

Meditation

Developed by The Center For Mind Body Medicine

I. Meditation

Meditation creates a relaxed state of moment to moment awareness which is critical to stress reduction and self-awareness. Meditation is the heart of healing and it's about being in the moment. Every spiritual and religious tradition in the world has meditative practices. If we belong to a particular religion, practice a spiritual tradition, or have no religious/spiritual affiliations, we may still use other practices. I invite you to use what is comfortable for you.

-3 Kinds of Meditation

There are three major types of meditation: (1) concentrative, (2) mindfulness and (3) expressive. All three have powerful and beneficial effects. The more often you do them, the more you will experience their effects.

We have already been doing Soft Belly breathing which is a **concentrative meditation**. Concentrative meditation consists of focused awareness on a particular object, such as an image or sound. Prayers and visual meditations are also concentrative meditations.

The second type is called **mindfulness (or awareness) meditation**, which involves being relaxed and aware of thoughts, feelings and sensations as they arise, without focusing on a particular object. Studies of mindfulness meditation have emphasized its value as a stress management technique. For example, walking can be a meditation. As you walk, focus on staying aware of your thoughts, feelings and sensations as they arise. As sights, smells and emotions come to you, name them to yourself. Observe what is around you. Notice how your body feels and whatever comes to you.

The third type is **expressive meditation**. This is probably the oldest kind of meditation. It's the one that indigenous healers around the world have used for thousands of years. This includes such active techniques as chanting, dancing, shaking, rapid breath work, and whirling.

Studies show that concentrative and mindfulness meditation can change brain wave activity and neurotransmitter levels, increase parasympathetic activity and increase heart rate variability. Studies have also demonstrated the effectiveness of concentrative meditation in lowering blood pressure, decreasing pain, decreasing frequency and intensity of asthma attacks, improving mood and decreasing anxiety.

As we practice meditative techniques the physiology of our body may change. Sometimes medications need to be reassessed and dosages changed after a regular meditation practice is established.

Meditation wakes us to the experience of the here and now and to our connection with that which is larger than ourselves. Meditation practice brings benefits to ALL aspects of our life.

II. Experiential Exercise: Expressive Meditation of "Shaking and Dancing"

Today we will do an expressive meditation called "shaking and dancing." This meditation can be useful for releasing any state of "stuckness" that we feel. We get stuck in our bodies and our joints don't move well. We get stuck in emotional states and feel sad and depressed.

Shaking helps us to physically begin to break up the stuck patterns in the body and open the joints, to relax the muscles and to break up those fixed postural patterns. Shaking also works to break up fixed ideas that we carry in our minds such as “Nothing is ever going to work out for me,” and helps us to move stuck feelings such as sadness, anger and despair. The movement of shaking helps to create open space where new ways of seeing, feeling, and experiencing can come in.

Shaking and Dancing Exercise: This meditation has three parts: (1) shaking, (2) stopping and remaining still for a minute or two, and (3) dancing.

Stand with enough room around you to move. Begin by planting your feet shoulder-width apart, bending your knees slightly, relaxing your shoulders and breathing deeply. Then shake your whole body from your feet, through your knees, hips and shoulders, to your head.

If you have physical limitations, shake to the best of your ability. You may need to shake slowly, standing near a wall, or while sitting down. Listen to your body. Do not push too hard. We will do the shaking for about 5 minutes. Then when the music stops, I will ask you to freeze in place and just notice how you feel. Some new music will come on and when it does, let the music move you...in whatever way feels good and right for you.

Please keep your eyes closed, so you can focus on yourself and your experience rather than others. It is easy to get caught up in comparing your movements to those of others. Remember that there is no right or wrong way to do this.

After the music had stopped “hold that pose and pay attention to your breathing and to your physical sensations,” then put on some upbeat music you enjoy and allow the music to move you. Dance your own unique dance for about five minutes. Don’t follow a particular pattern or dance step, just let your body move freely and spontaneously

III. Homework

- It is useful to have more than one meditative practice to choose from. Different types of meditation are appropriate in different situations. Experiment with both the quiet and the active meditations and write about it in your journal: Where were you? What time of day was it? What was the exercise like?
- Practice shaking and dancing once a day for a week. Do it in a private place where you won’t be interrupted. If you worry about what other would think if they saw you, notice the worry and keep shaking. If you want to stop, shake even more.
- Try doing the Soft Belly meditation one to three times a day. You may begin with five minutes and gradually increase your time to fifteen or twenty minutes. Set aside a place. You can use a timer so you will not be distracted by a clock.

NOTE: Whichever meditation practice you choose, attempt to practice it for several weeks. Remember, meditation does not always come easy so be patient with yourself.

