A photograph of a pond featuring large, patterned water lily leaves with green and brown variegation. A pink water lily flower is in bloom in the foreground. In the background, there are green plants and a building with a window.

Mindful Nutrition: Nourishing our physical, mental and emotional well-being through mindfulness

Week 6

Getting out of our own way: accepting our emotions and exploring the gut/brain axis

TROPICAL
DAY-FLOWERING
Nymphaea
'Avalanche'

Embodied Awareness, Embodied Presence

Thoughts, Feelings, Emotions... Tara Brach

Beliefs and thoughts are navigational maps that are not inherently true. Rather, some serve us and others cause feelings of separation, self-aversion and/or blame of others. We can free ourselves from harmful beliefs by investigating them with a dedicated, mindful and courageous presence.

When we notice that we're in the trance of "if-only" mind, we can choose to re-open and surrender to what is right here. When we make that U-Turn [back to the breath or whatever anchors you] and stay with our experience with kindness, we find a sense of goodness in that presence. This is the beginning of joy.

This short meditation helps us get unstuck from emotional difficulty with the practice of Inquiry. We use the acronym RAIN as a guide, starting with Recognizing and Allowing what is arising, and then systematically Investigating (through inquiry) the limiting beliefs and reactive feelings that are challenging. The meditation ends by offering Nourishment to our vulnerability with kindness, and discovering the shift in our own being...in our identity...that expresses increased freedom.
-Tara Brach

Embodied Presence (con't)

In describing our human predicament and dis-ease, D.H. Lawrence says we are like a great tree with our roots in the air. We need to replant ourselves—in our bodies, hearts and spirit. These talks explore how we regularly leave our body and skim life's surface in a mental trance, and the ways we can train our attention to come home again. We look at working with physical and emotional pain, and the gifts of love, wisdom, creativity and aliveness that arise as we learn to fully inhabit these living forms and all our senses with awareness. The meditations include body scans and invite the awakening of aliveness and awareness in the body.

How Meditation Heals The Gut: Mindfulness, Gut Health, and the Gut-Brain-Axis

EOC institute

<https://eocinstitute.org/meditation/beyond-probiotics-how-meditation-heals-the-gut-brain-axis-stress/>

The powerful "emotion ↔ stomach" connection is a common cultural reference:

"Trust your intuition, trust your gut... I'm so nervous, I have butterflies in my stomach... I have a gut feeling to reject this job offer... What a gut-wrenching experience."

...many doctors are now saying that our deeply intertwined "first" real brain and "second" gut brain (sometimes called the gut-brain axis) are actually one system, not two.

Your Ability To Handle Stress Controls The Gut-Brain Axis

Even after switching to a healthy diet, stress explains why many "second brain" gut-related diseases still stick around.

Strengthening the link, research has shown that psychological trauma can lead to digestive problems, inflammation, ulcers, IBS, IBD, Crohns, & more.

In light of these new findings, it is obvious that healing the gut is impossible without addressing our ability to manage emotion and stress. How you think does affect your health.

Mindfulness and the Gut/Brain Axis (con't)

Study: How Meditation Turns Off "Bad" Gut Genes, While Helping 1,000+ More

How mindfulness heals the gut-brain axis

For 48 patients suffering irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), a 9 week study at Massachusetts General Hospital changed everything.

Meditation had somehow managed to beneficially alter more than 1,000 genes, including suppressing the nasty protein complex arsonist (NF-kB) responsible for igniting (inflaming) the immune system and GI tract.

Said co-senior study author, Dr. Towia Libermann: "In both IBS and IBD, the pathway controlled by a protein called NF-kB emerged as one of those most significantly affected by the relaxation response."

Source: "The Microbiota and Gut Brain Axis", *Psychology Today* and "The Tantalizing Links between the Gut Microbes and the Brain", *Nature*.

