

Mindfulness: The Life-Mind-Body Connection

Welcome everyone to today's webinar. Mindfulness, like-minded body connection. And one of the moderators along with my colleagues. Kevin Herbert will be the guest speaker today. Kevin is the singular manager and a licensed professional counselor who has taught individuals and groups how to increase awareness, improve lives and find peace using communication, medication, hypnosis and mind-body integration techniques. With that said, I'm going to hand it over to you, Kevin.

Thank you. I appreciate the introduction. Welcome everyone. We will be discussing some things that can help you to perhaps better manage the stress that you have in your life and ways you can focus. We will define mindfulness. And a lot of you probably heard that. We also will look at the mind-body map that is shown effective for managing stress. We want to explain the myths and realities of meditation. It is not always the go-to for people. Sometimes, there are folks that don't benefit from it as much or would benefit from a different approach. We will practice some deep breathing and meditation techniques today. So we will get a chance to look at what is the background and what are we trying to accomplish side-by-side with some practical applications. Before we get started, what I would like for you to do is just to think to yourself, what is your level of stress today? What is your level of stress right now? And if you can put that on a scale from 1-10. One being not very much at all and 10 being the most stressed you could possibly be. Before we begin, just get a sense of where we are today and we will come back at the end and test that again. The first mindful practice is mindful expectations. What are your goals for meditation and mindful practice? Are you here to learn how to get some rest and restoration? Are you here to learn how to improve your focus? What do you hope to accomplish today and if you continue to practice meditation -- meditation techniques. Less worry? Perhaps greater self-control or even better quality of life. Hopefully everybody has got that number there. We will start by talking a little bit about stress. Stress is something that fuels our lives. It is something that we actually need for health and well-being. It is sometimes worse for us to have nothing to do and no stress at all. At every level of our being, from the physical to the biological on up through the emotional and the psychological, we have this constant back and forth. And that dynamic is stress and our lives. And stress builds us up but it can also overwhelm us. Stress can be something that is related to a specific situation. And it can be something that is all around us. I think most of us today do feel that all around us. It is the information that we get from the media that we tune in to and from the pressures of our work and from the struggles of our family and the people that we know. And so the stress is in everywhere all the time thing, which it is for most of us in today's age. What can we do to turn the tide? It might be a combination of a situation and everything else. And we might feel like we are juggling and how many things are we juggling at one time? It might be something that catches us by surprise. The unexpected. That can also be more stressful. So the stress, and distress -- any time the stress is having a negative effect on you, it is building over time. It is not going away. That can be stressful. The kind of stress that can help us, fuel us, challenge us and guide us in a helpful direction, that is good stress. And our bodies, we have competing systems that work together to maintain balance. And it is the nervous system. We have the sympathetic nervous system which many people are familiar with as a fight or flight response. It is one of the main functions of the sympathetic nervous system. If we had a threat to us and we needed to run or fight, our body is ready to turn that on and start pumping our blood. Filling our lungs. Helping us to take action. We also have a natural response. It is almost like flipping a switch. It is another division of that same nervous system and it has also been called the

relaxation response. So how can you manage something that your body is doing and voluntarily? We can manage our environment to some degree. We can manage our internal experience to some degree. And so a lot of the things that can help us to flip that switch from stressful to relaxation response, are things that we do automatically but we also have some control over like our breathing. And so, if you have been stressed yourself or have been present to somebody who is having some anxiety, you might have heard, just breathe. When you are really stressed out, and you are not sure about what that means or how to go about doing it. If you have learned some deep breathing techniques -- and by deep breathing, we mean filling up all of your lungs -- because when we are stressed out, our body usually needs the extra oxygen. Chances are, we are not breathing effectively. So bringing the extra oxygen gives our body what we need so that we can take on the various pathways we have ahead of us. And so breathing deep breathing, there is not any particular thing you need to do. The easiest way to get the fullest breath possible is just to change your posture. -- your posture. What like for you to do, however you are sitting or wherever you are right now, put your feet flat on the floor. And arrange yourself so you have a firm connection. Maybe wiggle your seat a little bit. Stretch forward.

