Mind-Body Medicine

Mind-body medicine focuses on the interactions among the brain, mind, body, and behavior, and on the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can directly affect health. It regards as fundamental an approach that respects and enhances each person's capacity for self-knowledge and self-care, and it emphasizes techniques that are grounded in this approach.

Mind-body medicine typically focuses on intervention strategies that are thought to promote health, such as relaxation, hypnosis, visual imagery, meditation, yoga, biofeedback, tai chi, qigong, cognitive-behavioral therapies, group support, autogenic training, and spirituality. The field views illness as an opportunity for personal growth and transformation and health care providers as catalysts and guides in this process.

Over the past 20 years, mind-body medicine has provided considerable evidence that psychological factors can play a substantive role in the development and progression of coronary artery disease. Mind-body interventions have also been applied to various types of pain. Clinical trials indicate that these interventions may be a particularly effective adjunct in the management of arthritis, with reductions in pain maintained for up to 4 years and reductions in the number of physician visits. There is considerable evidence that emotional traits, both negative and positive, influence people's susceptibility to infection. Following systematic exposure to a respiratory virus in the laboratory, individuals who report higher levels of stress or negative moods have been shown to develop more severe illness than those who report less stress or more positive moods.

Evidence from randomized controlled trials and, in many cases, systematic reviews of the literature, suggests that:

- Mechanisms may exist by which the brain and central nervous system influence immune, endocrine, and autonomic functioning, which is known to have an impact on health.

- Multicomponent mind-body interventions that include some combination of stress management, coping skills training, cognitive-behavioral interventions, and relaxation therapy may be appropriate adjunctive treatments for coronary artery disease and certain pain-related disorders, such as arthritis.
• Multimodal mind-body approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, particularly when combined with an educational/informational component, can be effective adjuncts in the management of a variety of chronic conditions.

• An array of mind-body therapies (e.g., imagery, hypnosis, relaxation), when employed presurgically, may improve recovery time and reduce pain following surgical procedures.

• Neurochemical and anatomical bases may exist for some of the effects of mind-body approaches.

Mind-body approaches have potential benefits and advantages. The physical and emotional risks of using these interventions are minimal. Once tested and standardized, most mind-body interventions can be taught easily. Future research focusing on basic mind-body mechanisms and individual differences in responses is likely to yield new insights that may enhance the effectiveness and individual tailoring of mind-body interventions. In the meantime, there is considerable evidence that mind-body interventions, even as they are being studied today, have positive effects on psychological functioning and quality of life, and may be particularly helpful for patients coping with chronic illness and in need of palliative care.