

**Holistic Health is the Answer to Healing**

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A feeling of embarrassment flushes the cheeks. The thought of biting into cake makes the mouth salivate. The thought of writing that paper makes your stomach tremble.

There's no question that the mind impacts the body.

Our minds can be our best friend or worst enemy. Because of this, healing our minds is a major step in healing our bodies and achieving the ultimate end goal of a happy and healthy well-being.

Holism is referred to as, “the idea that organic or unfired wholes have value and being which is inherently different from and cannot be the sum of individual parts” (Michaelson et al., 2019). With holism referring to the whole individual and not just individual parts that make up a person, holistic health deals with the idea that care and healing is treating and healing the whole body instead of just a disease or broken bone. Holistic health deals with our whole body and mind being healthy through focusing on how our mind and bodies are so interconnected.

Simply changing the way in which you think and taking charge of your mind can improve your overall health and well-being. Focusing on meditation for the mind and doing self-care practices like yoga can have the biggest impact on your physical health because of the simultaneous mind healing along the way.

Humans are whole beings; they are not a disease or, as a medical provider might hurriedly say, “the broken leg in room 215.” Because of the mind body connection we have, taking a step back to look at what caused the problem and how the entire mind, body, and overall person is affected is the first step in making progress towards healing.

I write as a healthcare worker—a student nurse who is about to go into the workforce—and a young adult who has a passion for health and wellness. I found excitement in researching this because I see the importance of incorporating holism into healthcare and the impact that

taking care of the mind can have on the body and overall health. Personally, taking care of my mind has been the best thing I have done for my health, happiness, and wellness.

In what follows, I will explain the science of mind-body connection, how this approach is improving the practice of health care and lastly, what [you or every person] can do regularly to benefit and be an all-around flourishing human being.

## **1. The Mind-Body Connection and its Implications for Health**

The mind and body are more connected than you may think. How we think and how our minds are working immediately impacts our physical and overall health and well-being. Stress can wear our out bodies physically; the same way happiness and love can make our physical health better.

Think back to that horrible time in your life. Whether it be your illness, that horribly sad death in your family, or that extremely difficult divorce. Your mind was not thinking about flowers and beaches. Your mind was certainly focused on that horrific situation and constantly overwhelmed and saddened. Not only was your mind affected, but your health was affected, your body was being worn down, you were not feeling yourself. Now think about that time you were sitting at the beach by the water while the waves buried your feet in the wet sand. You weren't stressed and anxious. You were relaxed and content with the situation because you were happy at the beach and happy in that moment of time. Your mind was in the right mental state- which made your body relaxed and at ease.

Our mindset and how we treat our minds has a huge impact on our physical health because of the inter-connectedness of our mind and body.

Mind-body approaches to healing the body have been practiced for years across cultures and numerous countries. The mind-body connection we create decreases our stress response and enhances our relaxation response.

For me, meditation and yoga are what make me feel the most connected with myself and in control of my physical and mental well-being. When I feel that my mind is free from stress and is not overwhelmed by the immense work that needs to get done, my body feels less tense and freer. When my mind is stressed with thousands of things that need to get done, my physical health takes the burden; I have less energy physically. Along with less energy levels, my skin is affected, my joints tense up, and my physical health takes a downward spiral. During meditation, my mind leaves the stressful thoughts behind and focuses on exactly what my body needs. When practicing meditation, I focus on tension or stress throughout my skin and bones, and I let that tension and stress leave my body. That process is the work of my mind being focused and letting go. But the outcome is both physical and mental. The outcome is a body with less tension, a mind with less stress, and a whole being with more happiness.

### **Effects of the Mind-Body Connection**

“According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), part of the National Institutes of Health, about 1 in 3 adults and 1 in 9 children used CIH approaches to healing.” (Mattar et al., 2020). This number is too low. Increasing this statistic will greatly impact the overall health of individuals all over the world.

By enhancing our mind-body connection, we can literally reduce chemicals that were damaged in our bodies and brains over the years. By reducing damaged chemicals in our brain and body, we are simultaneously increasing our health by decreasing disease susceptibility,

increasing immunity, and decreasing symptoms. The mind-body connection is ultimately healing our bodies and increasing our physical health all via the mind.

