

MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS & GUT HEALTH



Meditation

- Issues of the gut and the connection of gut microbes to stress and emotional issues brings some interesting questions
- So far we know that meditation can improve health outcomes across the board
- Meditation has also been shown lower stress levels
- But could meditation or the process known as mindfulness be used to help clients gets better results for their gut (including getting more from the food that is good for the gut)



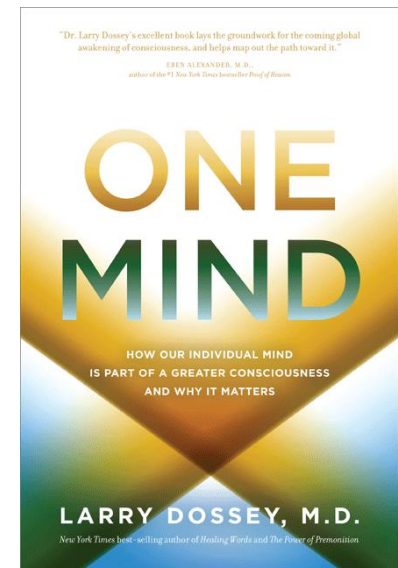
Meditation

- Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (FGID) is a category of intestinal issues that are hard to diagnose and have been considered to be “in one’s head”
- Studies show that patients who tried psychologically-based approaches were more successful than those who tried conventional medical treatments
- One study of 48 people with either IBS or IBD participates in a 9-week program of meditation training,
- Results included reduced pain, improved symptoms, reduced stress levels, and a change in gene expression that contribute to inflammation.



Intention and The Microbiome

- Can the practice of intention alter the microbiome?
- This is a current working theory of Larry Dorsey, MD, author of The One Mind
- He proposes that the practice of intention can be used to grow or suppress bacteria
- This means that perhaps unconsciously, we may have been using intention all along and this can be playing a role in our health issues.
- And of course, that would include our gut health



The One Mind

- We know there is a connection between human beings and the behavior of bacteria and visa versa
- If you believe we are all part of nature and that we cannot be separated from it – then our gut bacteria are sheer proof that we are part of nature
- Dr Dossey predicts that we will learn to regulate the microbiome with psychological thought (whether it is meditation, prayer, wishing etc.)
- In the meantime, use the techniques of imagery and visualization to use intention for improving the microbiome



From A Practical Perspective

- Does this mean gut bacteria can be affected by meditation?
- Gut microbes can alter gene expression, especially in the gastrointestinal tract
- Meditation lowers stress levels
- Stress effects gut bacteria levels
- Is the relationship to changes in gene expression from meditation due to meditation lowering stress which in turn improves levels of gut bacteria and therefore the microbes improve the gene expression



Meditation and Mindfulness

- More importantly, are the benefits to intestinal disorders that are associated with meditation due to providing the body with a better environment to correct dysbiosis which improves the intestinal issues?
- Mindfulness is another practice that can be extremely useful for reducing stress and playing in a role of using intention for gut health by focusing of eating foods for gut health



Cravings

- Microbes in the gastrointestinal tract are under selective pressure to manipulate the host's eating behavior to increase their fitness, sometimes at the expense of host's fitness.
- Microbes may do this through two potential strategies:
 - (i) generating cravings for foods that they want or foods that suppress their competitors,
 - (ii) induce dysphoria (a state of disease) until we eat foods that enhance their fitness



Cravings

- Gut microbes can control what you eat
- Different bacteria want to eat different foods and whatever bacteria have an advantage in numbers, determines what you crave.
- By having you eat more of a given food, they help keeps their numbers strong.
- The gut bacteria can even manipulate you to feel anxious and depressed and signal you to eat a given food “to feel better”
- Don’t assume that good bacteria does not like sugar
- Feeding the bacteria the right foods can help limit cravings overtime

Mindfulness: What is it?

- It is a type of meditation
- Traditional meditation requires that you try to rid your mind of thoughts
- However, unlike traditional meditation – instead of quieting the mind – mindfulness asks that you focus on something specific in the present
- It finds its roots in Buddhism, Taoism and Native American traditions



Benefits of Mindfulness

- Physical Benefits: lowers heart rate and blood pressure, reduces chronic pain, improves sleep and can improve intestinal issues
- Mental Health: Can help with depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, relationship conflicts, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders
- It is believed that mindfulness is helping people to accept their experiences—including painful emotions—rather than react to them with aversion and avoidance.



