

MEDITATION AS MEDICATION

Mindfulness: a powerful therapeutic tool of mind-body medicine and its health benefits in the healing process

by Paul Epstein, ND

There is an ever growing body of evidence pointing to the role of the mind and its healing power in the treatment of stress, pain, mental, emotional and physical illness. Mind-body approaches such as guided imagery and mindfulness meditation are becoming more widespread as the scientific studies mount indicating that mind-body techniques may not only improve the quality of life for those facing a health concern or serious illness, but can actually promote physical healing and whole person wellness of body, mind, heart and spirit. These therapies are gaining more interest from researchers in major hospitals around the world and the increasing popularity of the MBSR Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program and related evidence based research findings demonstrating its effectiveness.

"Non-physical treatments like meditation have been shown to be effective in controlled scientific studies for depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, skin diseases, cardiac pain, insomnia, diabetes, ulcers, colds, fever, asthma, arthritis and alcoholism." says Dr. Anne Harrington, a Historian of Science at Harvard University.

"Mind and body are inextricably linked, and their second-by-second interaction exerts a profound influence upon health and illness, life and death. Attitudes, beliefs and emotional states ranging from love and compassion to fear and anger can trigger chain reactions that affect blood chemistry, heart rate, and the activity of every cell and organ system in the body- from the stomach and gastrointestinal tract to the immune system.", states Kenneth Pelletier, Ph.D, a pioneer in the field, and senior clinical fellow at the Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention at the Stanford University School of Medicine, and author of the book "Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer". His studies and teachings also focus on how the mind-body connection can be harnessed to help people stay well or recover from illness.

Meditation helps people learn to deal with stress more effectively and to activate, mobilize and utilize their inner healing resources and capabilities as evidence and research shows in all the mind-body studies. Mindfulness can be helpful if we are experiencing health problems and serious illness, as well as dealing with stressful life circumstances. Meditation, when combined with allopathic or naturopathic medicine, is a beneficial complement to and aids in the holistic treatment of a wide range of medical diagnoses.

An important part of the therapeutic value and approach involved in the practice of meditation as medication, is that the patient becomes a responsible participant in their treatment and in so doing is actively and consciously engaged in their healing process. Making a commitment to meditate regularly enhances the intention and sustains the effort to get well.

Mindfulness practice also includes heart practices to cultivate loving kindness, compassion, equanimity and joy.

One need have no prior knowledge or experience to begin to practice, only a beginner's mind, and a willingness to learn. Regular practice helps develop patience as we open to see clearly what's happening in our lives, once we are willing and able to stop and listen, which is the essence of meditation and mind-body medicine. As meditation can generate deep states of relaxation and inner peace, the practice becomes more rewarding and feels easier over time.

Mindfulness, however, is more than just a technique causing pleasant and relaxed feelings; it is a way of relating to, seeing, feeling, and being with our experience just as it is.

Ultimately it can teach us to face and be open to all of life's challenges and experiences, the painful and the joyful, the happiness and the sadness, all that life has to offer. The inner balance of mind cultivated and developed by consistent practice of mindfulness meditation allows us to face all of life's situations with greater clarity.

We can then live our life and respond from the depths of this inner awareness. We respond to life instead of being caught in the traps of our conditioned knee-jerk reactions to the stresses of our life.

A famous Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat HanH says in his teachings on the practice of mindfulness "The Present Moment."

"The present moment is where life can be found, and if you don't arrive there, you miss your appointment with life."

You don't have to run any more. breathing in we say, "I have arrived." Breathing out we say, "I am home." This is a very strong practice, a very deep practice." A very healing practice.

Dr. Paul Epstein
Mindful Healing: Mind-Body Integrative Medicine

42 Richmondville Ave.

Westport, CT. 06880

203-226-3923

epsteinmb@aol.com

www.drpaulepstein.com