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From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of Mind/Body Health Maine. In upcoming issues, you will find information and discussion about topics relevant to you and your emotional, physical and spiritual health—in other words, your health as a whole person.

The content of this newsletter will include straightforward advice about maintaining optimal health, exercises and practical information you can use, book reviews and recommendations, summaries of research about the mind/body connection, and updates about events and resources in our community. This will be a lot of ground to cover—we will need to do some significant growing to encompass all of this!

Q: So, why “Mind/Body Health?” Too many forces conspire to convince us that our various aspects really are separate. In error, we come to believe that we can have physical health in the midst of lives that preclude balance. We come to believe that we can have emotional health while ignoring some of the most valuable aspects of our lives. By logical extension, we come to believe

“we hold an insight
or have a clear view
for a moment and
then it slips away”

that illness, when it arrives, must also occur in isolation—and so seek remedies that reflect such wrong views. And our spiritual lives? Well, we can attend to that later, right?

I hope that these pages can offer a short reprieve from, if not a slight correction of, this fragmentation, and to remind us of our wholeness and the true interconnectedness of our minds, bodies, and spirit.

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Seasons & Moods, Part 1

The distinct seasons of Northern New England add richness and beauty to our lives. For some, however, the changing of the seasons comes with shifts in mood, energy level, and sleep cycles. Several factors can contribute to this effect: Shorter days, cooler weather, return to school or work routines, and the scattering of our families as they pursue their own lives and interests. The effect on your mood can be subtle and occur below your awareness, preventing you from taking steps that can help to anticipate and cope with these changes.

This year, commit yourself to taking active, deliberate steps to improve your overall health, buffer you from these changes, and help you enjoy the changing of the seasons. Fall can be a time in which you gain momentum in your life—momentum that will keep you moving through the winter months.

Exercise. Fall is the perfect season for long walks or a new exercise regimen (get cleared by your physician first, of course). Regular exercise can be a powerful and healthy antidepressant.^{1,2} Start slow. Pair the exercise with a fun activity, like walking into town or visiting. Take a ferry to a local island and explore. Enjoy a long bicycle ride or visit a state park. Be social by inviting a friend, joining an exercise group, or learning yoga.

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Stress Basics

Stress—we recognize it when we become overwhelmed and when it causes problems. On other days, we tolerate it, resigned to living in a world where new stressors emerge whenever a familiar stressor wanes.

According to national surveys, the top sources of stress include money, work, health concerns and the health of

Did you know?

Two-thirds of all office visits to family physicians are due to stress-related symptoms.³

our families, news of world events, and children. These surveys also show that Americans who report more stress are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as comfort eating, smoking, and being sedentary and inactive.⁴

But how well do you really understand your stress and your coping with stress? Therapists and healthcare workers understand that stress is cumulative—it builds up—and that our capacity to manage stress depends on many factors that fluctuate from day-to-day or even hour-to-hour. Better self-care and overall mind/body health are important. People

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Mindful Moment

Here is a simple mindfulness and relaxation exercise you can do anytime. We can call this “a trip through your senses.” Learn the exercise first and then walk yourself through it slowly, not at the pace of your reading it. Start by sitting comfortably with feet flat on the floor and your back upright, eyes closed. Move your attention as if scanning up your body starting at the floor. Notice what you feel, one sensation at a time, from your feet, legs, abdomen, chest and back. Become aware of your breathing—what it feels like, sounds like, how your

body moves. Scan up into your upper back, shoulders, and neck, noticing any tension there. Move your jaw around and relax it.

As your scan nears your head, tune into your senses one at a time. Start with your sense of taste, noticing any tastes that linger in your mouth. Inhale slowly through your nose focusing on scents in the room, including those you barely notice. Shift to your ears, noticing all the sounds coming from your body, the room, and beyond the room. Give yourself a few moments to allow

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Q: Why “Mind/Body Health Maine?” Quite simply, my aim is to keep the focus local. Just as separating our various aspects of self can impair our overall well-being so our separation from our local roots and communities can lead to isolation. So, let us make this newsletter about living fully as whole persons, individuals in community, right here in our home.