Mindfulness

- Living in the moment – lowers stress levels
- Stress is most often a product of worrying about what you cannot control –
- In particular – the future and the past
- Focusing on the present prevents worrying
- It also provides an opportunity to see things in a new perspective – you will take things less for granted



1. To improve how you perform – don't think about - the best dancers, for example, just let go

- Thinking too hard about what you do causes you to do worse

2. Stop worrying about the future – work in the present and experience life now and enjoy it – learn to savour

3. If you want a future with someone – focus on living in the present. One study showed that by doing mindfulness exercises of focusing on the present made people less aggressive towards others when upset



- 4. To make the most of time – lose track of it - in other words being so engrossed in a task that you are totally absorbed – this is known as creating flow
- You can't force flow (like sleep)but you can set the stage for it to occur
- You do this by setting a goal that is challenging but not unattainable so you can fire on all cylinders
- There also needs to be immediate feedback as to whether you are going in the right direction so you can make corrections as you go



5.If something is bothering you, move towards it – do not avoid it.

Avoiding the pain only makes it worse – we have primary emotions and secondary ones – you stress about the bad feelings you have and fight trying to have them which creates more stress.

Instead – acknowledging the feelings and realizing they are normal reduces the effect they can have



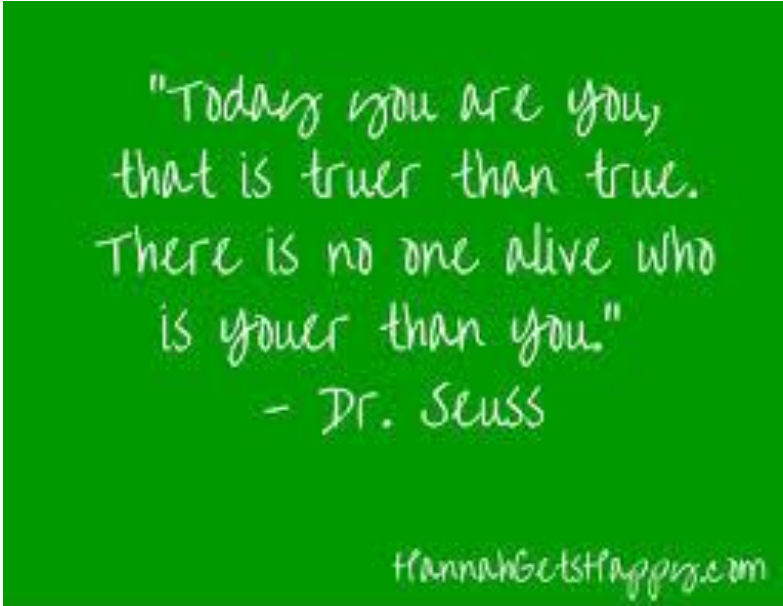
6. Know that you do not know – have you even been lost in your thoughts that you cannot remember what just happened in the present – this is known as mindlessness

- Once we think we know something – we stop paying attention to it (like our drive home)
- We should be looking at everything with fresh eyes – living in the present allows for this
- Try this the next time you leave the house – look at everything around you – you will see it is different each time – it will be a new adventure



Mindfulness

- This must be practiced and there are courses that can teach this
- The practice will take time
- It does not mean you do not make plans – it just means that you make your plans but stay focused on one task at a time
- It takes time to develop the skill but it is worth the effort and it will lower stress levels
- It allows you to be you



"Today you are you,
that is truer than true.
There is no one alive who
is youer than you."
- Dr. Seuss

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In Conclusion:

- This is just a introduction the to the concept that there is more (psychospiritually) to the using the mind for manipulating health and gut health
- We need to stay tuned as this progresses
- In the meantime, we can still encourage the practices of meditation and mindfulness (and visualization, imagery) to help clients no matter what
- If this is not your area of expertise, then develop a list of recommendations – books and programs
- But this is something we do need to think about, especially when clients are not progressing

