

Excerpt from Integrative Healing

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INTEGRATIVE HEALING

Developing
Wellness in the
Mind and Body

Z ALTUG PT, DPT, MS, CSCS



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CONTENTS

Contributors	x
Acknowledgments	xi
Preface	xii
Introduction	1

SECTION I: LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

Chapter 1: Mindfulness and Relaxation Training	8
Chapter 2: Managing Your Stress	24
Chapter 3: Getting Enough Sleep	41
Chapter 4: Nutrition for Life	53
Chapter 5: Sustainable Exercise	73

SECTION II: MIND BODY HEALTH AND INTEGRATIVE MOVEMENT

Chapter 6: Yoga for Health	84
Chapter 7: Tai Chi for Health	101
Chapter 8: Qi Gong for Health	112
Chapter 9: Pilates for Health	122
Chapter 10: Feldenkrais Method® for Health	133
Chapter 11: Alexander Technique for Health	142

SECTION III: REJUVINATING WESTERN EXERCISE AND MOVEMENT

Chapter 12: Practical Exercise Programs and Routines	152
Chapter 13: Exercise Menu and Home Program Guide	167

SECTION IV: SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

Chapter 14: Tracking Your Progress	212
Chapter 15: Healing Faster	221
Chapter 16: Improving Your Brain Health	261
Chapter 17: Sustainable Weight Loss Guide	283

Mind Body Makeover: Message from the Author	296
Appendix A: Medical and Wellness Associations	298
Appendix B: Research Resource to Manage Health	300
Appendix C: Products for Holistic Living	301
Index	304
About the Author	307

HOLISTIC HEALING BOX INDEX

Box 1: Controlling Type A Behavior	15
Box 2: Monitoring Your Blood Pressure at Home	19
Box 3: Pain Management Information	27
Box 4: Tips to Reduce Anxiety and Stay Calm	35
Box 5: Healthful Habits	49
Box 6: Hashimoto's Thyroiditis Health Guide	67
Box 7: Scoliosis Information	75
Box 8: Natural Bright Light for Good Health	80
Box 9: Face Touching and the Flu	164
Box 10: Osteoporosis Information	168
Box 11: Fidgeting at Work to Burn Calories and Prevent Stiffness	196
Box 12: Top 10 Health Products	219
Box 13: Women's Health Highlights	227
Box 14: Balance between Yin and Yang	246
Box 15: Random Acts of Kindness	274
Box 16: Managing Osteoarthritis	285
Box 17: Healthy Teest and Gums for a Healthy Body	291
Box 18: Tips to Manage Constipation	291

EXERCISE INDEX

WARM-UP EXERCISES

Shoulder March	174
Heel Sits	175
Cat/Camel	175
March In Place	176
Tai Chi Steps	176

AEROBIC EXERCISES

Outdoor Walking	178
Treadmill Walking	178
Stationary Bicycling	178

STRENGTH EXERCISES

Get Ups	179
Side Leg Lift	180
Bird Dog	181
Supine Bridge	182
Chair Squats	182
Shortstop Squats	183
Kettlebell Floor Squat	184
Elastic High Rows	185
Elastic Low Rows	185
Elastic Shoulder Blade Squeezes	186
Elevated Push-Ups	186

FLEXIBILITY EXERCISES

Squat Stretch	188
Outer Hip Stretch	188
Inner Hip Stretch	189
Hamstring Stretch with Ankle Pumps	189
Quadriceps Stretch	190
Calf Stretch	191
Look-over-Your-Shoulder Stretch	191
Hands-behind-the-Back Stretch	192
Hands-behind-the-Neck Stretch	192
Reach-to-the-Sky-Stretch	193
Yawn Stretch	193

BALANCE EXERCISES

Single-Leg Stance (static balance)	195
Heel Raises (dynamic balance)	196



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CHAPTER 1

MINDFULNESS AND RELAXATION TRAINING

“Wherever you go, there you are.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

I routinely tell my patients that “your body believes what your brain tells it.” Of course this is an oversimplification, but there is a purpose to the statement. In athletic competition, if our brain is thinking I can’t do something or is focused on negative thoughts, there is a good chance the body won’t be able to perform the way we want it to (Josefsson et al. 2017). The same holds true for my patients trying to accomplish a task, such as going down stairs or crossing a city street without fear. Once the person has the necessary strength, balance, and stamina, they ultimately need to believe and be confident that they can do the task.

