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Health Insights

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The Heart and Mind Connection

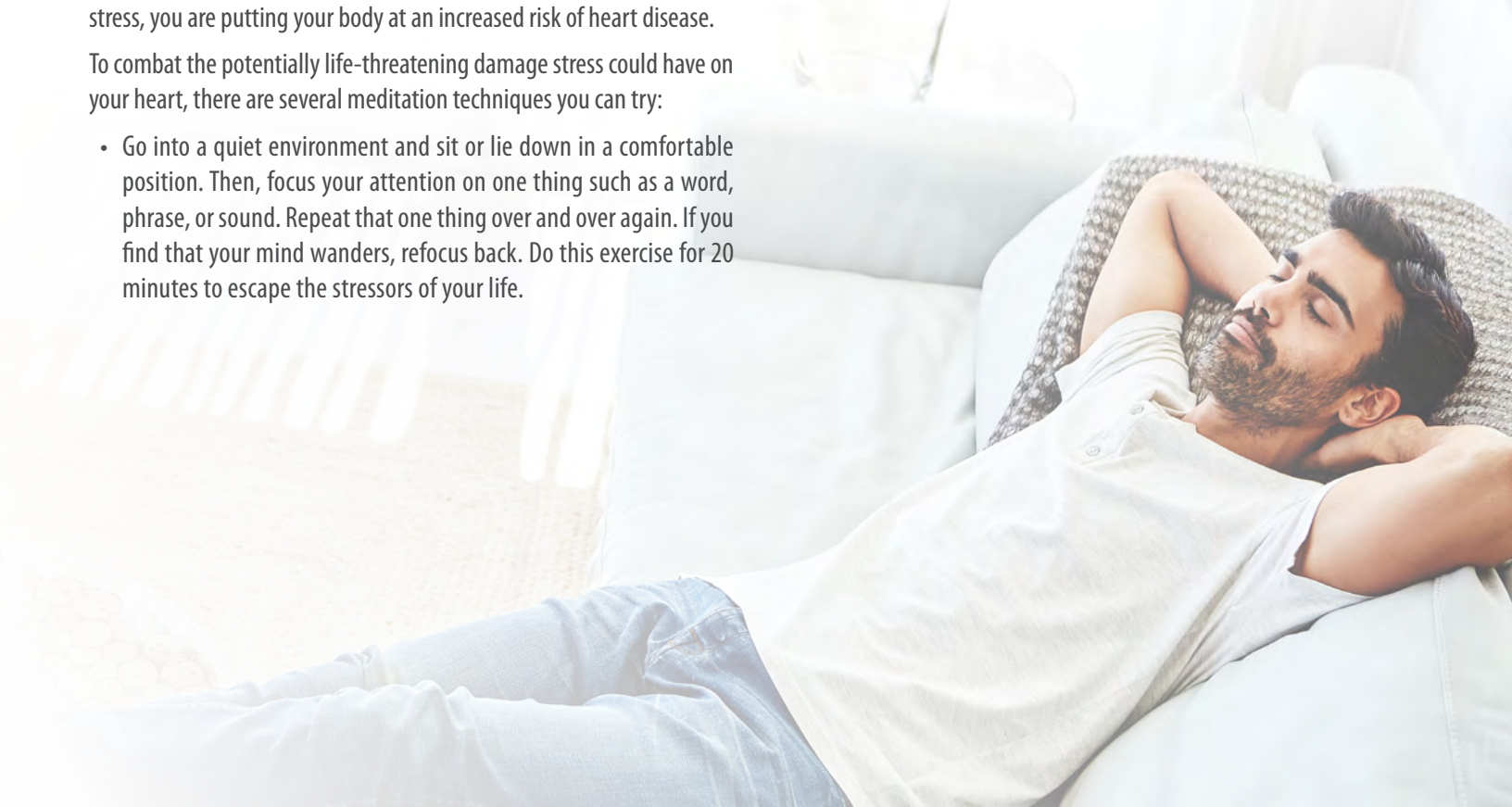
The brain and the heart are intrinsically connected and have a significant impact on how the other functions. The two organs communicate via the muscular walls around the heart, which are connected to the brain in the circulatory system. Since these two organs communicate, mental health can have a dramatic effect on heart health and vice versa.

The mind's response to a perceived or actual threatening situation is known as stress. The body responds to the stress by increasing your blood pressure, oxygen consumption, and more.

When you experience these responses on a regular basis as a result of stress, you are putting your body at an increased risk of heart disease.

To combat the potentially life-threatening damage stress could have on your heart, there are several meditation techniques you can try:

- Go into a quiet environment and sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Then, focus your attention on one thing such as a word, phrase, or sound. Repeat that one thing over and over again. If you find that your mind wanders, refocus back. Do this exercise for 20 minutes to escape the stressors of your life.
- Lie down or sit in a quiet area. Focus your attention on the muscle groups in your feet and slowly move through each group until you reach your head. As you go through each muscle group, try to imagine that you are actually breathing through those organs. As you "exhale", release the tension from the group.
- A third meditation exercise is to imagine that you are clearing your body of the toxins that you want to get rid of. For instance, visualize that you are ridding your arteries of plaque. Concentrate on releasing that energy, which will ultimately reduce the tension in your mind.