It is my hope that you learn something new in these pages over the upcoming months. But I also hope that you will be reminded of something very important that you already knew or perhaps have always known. In my experience as a psychotherapist, I have seen that the most important lessons in life are often learned repeatedly. Like the experience of meditation, we hold an insight or have a clear view for a moment and then it slips away. Our task is to notice that we have drifted, with acceptance that it is in our natures to drift and without judgment of ourselves for having done so, and to return. Let the arrival of this newsletter at your home or in your office be another reminder to come back—we cannot have too many reminders.



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More information, resources, book reviews, and useful links can be found in the online edition.

www.mainepsychology.com

FAQs: How do I share something of interest with other readers? Can I contribute an article to *Mind/Body Health Maine*? How do I subscribe?

A: Online at <http://www.mainepsychology.com> or...

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Diet. Your farmers’ market and grocery store are bursting with local favorites—learn to love them. Buy vegetables not on your usual menu or prepare old favorites in a different way. Bake some beets or a squash or even some apples for dessert. Find a healthy soup recipe or just make one up on the fly. Buy and steam those unusual greens you usually pass over. Eat breakfast, of course. How is this for simple: If you prepare healthy snacks, you will probably eat them. If you do not buy junk food, you will not be tempted by it. In other words, if your will power does not work at home, exercise it at the store instead. And eat before you shop—don’t shop when hungry!

Sleep. Sleep problems come in many varieties—too little, too much, interrupted sleep, overuse of medications, etc. Make adequate sleep a priority throughout the week rather than skimping all week and then sleeping in on weekends. Irregular sleep can disrupt your normal biological rhythms and sap your energy when you need it most. Learning better sleep habits can help. Also beware of oversleeping—sleeping to avoid your days or staying in bed when feeling depressed. In this case, committing to getting up and moving is a better choice. Schedule morning activities that you are confident will draw you out of bed. Commit to meet or call a friend. Invite someone over for breakfast or coffee (in moderation). If problems persist, talk with your physician or a therapist.

See *Seasons & Moods, Part 2 online now or in the next issue (Vol. 1, Issue 2) for recommendations on waking up your mind, your activities as a whole person, and yourself as member of your community.*

MINDFUL MOMENT (Continued from page 1)

these to come to you. Label them “I hear a car...I hear someone talking,” and let them go—don’t wander off with them. Notice the feelings in your face and around your eyes. Notice that, even with your eyes closed, you probably do not see blackness, but rather shapes and dull colors. Isn’t it strange how rarely we notice this?

Open your eyes and see what is in front of you as if for the first time. Notice colors, shapes, textures and pat-

STRESS (Continued from page 1)

with more social support tend to cope better with stress and more readily rebound from its effects. Having regular physical exams to catch early signs of stress-related problems is also a good idea.

It is important to recognize that we all have moments in our lives when we become overwhelmed and over-taxed by our circumstances. Managed well, most people are able move forward with their lives. Managed poorly, a situational crisis can become a chronic struggle.

Understanding stress can help you manage it. However, it is even more important to understand your particular stress response. What triggers your stress? What do you worry about? How does your stress response “show up”—in your body, your mind, your emotions, and your behavior? If you are unaware of your stress until it erupts into your life as problems in these areas, it may be time for you to “tune in” to what your mind and body are telling you—and time to learn more effective strategies for managing stress.

To learn more about stress, your stress response, and to access additional resources, visit the online edition at www.mainepsychology.com.

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1. Blumenthal, JA, Babyak, MA, Moore, KA, Craighead, WE, Herman, S, Khatri, P, Waugh, R, Napolitano, MA, Forman, LM, Appelbaum, M, Doraiswamy, PM, Krishnan, KR (1999). *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 159 (19): 2349-56.
2. Babyak M, Blumenthal JA, Herman S, Khatri P, Doraiswamy M, Moore K, Craighead WE, Baldecwicz TT, Krishnan KR (2000). *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 62 (5): 633-8.
3. Statistic from the American Academy of Family Physicians and reported on <http://www.apahelpcenter.org/featuretopics/feature.php?id=62>
4. <http://www.apa.org/releases/stressurvey0206.html>

terns. Really look at what you see—directly if possible—not just as the categories we place these things into (don’t see “a couch,” see the actual couch in front of you). Remain still and allow sensations to come to you one at a time, like waves rolling in. Notice each and then let it go, allowing the next sensation to arise and tug at your attention. Continue this for several minutes (eyes opened or closed). If you found some stillness here, resolve to take some of it with you as you go about your day. Better yet, find the stillness already there.