It gives you a sense of control. There are two basic types. You have your practical coping and your emotional coping. With practical coping, you are taking control of your time and your space. And again, we frequently live a life that has a lot of overlap. We are getting messages on the cell phones. One person in one place and from another person at the next place. We have all these reminders popping up. We have so many things vying for our attention. And that puts us in that juggling act again. And so what can we do in the moment to reduce the number of things we are focusing on? We can ask ourselves, am I attending to things that I can control. Sometimes there isn't anything we can do about a situation. Sometimes if we make one effort, we could get a sense of control about it. And you can ask, are the things that I have been attending to my responsibility? And then take on the world. May have a hard time saying no when a request comes in. Everything seems to be on the same level of urgency. But when we stop and reflect for a moment, we realize that some things are more urgent than others. And some things are urgent but not for us. And so becoming aware of what is my own and what is mine to attend to also gives us a greater sense of control. And if it is something that you should be doing, if it is something that is important to you that you have responsibility for. You can also ask yourself, do I have to address this right now? There might be part of you crying out, do I have to do this now? But perhaps there is a better time and a more appropriate place. And getting a sense of what the appropriate time in the appropriate place is helps us to manage things practically. And there is a lot of great stress management, time management and relational coping skills that can help on the practical side. But what if it is something that we can't control? What if it is something that won't go away right now? You turn to emotional coping. How you manage yourself when the situation is out of control will send a signal to your body about what is and isn't right and what does and does not need to be attended to. So we can learn to manage that communication with our body and we can do that by attending to our emotions. Giving it a name and then asking ourselves, is this emotion appropriate? Is it appropriate for this moment right now? We are here to talk more specifically about physical things. The mind-body connection that can help put your life back into balance. And the first thing is, relaxation. Like I have all these things going on. I wish I could just relax. And I would say, don't worry about it. Just relax. Relaxation does help. One, taking a break. If we have all these things you are trying to attend to and we are trying to multitask, it is really a myth. We can really only ever attend with the wholeness of our concentration to one thing at a time. And any time we try to do more than that, we are really just stopping and shifting gears. It is that stopping and shifting gears part that

takes up energy and it takes time to get back up further . So when two week vacation? Our body does not know the difference. It will appreciate it when it comes. But what do we do now? Taking a break as soon as you are able to, even just for a little bit of time, helps to create a space where your body can function in the relaxation state instead of the fight or flight state . So some things that we do to help with that are just distractions. We might watch a television show or fiddle around on our phone or go for a walk. These are all, at a basic level, things that can serve as a distraction. Not necessarily going to make our problems go away and not going to fix tension we might have within our muscles. But it is enough to give us some space. That is really helpful. Having control of our time and space and realizing that we do helps us to care for ourselves. Physical relaxation has been demonstrated to help calm the nervous system and research has been done going back to the early 20th century, back to ancient times that focuses on restoring a sense of calm in the body. Relaxing the body. Then we are able to relax the mind.

So exercise has been around a long time. Known as progressive muscle relaxation. Basically the idea is, if you tense the muscle and then relax it, you develop a sense of relaxation. I think what you also learn is to identify what tension feels like. And you give it a name. And then you create relaxation for yourself. Notice what that feels like and give it a name. Progressive muscle relaxation, you are doing that basically with every muscle you can identify come from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. And it might take you a half hour or more to relieve those muscles. And it is a great exercise. A great activity that I would encourage you to try.

There is also the body scan which many times is just another name for the same thing. What is interesting to think about is our body holds on to tension. Sometimes it is holding on to tension so we don't fall out of our chairs or stumble when we are walking but when we are anxious about things were when we have extra stress soars, we have the weight of the world on our shoulders. We feel it in our back. And wherever it is in the pit of our stomach. And that is our body saying, I'm going to hold on to this for you. It is our body saying, we need to do something here. And if you ignore it, distract yourself, your body might just hold on to it for you. Say that's all right. I will keep it here. I will have it for you when you get back. So interestingly, when we pay attention to our body, even just putting our focus and attention on the part that is tense, it sends a signal of interest that can lead to relaxation. I think body scans are more helpful when you practice progressive muscle relaxation a few times because that way , you have a familiar connection to every part of your body. One part of your body is a little tense, you will know how to act and attend to it and you will be able to tell that part, okay. We don't have to hold on to that anymore.

