

QUARTERLY

Balancing Life, Work & Wellness

LifeSolutions™

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☞ The Power of Meditation

Turn to page 2 to learn meditation techniques to help strengthen your physical and mental health.

☞ Healing Your Body

Consider these tips to use your mind to heal your physical self.

Welcome!

This quarter's theme is Mind/Body Medicine. We welcome your feedback at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

DidUknow?

Knowledge, Tips, and Skills

More than half of Americans have used an alternative therapy instead of – or in addition to – Western medical treatment for their conditions. Among these therapies are Chinese-medicine practices that have been used for more than 3,000 years, such as acupuncture and herbal therapies. There are many different types of Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM). Some of the most common types are:

- ◆ Acupuncture
- ◆ Chiropractic
- ◆ Dietary supplements
- ◆ Homeopathy
- ◆ Mind-body medicine
- ◆ Naturopathy
- ◆ Osteopathy

Many people think their doctor won't want them to try CAM therapies, so they don't want their doctor to know. But it's important for your doctor to know about all the treatments you are receiving. Some CAM therapies can interfere with conventional treatments, with potentially negative results. For example, taking certain herbal therapies can increase your risk for bleeding with certain medications or during surgery. Keeping your doctor informed will ensure you get the best total care.

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Using Your Mind to Heal Your Body

When you're ill or in pain, taking time to look at your habits, diet, and attitudes may provide insight into what ails you.

"Clearly, the more active you become on your own behalf, the more likely you'll do well," says James S. Gordon, MD, director of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine, in Washington, D.C., and author of *Manifesto for a New Medicine*. "Thinking about your illness, what may have caused it, and what you can do to speed your recovery may minimize your need for drugs and surgery, because doing so maximizes your capacity for helping yourself."

The following tips may help you move faster from diagnosis to recovery by using your mind to get more involved in your care.

Strive for self-awareness

Heredity and infections cause many illnesses. But some conditions are part psychological and part behavioral, and people often play more of a role in causing health problems than they realize.

Asking yourself questions can help you get at the root of a health problem and on the road to recovery. Start with: How did this condition come about? Is there something going on in my life that could be causing it?

If you suffer from chronic neck pain, for instance, there may be a connection between your pain and the way you sit hunched over your desk all day.

Look at your diet

Take a close look at your diet and eating habits as the next step in the process. An unhealthy diet can cause many health problems, including diabetes, chronic heartburn, heart disease, and general malaise.

"Many people eat too much and are overweight as a result," Dr. Gordon says. "And, there's increasing evidence that obesity predisposes you to a variety of illnesses and that maintaining a healthful weight can contribute to longevity."

There are also some common foods many people are sensitive to, such as coffee, milk, and red meat, as well as food additives and preservatives.

"Depending on your symptoms, you might consider eliminating these foods for a while to see if your symptoms diminish," Dr. Gordon says. "As a general rule, I suggest people who want to eat more healthfully include large quantities of fiber-rich raw fruits and vegetables in their diets, as well as a morning helping of wheat and oat bran."

Focus on the possible

If you're diagnosed with an illness, take steps to learn about it, including the range of symptoms and outcomes.

"The dominant mode in traditional medicine is to focus on the disease and all the terrible things that might happen," Dr. Gordon says. "If you're diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, for example, you would be told it's degenerative and that, in most people, the disability worsens and becomes permanent."

"By accepting this prediction, the disease and your fears about it can take over your life."

As an alternative, stay focused on the best possible prognosis instead of the worst-case scenario. You may also want to investigate alternative treatments. "If you do some research, you may find a treatment that will at least be a complement to your conventional therapy," Dr. Gordon says.

Source: *Krames Staywell*

The Power of Meditation

Worry, anxiety, and stress can be more than distractions. Continually replaying daily problems and fears in your mind can affect your mental and physical health.

"Meditation provides a way of quieting that chatter," says James N. Dillard, MD, DC, CAC, assistant clinical professor at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, and author of *The Chronic Pain Solution*. "By bringing your focus to your breath, a mantra, or a sound, you give your mind something simple to hold on to as you gradually let go of the world."

By controlling your attention as you meditate, you begin to feel more relaxed and at peace. And this peacefulness usually lasts far beyond the meditation itself, so that when stress appears hours later, you have the psychic resources to deflect it.

Meditation allows you to become more awake and more deliberate about your actions, says the Arthritis Foundation (AF). It teaches you how to respond rather than react to situations in your life.

Although meditation sounds simple, it takes discipline to remain still in body and mind, blocking out the world around you and quieting your thoughts, the AF says. You also need to practice at least 20 minutes a day to get the most out of your meditation.

There are a number of theories about how meditation may improve physical and mental health. One hypothesis is that it reduces activity of the sympathetic nervous system, leading to a slower heart rate, lower blood pressure, slower breathing, and muscle relaxation.

Various types of meditation use different techniques. Popular forms of meditation include:

- ◆ Mindfulness, which involves focusing on a physical sensation such as the breath. When thoughts intrude, you return your focus to your breathing.
- ◆ Relaxation response, which involves progressively relaxing your body and then focusing on a word or sound.
- ◆ Visualization, which involves focusing on specific places or situations.

"It's important to remember there's no 'right' way to meditate," says Randy Flora, a mind-body fitness instructor at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Arizona. "If you get frustrated with one method, or it's just not working for you, try another technique until you find one that's helpful."

Two of the most popular meditation techniques are described at right. For best results, try to meditate every day for 20 to 30 minutes.

Mindfulness meditation

In mindfulness meditation, you focus on an awareness of the present moment, the AF says. You start with a single focal point, such as your breath, and then expand to include thoughts, emotions, and sensations. Here are some tips to keep in mind when you meditate.

- ◆ Find a quiet place. Sit in a chair or on the floor.
- ◆ Become aware of your breathing, focusing on the sensation of air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Feel your belly rise and fall and the air enter your nostrils and leave your mouth.
- ◆ Watch every thought come and go. When thoughts come up, don't suppress them, but simply note them and return to your breathing.
- ◆ As the time comes to a close, sit for a minute or two, becoming aware of where you are. Get up gradually.

Moving meditation

Fitting an additional 20 to 30 minutes of meditation into your already busy day may be difficult. An alternative is to try a form of exercise that combines fitness with meditation. Yoga, for instance, focuses on breathing, movement, and posture to help you relax and control stress. Tai chi is a form of meditation that combines slow, gentle movements and deep breathing. Some people do a walking meditation; with this method, you slow down your walk so that you can focus on your steps and the movement of your legs and feet. This is a good alternative for your lunch time, or it can be shortened to fit break time.

Source: *Krames Staywell*

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