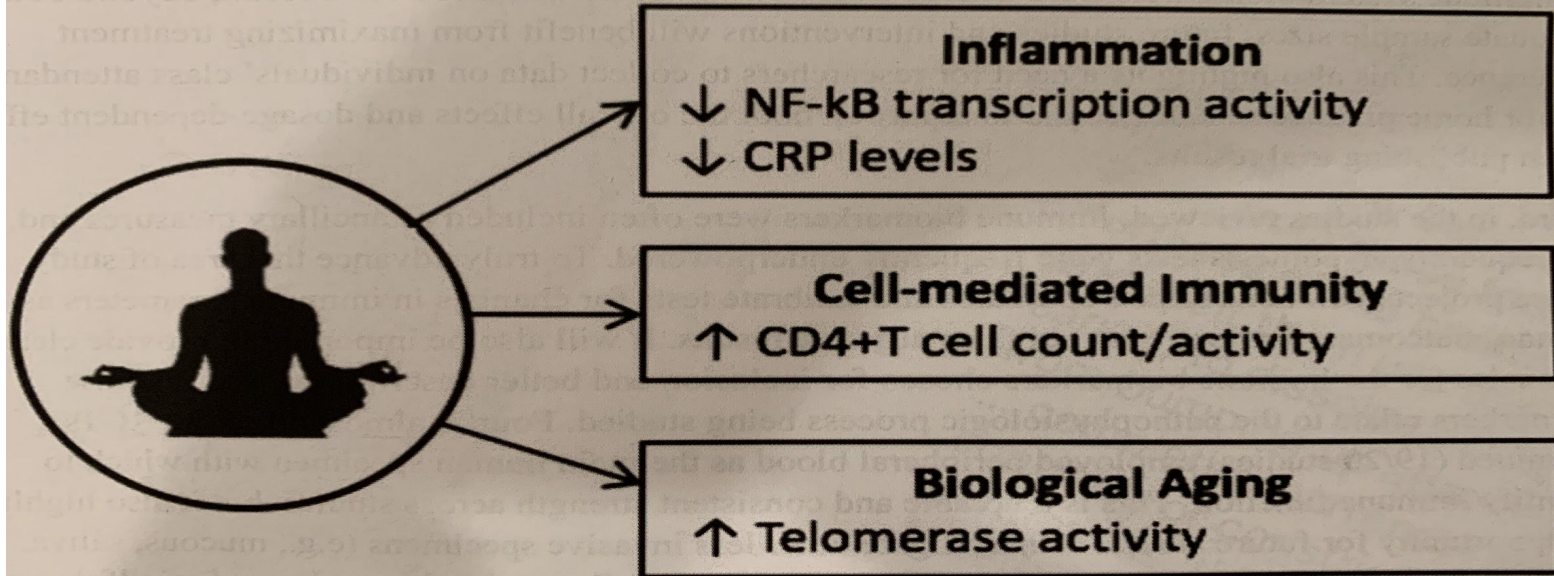


Figure 1

Mindfulness meditation and immune system biomarkers. This systematic review of 20 randomized controlled trials, comprising more than 1600 participants, revealed replicated, yet tentative, evidence that

Mindfulness meditation and the immune system: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26799456/>

Stop, Breathe, Feel: Anytime, Anywhere

For this week, make your “Stop, Breathe, Be” practice an opportunity to feel. You can call it “Stop, Breathe, Feel.” Do this at moments when you are having a strong emotion and see exactly what that emotion feels like. Then do it when you are not aware of emotion at all. Is anything happening? Look closely.

Creating a clearing with this practice and RAIN. What are the trancelike forests of limiting beliefs (thoughts) you habitually get lost in?

What are some instances when you have touched presence in your life? What was your experience of presence? How does that differ from being in trance.

