

Fact Sheet

Mind–Body Medicine Practices in Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Yesterday

- The concept that the mind is important in health and illness dates back to ancient times. In the West, the notion that mind and body were separate began during the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras. Increasing numbers of scientific and technological discoveries furthered this split and led to an emphasis on disease-based models, pathological changes, and external cures. The role of mind and belief in health and illness began to re-enter Western health care in the 20th century, led by discoveries about pain control via the placebo effect and effects of stress on health.
- Mind-body medicine focuses on:
 - The interactions among the brain, the rest of the body, the mind, and behavior
 - The ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, experiential, and behavioral factors can directly affect health.
- The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is the component of the NIH that studies complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Within CAM, some examples of mind-body medicine practices are meditation, hypnosis, tai chi, and yoga.

Today

- In 2007, a national survey of approximately 33,000 Americans by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 19.2 percent of adults and 4.3 percent of children aged 17 and younger had used at least one CAM mind-body therapy in the year prior to the survey.

- Pain was the most common reason for CAM use in this survey.
- Many studies document that psychological stress is linked to a variety of health problems, such as increased heart disease, compromised immune system functioning, and premature cellular and cognitive aging. Some evidence suggests that mind-body therapies could reduce psychological stress.
- Recent results from NIH-funded studies on CAM mind-body therapies include:
 - Pain sufferers often seek relief through CAM therapies, including mind-body modalities. A review of the evidence on various mind-body therapies to help treat certain neurological diseases involving pain found some evidence for positive effects from some therapies--including biofeedback for migraine headache, yoga for fatigue from multiple sclerosis, and relaxation therapy as a part of comprehensive programs to help control epileptic seizures.
 - Women who used self-hypnosis while undergoing a core needle breast biopsy experienced anxiety relief and less pain compared with standard care.
 - Stress can significantly slow wound healing--as seen, for example, in studies of spousal caregivers of patients with dementia and stressed student populations.
 - Small preliminary trials of Zen meditation and Buddhist Insight meditation suggest that meditation may be a strategy to help prevent and/or reduce the cognitive decline of normal aging.

- In another preliminary trial, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction boosted well-being and reduced psychological distress in people with osteoarthritis.
- Transcendental Meditation added to usual care was found to contribute to a lower death rate in people aged 55 and older with high blood pressure.
- Daily practice of a yoga intervention had a positive impact on chronic insomnia, according to a small preliminary study.
- Tai chi may be a safe alternative to conventional exercise for maintaining bone mineral density in postmenopausal women, thus helping to prevent or slow osteoporosis, increase musculoskeletal strength, and improve balance.

Tomorrow

- Americans will continue to be interested in strategies that they can employ themselves, such as mind-body medicine practices, to improve their health and quality of life and maintain wellness.
- Management of chronic pain will incorporate effective use of strategies based on the understanding of mind-body interactions.
- Advanced technologies, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), will help researchers understand the fundamental biological basis of mind-body medicine practices.

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