden stress. People with higher scores are more likely to have hidden stresses but even some people with scores in the 2-5 range will have issues they could beneficially review with a health care professional.

Here are a few additional basic suggestions about what to do for scores greater than zero for each question.

Question 1: Make a list of every stress in your life. Keep the list with you and add to it as new ideas come up. Then, see if you can reduce the stress from some of the listed items.

Question 2: If possible, take several hours each week for self-indulgence to put yourself on the

list of people for whom you care.

Question 3 A & B: These two questions screen for the presence of an Anxiety Disorder. Ask your health care professional for more information.

Question 3 C & D: These two questions screen for the presence of Depression. Ask your health care professional for more information.

Questions 4 & 5: These two questions screen for the presence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Ask your health care professional for more information.

Question 6: Significant scores here raise the possibility of your having prolonged effects of childhood stress. This can cause other types of hidden stresses described above and can also lead to one or more of the following:

- Low self-esteem
- Addictions (tobacco, alcohol, drugs, work, sex, eating, gambling, exercise, shopping)
- Eating disorders
- Regularly finding yourself in relationships where you are treated disrespectfully
- Cutting, burning or otherwise deliberately injuring yourself

If any of these issues is a concern, ask your health care professional about them.

Further information is available at www.ppdassociation.org. Used with permission from The Psychophysiologic Disorders Association.