

Meditation for Stress Reduction

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Fast food, drive up windows, e-mail, instant messaging and multi-tasking, we live in an era of time urgency or what is becoming referred to in medical circles as “hurry sickness”. Increasingly people are asking, is this a healthy way of life?

As a physician, I see the effects of stress in my patients on a daily basis. The American Academy of Family Physicians estimates that 2/3 of office appointments have stress related causes. The impact of chronic daily stress affects the body in a multitude of ways. Immediate physiologic changes occur leading to increased heart rate and blood pressure, impaired oxygenation of tissues and slowing of digestive activity. Long-term effects lead to mood changes such as anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue complaints, and exacerbation of pain syndromes such as migraines. Medical research suggests the long-term effects may also affect our heart making us susceptible to heart attack and impair our immune function leading to frequent illness and possibly cancer.

However, our personal ability to cope with stressors plays a large role in mitigating these risks. How we “see” life’s set backs and respond to daily stressors may go a long way in preventing disease. The most famous example is the type A personality that was correlated with increased risk of heart disease. Further examination suggests it is the hostility associated with this personality that leads to the highest risk. In another example, pessimism is associated with depression and early death. With this information can we learn to “see” differently and thus lead healthier lives?

Mindfulness meditation provides the opportunity to do just that. It is a way of learning to face the multitude of daily stressors that come our way.

Mindfulness teaches us to focus on the present moment without passing judgment or trying to achieve or strive for any particular goal. Rather, the focus is on learning to just be, observing each moment as it passes. Often it is through this observing that we come to understand the messages we have been telling ourselves. By observing this “self talk” we find that often it is these messages that cause us the most distress in our lives. It gives us the opportunity to understand how we “see” and learn to stop resisting what is. Through meditation we are able to connect with our inner strengths for healing and well-being.

For over twenty years, Jon Kabat-Zinn, a leading voice in the area of mind-body medicine has been teaching mindfulness meditation through the stress reduction clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. It has

proven useful for a variety of patients facing stress, pain and disease. Through mindfulness we learn “healing is coming to terms with how things are” (Kabat- Zinn).

For those interested, we have a class available locally through Enloe.

For more information call 332-6724

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