In a piece written by Braden and Perazzo, it was mentioned that mind-body techniques can influence our resistance to disease all by increasing antibody production and responsiveness of immune cells to infectious pathogens, and by decreased production of proinflammatory cytokines. (Braden & Perazzo, 2007). Inflammation and elevated levels of pro-inflammatory substances majorly contribute to diseases and illnesses. In a depressed individual, these levels are immensely elevated, which contributes to a plethora of diseases. (Braden & Perazzo, 2007). When our minds are unhealthy, our physical health takes on the burden. With that, our bodies are impacted immensely.

To give you some background of reality in the clinical setting, as an individual gets diagnosed with clinical depression, an antidepressant prescription is usually common protocol. Because of the depression and unhealthy mind, the body is already filled with inflammatory response markers and inflammatory cytokines. To add to this, antidepressants are usually prescribed to help. These prescribed medications are just adding to the issue and piling onto the decline in physical/mental health like snow on the highway. A depressed mind leads to a plethora of diseases and physical symptoms. On top of that, the medications have their own set of negative physical effects and side effects. Stepping back and looking at how to heal your mind is the most beneficial way to heal your depression and therefore decrease diseases, decrease fatigue, and decrease all the other negative symptoms of depression.

As a nursing student, I learn that all care is patient centered and unique to the individual patient. I find it to be beneficial to not only talk about the drugs and treatment options, but to focus our attention on non-pharmacological treatment options such as meditation, yoga, reiki,

mindfulness, guided imagery, and deep breathing. Incorporating holistic health and healing into the picture brings about more opportunity to happiness and health.

I see first-hand how connected the mind and body are. Therefore, I see how beneficial it is to look at patients holistically and get the full picture of what is going on both mentally and physically. Sometimes the answer is medication, but other times, the answer can be making changes in diets, practicing yoga to heal the mind, or meditating daily to de stress and decrease the inflammatory cytokines in the body.

### **Stress Affects our Health**

There is no surprise that your mental health has an impact on your overall health. Because our minds can be our best friend or worst enemy, healing our minds is a major step in healing our bodies. Experiencing high levels of stress is a major risk factor for poor physical health outcomes. Today, everyone experiences stress. You stress over an overdue assignment. You stress over a traffic backup. You stress over your dinner plans. Not only does stress affect our minds, but it affects our physical health abundantly. Stress causes increased blood pressure, increased low density lipoprotein cholesterol levels, decreased immunity, and chronic inflammation. (Fanning et al., 2020).

Psychological stress leads to a whole cascade of events throughout of bodies. “Stress leads to the activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal and the sympathetic-adrenal-medullary axes, reduce cell infiltration at the wound site, increase susceptibility to wound infection, and indirectly influence wound repair by promoting the adoption of health-damaging behaviors” (Gouin & and Kiecolt-Glaser, 2011). As our minds process stress, hormones are

constantly released. “Enhanced glucocorticoids and catecholamines production can directly influence several components of the healing process” (Gouin & and Kiecolt-Glaser, 2011).

Stress is a domino effect in our body. It starts off because we're stuck at a traffic light and we won't make it to the meeting on time, then it's quickly a cascade event. It hits on every single body system. Think of stress like red poison entering through our head quickly rushing through our bloodstream causing inflammation, hormone releases, and increased pressure in all of our vessels. There is something to help this: healing your mind. Realizing stress is there and naturally decreasing stress by meditation practices and yoga is the best way to stay clear of the diseases and inflammation that comes along with stress.

## **2. Taking Holistic Care Seriously in the Practice of Health Care**

When you think about healthcare and treating a patient, are you viewing the patient as a whole? Are you thinking about a comprehensive plan of care or just a focused plan? Are you just focusing on the broken leg that room 215 came into the ER with or the recently diagnosed diabetes the patient in room 220 was just diagnosed with? Or are you taking that extra step to look at the patient holistically and whole? Are you looking at the other systems affected by the diabetes diagnosis and how the mind is dealing with it?

“Holistic care is an expanding domain of healing practices harmonized with Western medicine to provide comprehensive treatment of individuals as holistic beings.” (Schramm et al., 2021). Holistic care is taking care to the next level and focusing on the individual patient as a whole being, instead of just the sum of individual parts. Using this type of holistic view in the healthcare setting creates a more comprehensive and patient centered care plan. Focusing on the whole being shifts the focus of healthcare more towards healing the mind and body, rather than

just treating a disease or broken bone. The ultimate end goal of holistic care is healing the whole being. “Holism, inter-connectiveness, and wholeness are the central focus when treating an individual holistically” (Schramm et al., 2021). Therefore, when treating patients, all of the systems should be assessed, as well as mental and emotional health. When the body accomplishes inter-connectiveness and wholeness, the mind and body are simultaneously healthier.