Exploring Emotions with Mindfulness

Practice:

RAIN

Curiosity: ERN/Brewer

https://www.pennmedicine.org/~media/documents%20and%20audio/patient%20guides%20and%20instructions/mindfulness/homework_week_5.ashx?la=en

RAIN, Tara Brach

Recognize what is happening;

Allow the experience to be there, just as it is;

Investigate with interest and care;

Nurture with self-compassion.

You can take your time and explore RAIN as a stand-alone meditation or move through the steps whenever challenging feelings arise.

Connect

- Offset the “power” of loneliness
- Seek out the company of others: Classes, “meet ups,” etc.
- strengthen your relationships with self and others
- Loving-kindness practice
- Before you speak let your speech pass through three doors:
1) Is it True, 2) Is it Helpful (or Necessary), 3) Is it Kind?

20 breaths Practice

One at a Time: **The 20 Breaths Practice**

The 20 Breaths practice helps you to create a powerful moment of stillness and silence in the middle of activity and stress. Like all mindfulness-based techniques, it requires practice and rewards patience. If you stay with it, and especially if you practice even when you think you are too busy or distracted, you are guaranteed to learn from it. You will discover for yourself that your own natural resources are never farther away than the next breath.

Here are some suggestions to make this practice work for you.

1. **Come to a “Full Stop”** at the beginning. Deliberately stop everything else that you are doing. The practice only lasts a few minutes, so give it your full attention.
2. **One breath at a time** You are really practicing 20 very short mindfulness practices. Each session only lasts for the duration of one breath, about 5 seconds or so. Every breath is different. Each one is short enough for you to devote yourself to it fully. Don't worry about what happened during the last breath, or what will come next. Don't critique your performance. See if you can bring your full attention to the breath that is alive right now. You will notice, of course, that your mind wanders into the past and future. That is not a problem; it is how you learn about mindfulness. Just don't wander away completely. Simply notice it, and gently return to the moment of breath that is here. If you completely miss one breath (or 10), don't worry. Another is about to begin.
3. **Full attention** See if you can bring all of your attention to the present moment of breath. You are bringing your full awareness to meet the breath. Each time you notice that some of your attention is elsewhere, see if you can bring that part of attention back to meet the next breath. Notice distractions, not to fight with them, but because once you notice them you will have the opportunity to undo them in the next moment. Distractions are opportunities. Once we notice them, they will show us how to return to the present moment.
4. **Let go completely at the end of each breath.** Give yourself a moment to completely relax, release, let go. Count the breath in that moment. It is easiest if you count right before you start your next inhalation.
5. **Take a fresh start** when the next breath begins. This breath is new, never before experienced. Catch it while it is fresh, right at the moment when it first arises. See if you can find that moment, the exact moment where the breath is found.

6. **Rest for at least a few moments at the end of the practice.** If you can, schedule each 20-Breath practice to last for five minutes. During the last minute or two, after you've



“Look at other people and ask yourself if you are really seeing them or just your thoughts about them... Without knowing it, we are coloring everything, putting our spin on it all.”

— Jon Kabat-Zinn

Your brain needs a party

Excerpts from the Newsletter by Elemental, 10/20/2020, Dana Smith

<https://elemental.medium.com/your-brain-needs-a-party-2551b1a887b6>

Looking forward to good things in the future is a key element of well-being. One study showed that the more positive events a person anticipates, the brighter their mood is. Actively planning for the future, even the logistical aspects of it, was also linked to greater optimism about the coming months and years. Notably, people who are depressed anticipate fewer positive events than non-depressed people, while people who are anxious expect more negative things will occur.

Other research has demonstrated that anticipating a reward, even a simple one like reading a funny comic, is enough to increase people's positive emotions before and after a stressful event. The scientists suggest that looking forward to and experiencing a positive event after a negative one can help people recover from their stress faster.

A paper published this summer revealed a positive anticipation circuit in the brain involving three key regions: the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which encodes reward value; the midbrain, which is involved in feelings of motivation and is rich in the neurotransmitter dopamine; and the hippocampus, which is important for creating a memory of an event.