Before we move on to, how does focusing help , I want to give you a brief version of the tension and relief exercise. This is hand exercise number one. Whichever hand you would like. Just begin to roll up your fingers to the middle of your palm so you can make a nice tight fist. Put your thumb over the top of your knuckles. And just give it a little squeeze. As you are breathing in, squeeze a little little tighter. And when you are breathing out, don't squeeze so much. Let it go a bit. Just do that a few times and notice how that feels . Now over the cycle of one full breath, as you are breathing in, make that as tight as you can make it. And when you breathe out, let it roll open gently and easily. And when the fingers are open, give them a nice wiggle. And when you wiggle the fingers a little bit, give the hand a shake. Just let it hang there . So when you make that fist , you are noticing what tension feels like. That is muscular tension. And it is an analog. It is a metaphor for the tension we hold in our emotions and our mind. And when we let that go, there is also a feeling there. It feels more free . It might even feel tingly. Because when you are making a fist, you are cutting off blood circulation basically. Your arm falling asleep when you lay on it too long. And so even that can be a technique , a distraction. A technique of relaxation when you notice you are feeling stressed out. You can just

breathe in as you are making a fist and breathe out and let it go. The relaxation can turn on the relaxation response which is a counterbalance to our stressed out fight or flight sympathetic nervous activation.

We talked a little bit about how focus can help. Are we focusing on things we are in control of? Are we focusing on things we have responsibility for? Are we focusing on things that are not appropriate to this time or place? If we find that we are, we can change that. So what is your state of mind? Are you wide-awake? Half-asleep? Most of us, most of what we do at any moment is pretty mindless. Pretty automatic. And that's okay. We wouldn't survive if we didn't have 95% of our activities running automatically. But a lot of the behaviors we have learned over time, especially the ones that are not appropriate or don't suit us well at that particular moment, they are just running automatically. And the only way to really do anything about that is to become aware of it. And so self reflection can be very helpful. Paying attention to what your body does and setting aside time to develop that awareness. That can be very helpful. Awareness of our thoughts, feelings and actions allow us to make informed decisions and work with otherwise unconscious behavior. If we know what is happening, we can do something about it. We are what we pay attention to. For this, you can imagine having a flashlight. Your consciousness, your awareness is whatever you point the flashlight at, right. If you don't point the flashlight behind you, you cannot even see behind you. You don't know what is going on there. If you point the flashlight straight ahead, you will not see what is to the left. You won't see what is to the right. Our attention is like a flashlight. We can change the light. What you are conscious of depends on your focus. It can be a laser beam of concentration. I have things to do and I will focus on it. Pointing a laser beam added. But if we have multiple things to attend to or we are transitioning from one activity to another or we are giving ourselves permission to not be stressed and to relax a little bit, it might be that soft glow of mindful bliss where the diffusion of our attention is much broader. So concentration and diffusion. It helps to have something to focus on and to be specific. But it is also okay to focus on nothing for a while. And I think we feel like we always have to be doing something and we always have to be focusing. And we don't have to. It is just something that we decide to do. And so we are going to practice this idea with the hand again of near and far. And so, is the hold up in front of your face. Or put one hand on top of the other. With your eyes in your hands, notice what is there. Notice what you feel. Notice what you see. There might be blemishes or scars or wrinkles on your knuckles. Just pick one thing and hold your attention on it. Breathe in and breathe out. So it is close there. Your just looking at it. Again breathing in and breathing out. It takes a little bit of tension to hold your hand up like that. It also takes a little bit of tension to focus in that way. Not just put your hand back down on your lap. Close your eyes and imagine that hand a million miles away. It's almost like it is calling you from a million miles away. Your imagination can cover that distance. Give yourself permission for a moment to go someplace. You can breathe in and notice what it feels like you can breathe out. Let go of anything holding you back. Remember that sometimes you can change your state of mind by changing what you are focusing on. And sometimes you realize you have been focusing on the wrong things. Focusing too intense on things that don't deserve that much attention. Seeking give yourself permission to let that concentration go for a moment.