Experts Review Evidence Yoga is Good for The Brain

Scientists have known for decades that aerobic exercise strengthens the brain and contributes to the growth of new neurons, but few studies have examined how yoga affects the brain. A review of the science finds evidence that yoga enhances many of the same brain structures and functions that benefit from aerobic exercise.

The review, published in the journal *Brain Plasticity*, focused on 11 studies of the relationship between yoga practice and brain health. Five of the studies engaged individuals with no background in yoga practice in one or more yoga sessions per week over a period of 10 to 24 weeks, comparing brain health at the beginning and end of the intervention. The other studies measured brain differences between individuals who regularly practice yoga and those who don't.

The studies also find that the brain changes seen in individuals practicing yoga are associated with better performance on cognitive tests or measures of emotional regulation.

The discovery that yoga may have similar effects on the brain to aerobic exercise is intriguing and warrants more study, said University of Illinois kinesiology and community health professor Neha Gothe, who led the research with Wayne State University psychology professor Jessica Damoiseaux.

"Yoga is not aerobic in nature, so there must be other mechanisms leading to these brain changes," she said. "So far, we don't have the evidence to identify what those mechanisms are."

She suspects that enhancing emotional regulation is a key to yoga's positive effects on the brain. Studies link stress in humans and animals to shrinkage of the hippocampus and poorer performance on tests of memory, for example, she said.

"The science is pointing to yoga being beneficial for healthy brain function, but we need more rigorous and well-controlled intervention studies to confirm these initial findings," Damoiseaux said.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, News Bureau. "Experts review evidence yoga is good for the brain." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/12/191212105851.htm (accessed April 1, 2020).

Spending on Experiences Instead of Possessions Advances More Immediate Happiness

Certain purchases are better than others at sparking people's in-the-moment happiness, according to new research from the McCombs School of Business at The University of Texas at Austin. Lead author Amit Kumar, assistant professor of marketing, and his research team found that consumers are happier when they spend on experiential purchases versus material ones.

"One issue that hasn't really been examined much is what happens in the here and now – are we happier spending our money on an experience or on a material item?" Kumar said. "The basic finding from a lot of experiments is that people derive more happiness from their experiences than from their possessions."

The researchers concluded that people are happier with experiential purchases over material ones irrespective of when you measure happiness: before, during, or after consumption. Experiences also provoke more satisfaction even though people typically spend more time using their material possessions. The researchers said a possible explanation is the endurance of experiences in people's memories, while the perceived value of material goods weakens over time.

"If you want to be happier, it might be wise to shift some of your consumption away from material goods and a bit more toward experiences," Kumar said. "That would likely lead to greater well-being."

University of Texas at Austin. "Spending on experiences versus possessions advances more immediate happiness." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/03/200309130020.htm (accessed March 19, 2020).

Squatting or Kneeling May Have Health Benefits

University of Southern California. "Squatting or kneeling may have health benefits." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/03/200309165235.htm (accessed March 18, 2020).

A USC-led study shows that squatting and kneeling may be important resting positions in human evolution – and even for modern human health.

"We tend to think human physiology is adapted to the conditions in which we evolved," said David Raichlen, a professor of biological sciences at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. "So, we assumed that if inactivity is harmful, our evolutionary history would not have included much time spent sitting the way we do today."

To better understand the evolution of sedentary behaviors, the scientists studied inactivity in a group of Tanzanian hunter-gatherers, the Hadza, who have a lifestyle that is similar in some ways with how humans lived in the past.

The researchers suggested that because the Hadza squat and kneel and have high levels of movement when not at rest, they may have more consistent muscle activity throughout the day. This could reduce the health risks associated with sedentary behavior.

"Replacing chair sitting and associated muscular inactivity with more sustained active rest postures may represent a behavioral paradigm that should be explored in future experimental work," they wrote. Resolving this inactivity mismatch with our evolutionary past could pay off in better health today.

Ranch Chicken Salad

- ½ C 1% buttermilk
- 3 Tbsp. mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. fresh finely chopped chives
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. garlic powder
- ¼ tsp. onion powder
- ¼ tsp. dried parsley
- ¼ tsp. dried basil
- Fresh black pepper, to taste
- 2 C shredded boneless chicken breast, from rotisserie chicken or leftover

In a medium bowl combine the buttermilk, mayo, chives, salt, garlic powder, onion powder, parsley, basil and black pepper and mix. Add the shredded chicken and mix well. Refrigerate until ready to eat.

Serving: 1/2 cup, Calories: 167kcal, Carbohydrates: 2g, Protein: 17.5g, Fat: 9.5g, Saturated Fat: 2g, Cholesterol: 48mg, Sodium: 263mg, Fiber: 0.5g, Sugar: 2.5g

Gina Homolka. "Ranch Chicken Salad." Skinnytaste, March 2, 2020. https://www.skinnytaste.com/ranch-chicken-salad/.