Similar to holism, complementary alternative medicine is gaining attention in the United States. During my research, one article stated, “Evidence nourishes to support the utility of integrative medicine techniques; specifically, in the domain of pain management where the impetus for multimodal strategies is the new paradigm of care” (Schramm et al., 2021). Using these new techniques and focusing on integrative care and holistic modalities, rather than western medicine alone, pain is managed more comprehensively.

Incorporating holistic modalities into Western medicine practice has increased immensely between 2012 and 2017 in areas of chiropractic, yoga, and meditation. (Schramm et al., 2021). “The integration of alternative care modalities invites patient empowerment and self-care, and positively correlate to improved participation in care and care of pain management” (Schramm et al., 2021).

When patients realize that healing and treatment is in their control, patients are more likely to become involved. The integration of using holistic care and alternative modalities to heal, such as yoga and meditation overwhelmingly increases patient outcomes.



### **Inter-Connectiveness Within Our Bodies**

To give you something to think about when talking about holism: our skin and heart may seem so opposite. It may seem like there's no interconnectedness between our heart and skin. But we are whole beings, and it is all connected. Although it may seem like our cardiac system won't affect our skin (integumentary) system, any changes in cardiac health can also translate to integumentary changes. Changes in our blood pressure affects our skin. If our pressure in our vessels is too low, blood doesn't get pumped through our body effectively. Our peripheral vessels don't get the needed blood return and our skin becomes cold and loses that much needed circulation. The same is true for every system in the body. The same is true for mental and physical health.

### **Shifting the Focus of Care**

Shifting the focus of treatment and health from medicine and pharmacy to integrative and holistic health can have a huge impact on pain management, overall health, and disease processes. (Schramm et al., 2021).

Think about a person getting diagnosed with HIV after an accidental needlestick at work. Doctors and pharmacists know that HIV is a virus and experts know that the virus has to be targeted at many different life stages in order to treat HIV accurately. Just as doctors treat HIV with multimodal drug therapy to target the HIV virus at all stages of the life cycle, its essential that healing the human body should target more than just the disease. It should target every little thing. Mental health, emotional health and the overall human should be focused on when treating diseases. A disease may be masked with treatment, but a disease can be cured when the person is treated from holistic standpoint.

As well, diabetes mellites is another example to bring up. Being a nursing student, I have learned the differences between type 1 and type 2 diabetes. It has been engraved in my head that type 2 diabetes is mainly a result of a sedentary lifestyle, poor diet, and lack of exercise. Type 2 diabetes is not usually treated with insulin, while type 1 needs insulin treatment. For type 2, the first line of treatment is mainly diet and exercise. Diet and exercise are two things that humans can control in life. Treatment of type 2 diabetes with diet and exercise programs shows how medications and invasive treatments are not always the best choice and the only answer. Our bodies can heal from giving them what they need naturally. With less stress on the body, more movement, and a more nourished and vitamin rich diet, the insulin is able to transfer glucose to the cells instead of letting the glucose sit in the blood vessels and cause a domino of negative health effects.

For me, if I know I can control an outcome, I work towards the best outcome for myself instead of staying unhappy and unsatisfied. I know my body best, just like every individual knows their body best. We all have different pain levels, feelings, emotions, and attitudes. The one thing we all have in common though is how we are all whole beings that need to be healed holistically.

### **3. How Everyone Can Benefit from Appreciating Holism**

#### **Mindfulness and Meditation**

Mindfulness meditation has been an important part of religious, philosophical, and humanistic traditions. “Mindfulness meditation is a mental and physical activity that creates awareness of present-moment experience with a compassionate, nonjudgmental stance” (Freeman et al., 2020).

Mindfulness meditation has been practiced for thousands of years. Starting in the Eastern philosophy of Buddhism, mindfulness was considered as “a remedy to delusion and as a power which contributed to the attainment of nirvana” (Freeman et al., 2020). “Nirvana was a state of being overcoming/abandoning “dis-ease,” categorized as the three “poisons” of greed, hatred, and delusion in the mind” (Freeman et al., 2020). As the definition of nirvana states, meditation and mindfulness have the ability to rid disease and heal the body naturally.