All right. We talked about relaxation. We talked about what we focus on. Let's talk about the actual technique of medication -- meditation. Meditation is intentionally doing things on purpose. The idea of intentionality. Meditation involves doing something else and living a certain way. The eastern tradition we see here on the slide, you don't want to be too comfortable. Like why would someone sit like that? If you got too comfortable, you would just fall asleep. The goal of meditation is to not fall asleep. And Western tradition, you would just sit in the

chair, straight-backed chair. You can prop yourself up with yoga pillows. And you rest your hands in that same place on your thighs. Some people prefer palms down and some prefer palms up. You can see the fingers there putting the thumb to the middle finger or the index finger. And again, if you get sleepy, you lose that connection. Another thing that Einstein and others are famous for is holding something in your hand, like a pen or a rock and then as you get too relaxed, it drops from your hand and sort of revives you. And that is a way to move out of that normal waking state that we find ourselves in and moving into a more relaxed state and even a more creative state. Meditation is, on the one hand, something you do. And it is also not doing a lot of other things. It is getting into a space where you give yourself permission to not do whatever you are doing an hour ago or one hour from now and just be where you are. Meditation promotes a pathway to peace that can improve the moment. It promotes relaxation, awareness and focus and concentration. If you are getting yourself permission to stop and meditate, you will learn something about yourself. You will learn something about the way your body communicates with you and hopefully that awareness helps you to better manage your focus and everything else. Meditation can also take you somewhere else. Just like that, imagining the hand far away and letting that hand bring you there. You can meditate in a way that puts you right here and now and take see someplace else. Each one of these things can be helpful. And finally, mindfulness. How does mindfulness help? Mindfulness is defined by John Kevin who was famous for popularizing here and in the United States and developing programs through Boston University Medical Center and books and teaching. Awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose and the present moment. Nonjudgmentally. And also says, don't take yourself too seriously. We are approaching meditation. We are approaching mindfulness and the understanding and wisdom. And so, just as we did earlier, looking at the hand, we noticed the little details. The details can draw us in. If you are having any issues of getting focused, getting connected to the moment, there are physical things that you can do like tensing the muscle and relaxing it. Putting her palms flat down on the tabletop. Pushing your feet into the floor. If you are standing, resting a hand on the wall. You can also look around you and ask yourself, what is that? Is it a threat? Do I need to know anything else about it? As soon as your mind tells you what it is and tells you what it is, you can say, I don't know. Or nevermind. But then you keep looking, right. You might say, it's not that it's not that. And defined that minutes go by and you have actually changed your state of mind by not attaching yourself, by not feeling like you have to have an answer for everything. The past, the future future, those are things that take us out of the present moment. If we are regrading our mistakes or trying to figure out where we went wrong, we are somewhere in the past. If we are worried about the future, we are someplace else.

And so, I encourage you to add moments of self-care and relaxation. Thinking about what you are focusing on and trying to spend as much of that time in the present moment. The mindful exercises you can try are just breathing in and out. As you breathe in, say I'm breathing in. As you breathe out, I'm breathing out. You can also do something delightful like eating or anything else you can think of that brings you pleasure. And put all of your attention on it. Remember to move. Remember your posture largely governs how you feel about things. If you are not feeling so good, change your posture. Finally, take the time to explore yourself. Communicate with your body. Learn to relax.

I got a notice that we are at the end of our time. We do have an opportunity for some Q&A. I could certainly provide my e-mail if anybody has any questions. We have a great program here with the EAP. Definitely reach out at any time.

Thank you so much, Kevin. I do want to remind everyone that your program is available. I feel relaxed I will say. We do have some sound issues. We did have a large crowd attending.

So the recording will be available on your member website and about 2-3 business days. I just encourage you to go back and listen to it. Some great exercises can be repeated again later. And so we will be there at the end. Five business days. I cannot think. And too relaxed, Kevin. I would ask that you rate your overall satisfaction of the webinar before you leave. Answer very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied or very to satisfy. If you click the radio button next to your response, it will be broadcast to us. We are not broadcasting to everyone. Also, we will take any comments you have. And there is a certificate of completion which is available for download in the lower right-hand corner of your screen. Again, thank you for attending. Please vote. And this is end the presentation. Have a wonderful rest of your day. [Event Concluded]