Meditation and Mindfulness by Mary Yoke, M.A., M.M.

Increasing evidence indicates that mind/body practices such as meditation and mindfulness are a powerful antidote to stress, anxiety, and depression; many other health benefits have been documented as well. Fitness professionals need to be familiar with the positive attributes of meditation and mindfulness, which can enrich both personal and professional well-being.

I. What is Meditation?
   A. A practice to train the mind, promote relaxation, enhance the vital life force, and promote compassion
   B. Many measurable physiological changes occur during meditation. For example, brainwave activity shifts into a more relaxed and therapeutic state: the four basic patterns are beta, alpha, theta, and delta.
   C. Attention and awareness are trainable and improve with practice.
   D. The many benefits of meditation
   E. There are many meditative traditions, including Zen, Transcendental Meditation, Vipassana, Kundalini, Insight Meditation, and Qi gong.

II. Selected Meditation Research Findings
   A. Meditation improves self-regulation over the life span (Tang et al, 2014).
   B. Meditation increases activation in the pre-frontal cortex and inhibits cortisol (the stress hormone) production. (Guglietti et al, 2013)
   C. Meditation improves student knowledge retention (Ramsburg et al, 2014).
   D. Meditation reduces anxiety, depression, and pain (Goyal et al, 2014)

III. Meditation Practicalities
   A. Find a quiet place free of distractions
   B. Sit tall, with a long spine and a lifted heart
   C. Both feet on the floor
   D. Find a peaceful hand position (mudra)
   E. Set your timer
   F. Notice your body; notice what there is to notice

IV. Meditation Techniques
   A. Following the breath
   B. Other breathing techniques
   C. Heart breath
   D. Mantra-based meditation
   E. Loving-kindness meditation
   F. Affirmations (Peace is my true nature; I am an eternal spark of life energy; I find deep peace and contentment within; I am awake to the beauty of life.
G. Walking meditation (peace is every step)

V. What is Mindfulness?
   A. Qualities that facilitate mindfulness: beginner's mind, non-judging, acceptance, non-attachment, non-striving, letting go, using all six senses
   B. Can be practiced formally or informally
   C. MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn
   D. Benefits of mindfulness

VI. Mindfulness Research Findings
   A. Mindfulness-based therapy meta-analysis (Khoury et al, 2013). MBT is more effective for psychological disorders than physical disorders. MBT is as effective as traditional psychotherapeutic treatments, and is particularly effective at treating anxiety, depression, and stress.
   B. Mindfulness is an antidote to suffering for those with addiction substance abuse problems (Black, 2014).
   C. Mindfulness improves emotional regulation, helps increase self-compassion, and helps decrease aggressive anger expression (Robins et al, 2012).
   D. Mindfulness training can help with binge-eating and emotional eating behaviors (Katterman et al, 2014).

VII. Mindfulness Practice
   A. The mindful mountain
   B. BRFWA (breathe, relax, feel, watch, allow)
   C. Mindfulness Meditation
   D. The spirit of mindfulness (sitting by the fire, early morning, deep communication, mindful eating, waiting in line, life’s work)

VIII. Take-aways
   1. Let your life itself become your meditation practice.
   2. Non-judging is an act of intelligence and kindness.
   3. Only a few minutes of meditation a day can make a big difference in your health and well-being.
   4. Meditation is easy and can be as simple as consciously taking a deep breath.
   5. Regular practice is key for optimal benefits.

Resources:


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