Personally, meditation has helped me immensely when dealing with nursing school, family, relationships, and other challenges life has thrown my way. When life throws obstacles at me and I face challenging times, I find myself turning to meditation more frequently. This is because when I meditate and use mindfulness practices, I devote my time and focus to myself and my intentions. I focus on sound or a guided meditation practice, which lowers my stress level and makes me more aware of my body and mind. Leaving meditation, my mind is clear and more focused on the good. Meditation gives me the ability to free myself from the stress and negative thoughts, which opens up opportunity to flourish in areas that better myself.

### **Yoga Influences Health**

Around the world today, there are various forms of yoga practiced that influence healing. It was not a surprise that the results for “mind body connection” research happened to be articles about yoga impacting our health. Many of the articles and journals that first popped up during my research yielded results focusing on how yoga is beneficial and influences our bodies.

“Yoga is an ancient discipline designed to bring balance and health to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the individual” (Ross & Thomas, 2010). In the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Authors, Alyson Ross and Sue Thomas

stated, “It is often depicted metaphorically as a tree and comprises eight aspects, or “limbs:” yama (universal ethics), niyama (individual ethics), asana (physical postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (control of the senses), dharana (concentration), dyana (meditation), and samadhi (bliss)” (Ross & Thomas, 2010). Our bodies are like trees with grounding on this earth. Yoga is the form of movement and mindfulness that pulls all the aspects of our body together and focuses on pure bliss.

Because yoga brings balance and health to our physical bodies, mental state, emotional state, and spiritual dimensions, it has the ability to transform our health immensely and rid our bodies of diseases. Just as generic exercise and movement can help ease the mind and positively impact physical health, yoga has the ability to go beyond transforming our mind and bodies; it has the ability to reinforce the balanced inter-connectiveness within our mind and body.

There has been thousands of studies done and research to support the effects of yoga on mental and physical health. “Evidence supports the belief that yoga benefits physical and mental health by the downregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the sympathetic nervous system” (Ross & Thomas, 2010). The HPA axis and SNS are triggered in response to physical and/or psychological stress. As a result of the release of cortisol and hormones, this trigger leads to a waterfall of physiologic, behavioral, and psychologic effects. (Ross & Thomas, 2010). “Over time, the constant state of repeated firing of the HPA axis and SNS can lead to our body systems not being regularly appropriately” (Ross & Thomas, 2010). This ultimately leads to diseases such as obesity, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, depression, substance abuse, and CV diseases. (Ross & Thomas, 2010).

Numerous studies also show, that yoga significantly decreases heart rate, inflammation and systolic and diastolic blood pressure. (Ross & Thomas, 2010). Studies prove that yoga

reverses the negative impacts that stress has had on the immune system by increasing levels of immunoglobulins A. (Ross & Thomas, 2010).

Regardless of all the pathophysiological effects that yoga has on our physical health, yoga extensively impacts the mind. Yoga has been shown to have immediate psychological effects such as, decreasing anxiety levels and increasing emotional well-being. For many people, yoga is not just an exercise or daily activity; yoga has meaning and purpose.

For me, yoga is more than just movement- it's something that brings me strength and lifts up my spirits. I can feel when my body needs yoga- my body gets tight, my mind gets stressed, my teeth are clenched even at rest. Within just a few moments of laying down the mat, dimming the lights, and switching on yoga music, my body and mind begin to relax. Breathing in a deep breath as my arms lift and stretch to the sky as far as they can, my feet stay grounded to the floor and I feel my body fill with air and regain all my lost energy. I gently breath out all the bad energy and stress that I was holding inside. In minutes, my mind is less chaotic. Yoga is something that engages both the mind and body simultaneously.

By participating in yoga, our minds become at ease and our bodies are positively impacted. Our bodies are able to let go of the toxins and stress hormones and free ourselves from triggers.

## **Conclusion**

The mind impacts the body, and the body impacts the mind. Stress and an unhealthy mind will impact our overall health and wellbeing. From inflammation to systemic diseases, our physical health can be impacted vastly.

Taking control of our health and healing our bodies as whole is extremely beneficial. Being aware of stress and unhealthy habits is the first step. Taking charge is the next step. Through practices like yoga and meditation, our minds can be at ease, which in turn crates a healthier individual.

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