So what does this have to do with mindfulness and relaxation? First, a person needs to be connected to the moment or a task at hand before they can be highly successful at it. Then they need to be relaxed and calm enough to perform the task. This isn’t always true but highly desirable. For example, even a sprinter trying to run at full speed needs to have a certain amount of focus and relaxation while running in order to allow for fluid motion and prevent unnecessary tension. Another way to think of it is that you can’t step on the gas pedal and the brake at the same time if you want to accomplish certain tasks. So in my clinical world, I have found that being mindful can help unlock the mind and the body.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

There are several interpretations as to what mindfulness means. One definition is that mindfulness-based stress reduction is “the use of meditation and self-awareness to enhance one’s ability to cope with challenging circumstances and psychological tensions” (Venes 2017). Another way to look at it is that “Mindfulness meditation is a technique to help us quiet the mind” (Savel et al. 2017). You will

read about more interpretations in this chapter and throughout the book. The main purpose of this chapter is to share my collection of practical mindfulness routines for you to try. This way, you can see which one(s) works best for your needs. However, I do want to point to one of my clinical observations about being mindful and relaxed. Simply doing mindfulness exercises may not be enough to “quiet the mind.” The person may have to dig deeper to find the root cause of their anxiety or mental unrest. Perhaps the root cause is eating trigger foods or nutrient deficiencies, lack of quality sleep, or not engaging in a fun or meaningful exercise program. It could also be that a person may need counseling and the expert guidance of a psychologist or psychiatrist. However, using the techniques outlined in this chapter and book can serve as good adjuncts to other medical care.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS TRAINING?

According to the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, the benefits of mindfulness training may impact your health in the following ways (UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center 2017):

- Help you to reduce stress
- Help to reduce chronic physical pain
- Serve as a boost to the immune system
- Help reduce emotional reactivity
- Help increase self-awareness
- Help improve attention and concentration
- Help you enhance positive emotions
- Help you cultivate well-being and happiness
- Impact the brain in a positive manner

DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING AND SPINE DECOMPRESSION

Purpose: To relax the mind and body, and decompress the spine. Diaphragmatic breathing (or belly breathing or abdominal breathing) may be helpful for stress reduction, relaxation, pain control, lymphedema, and thoracic outlet syndrome (Kisner et al. 2018).

Positions: Supine position (lying down on your back, face-up) for relaxation and decompression, or a seated position for relaxation only.



Technique and Design:

- Start by lying on your back with knees bent to approximately 90 degrees, feet shoulder-width apart.

- Breathe in through your nose as if trying to draw in a pleasant aroma. Then, breathe out as if you want to make the flame of a candle in front of your mouth start to flicker without blowing it out (Eherer et al. 2012).
- Once you are good at this exercise in a lying position, try it when sitting, standing, or doing gentle stretches.
- Do one set of 10 to 20 slow breaths for a brief relaxation period. For a more extended relaxation period and also to decompress the spine, try lying on your back with your legs either straight or elevated (supported on pillows, a bolster or cushion, or placed on a sofa or chair) for 5 to 15 minutes. May be performed daily.

Precaution: If your chest rises more than your abdomen, you might be performing the exercise incorrectly. Try again, and be patient. It takes practice and a little coordination to master this exercise.

Alternate Spine Decompression Strategies:

- Try a sidelying position with the knees bent, while hugging a pillow with your arms, and placing a separate pillow between your knees (do for 5 to 15 minutes)
- Try assuming a hands-and-knees position (do for one minute)
- Try partially hanging from a pull-up bar or a doorframe, with your feet still touching the ground (do three sets for 10 to 15 seconds)
- Try relaxing in a pool (do for 5 to 15 minutes)
- Try reclining in a good reclining chair (do for 5 to 15 minutes)
- Try a rocking chair (do for 5 to 15 minutes)
- Speak with a medical professional about using a spine belt or brace
- Speak with a medical professional about using a traction device

MINI-MEDITATION BREAKS

Purpose: To ease your mind when you can't get to sleep, you have a big test, or you're in stressful situation. Or, you can use mini-meditation breaks (or what I call "waiting meditation") while standing in a busy line during shopping, waiting at a red light, or passing time in a doctor's or dentist's waiting area. I recommend putting down the phone and taking advantage of the golden opportunity to allow yourself to relax multiple times every day rather than waiting for your three sessions every week. I personally use the "waiting meditations" all the time and I am no longer impatient about waiting in line or waiting for an appointment. I now view it as my time to relax.

Positions: Sitting or lying down



Technique and Design:

- See the Diaphragmatic Breathing and Spine Decompression section above.