

[IMAGE]

Meditation: Mind over Matter

By Julie T. Chen, MD

What we as humans can comprehend about the vast abilities of our mind is still relatively limited, especially in the realm of how imagery and meditation can impact our body's physiology.

In many studies, it seems as though our body's physiology follows the imagery of what our mind focuses on. For example, in a small study, they used hypnotherapy to help patients before surgery and those who received the hypnotherapy session before the procedure about losing less blood during surgery, actually lost less blood than those who did not receive the hypnotherapy treatment.

Studies aside though, even in real life, we see it time and time again that if we think about an upcoming stressful event, our body naturally starts to feel more anxious and your heart rate or breathing starts to speed up as though you are already in that situation. Similarly, when we are looking forward to a vacation, when we start to think about the specifics of that upcoming vacation, our mood and heart rate and breathing naturally calms as we think about the positives of what's to come.

Even in studies looking at weight loss, our mind's ability to control cravings for weight loss and foods is significant such that study participants who make themselves think about the objective image of the food with descriptors about size, color, and shape were able to control cravings better than if they thought of the food in terms of taste or pleasure of consuming it.

So you see, our mind truly does govern much of our physiology and our habits; and if we can utilize that towards treating insomnia or anxiety, just to name a few issues that meditation sometimes can help with, then we have within our own control a great tool for healing.

I am a great fan of using healing techniques that do not harm but can do a lot of good for us. So meditation or positive imagery exercises are something I frequently discuss with my patients. When we regularly use positive imagery or use meditation to calm our mind and our heart, our overall physiology isn't running at high levels of stress all day every day then...and that is a great thing. As I have frequently said, our body is a machine and just like a car would need to not be running all day every day, your body also needs designated respite times every day. So sleep and relaxation and calming exercises should be important parts

of your day, every day.

Meditation and positive imagery helps with most medical conditions including but are not limited to autoimmune diseases, heart disease, neurological conditions, cancers, insomnia, anxiety, depression, and hypertension. In my opinion, positive mental exercises like imagery and meditation should be a part of every person's life as regularly as possible.

There are, however, those people who feel more anxious while sitting still...for those patients, I recommend walking or moving meditation. I myself prefer walking or running in a similar pattern to allow my body to be moving in an automatic pattern so that my mind is allowed to clear and focus on meditation or positive imagery. So, for those of you who have tried sitting or quiet meditation and found it difficult because you can't sit still or it will make you more anxious, try walking meditation or meditation mazes or even running on a track where you don't have to think about where you are going so your body just moves while your mind is free to focus on meditation or positive imagery.

Ultimately, when we allow our mind to lead our body in moments of quiet and rest and positivity, our body inevitably will be a mirror to the calmness of our mind and the beauty of the images we create.

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