HEALTH &WELLNESS

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STRESS RELIEF

What is Stress?

Stress is defined as a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances. Stress is the body's method of reacting to a condition such as a threat, challenge or physical and psychological barrier. The body responds to this condition via multiple systems in the body.

Why is Stress Relief Important?

Stress can lead to unfavorable effects on the body, such as increased heart rate, high blood pressure, poor sleep habits, and decreased immune health. Having good stress relief habits can help prevent these negative effects and improve overall health.

How Can You Reduce Stress?

While there are many tools and techniques out there that can help provide stress relief, meditation and yoga are two popular practices that have been scientifically proven to be effective.

Meditation for Stress

Meditation is a practice used for stress reduction and overall wellness. The term meditation refers to a group of techniques, such as mindfulness or focusing the mind on a specific object, thought, or activity, to achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm state of mind. The basic elements needed to practice meditation are a space with minimal distractions, a comfortable position, a particular focus of attention, and an open attitude.

There are many different types of meditation. Transcendental, mindfulness, Zen, and breathing meditation are the most studied forms of meditation. Additionally, meditation can be practiced on its own or as a component of relaxation practices such as yoga, t'ai chi, or qigong.

The practice of meditation has been shown to reduce anxiety and negative thinking as well as increase self-compassion. Meditation also has many physical health benefits such as reduced blood pressure, reduced risk factors for heart attack and stroke, and decreased back pain, neck pain, headaches, and migraines, all of which may be an effect of stress.

(Horowitz S. Health benefits of meditation. Alt Comp Thera. 2010; 16(4): 223-228)

Benefits of Yoga on Stress

"Practicing yoga has been shown to reduce pain, relieve tensions, reduce risk of injury, improve posture, improve communication, increase energy and attention span, and enhance feelings of overall wellness and well-being."

(Gura, ST. Yoga for stress reduction and injury prevention at work. Work. 2002; 19: 3-7)

Yoga is a general term that encompasses breathing techniques, postures, strengthening exercises, and meditation. The breathing techniques used in yoga practice can help dramatically decrease high heart rate and high blood pressure which are two negative effects of stress. Additionally, the breathing techniques used in yoga help the mind relax allowing the participant to reach a meditative state. The postural aspect of yoga promotes body awareness, breaking down poor postural habits. Yoga also has been shown to improve muscle flexibility which can help reduce risk of injury.

Music Mindfulness

Music has been shown to be a great tool to help with relaxtion and mindfulness. When creating your next calming playlist, try adding songs that feature acoustic guitar or piano. Nature sounds, such as ocean waves, crickets, birds chirping, rainfall, or wind, have also been shown to produce calming effects on the brain.

Different Yoga for Different Needs

- **Hatha** – Incorporates postures, breathing techniques, and meditation to benefit physical and mental well-being.
- **Vinyasa** – Fluid, movement-intensive practice, with the intention of linking breath to movement as practitioners smoothly transition from pose to pose.
- **Ashtanga** – Rigorous style of yoga similar to vinyasa except the exact same poses are repeated in the exact same order.
- **Bikram** – Similar to Ashtanga as participants move through a series of 26 poses. Performed in heated rooms.
- **Iyengar** – Meticulous style of yoga with attention paid to finding proper alignment in a pose using the assistance of blocks, blankets, straps, chairs, and bolsters.
- **Restorative (Yin)** – Used to relax and soothe the body.
- **Anusara** – Aims to help practitioners open their hearts, experience grace, and let their inner goodness shine.