

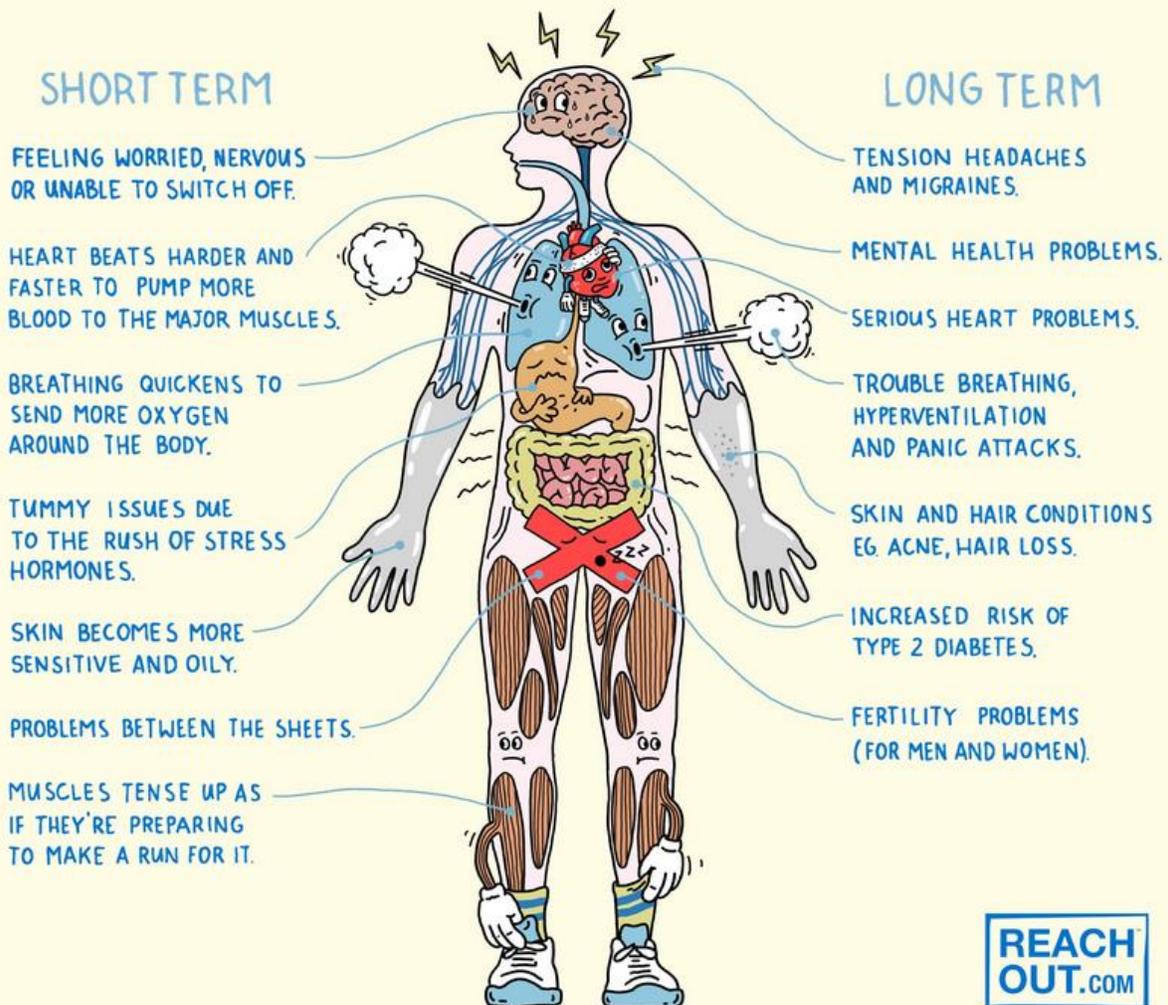


Mental Health Musings

Tip of the Day:

Reducing Stress through Mindfulness

WHAT STRESS DOES TO THE BODY



Feeling stressed, overwhelmed, irritable, or tired? Have you noticed tension in your shoulders or neck or that feeling in the pit of your stomach? If you are having a hard time feeling at ease, chances are you are loaded down with stress. Stress affects us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually and can get trapped in the body until it finds a release. Trouble is that if we neglect to work stress out in healthy ways, it often bubbles up or explodes into negative emotions, actions, physical symptoms or both- forming a flight, fight, or freeze response in the body and mind.

So what to do about it...? Try Practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness is simply paying attention to the present moment rather than being on auto pilot. Have you ever been driving along and realized you have been spacing out the whole time and can't remember the last 15 minutes of your journey? That is the opposite of mindfulness. To practice mindfulness it helps to become aware of the environment you are in as well as tune into the body through the 5 senses. Mindfulness has been found to reduce anxiety and stress and to increase concentration and productivity. It generates an aware yet relaxed balance in the body and mind.

Here are some different ways to practice mindfulness:

Be Here Now

Slow down and tune into your senses when doing daily routines like the dishes. Feel the soft soapy bubbly water and its warmth on your hands. How does that affect the rest of your body and your state of mind? Slow your breathing down and enjoy the moment.

Loving Kindness

Be non-judgmental to your own thoughts. Practice watching your thoughts come and go like clouds across a sky. They are forming and breaking apart as they pass by. Imagine yourself as a wise sage; a loving observer watching your own thoughts go by and honoring their ever changing creativity.

Breathe

Bring your attention to your natural flow of breath. Notice the breath... how it feels moving in and out of the nostrils, filling up the lungs and belly, bringing cleansing life into your cells. Hold your breath until you need to take a breath. Breathe deeply in. Close your eyes and appreciate that feeling of relief flooding back into the body. You can also imagine breathing into areas of tension- expanding and soothing those parts of your body. On the exhale, imagine the tension being carried out and away.

Meditate

Sit comfortably and quietly and hone in on one of the 5 senses. Listen for all of the sounds and the silence in the space you are in while breathing calmly. Try holding one hand on your forehead and one on your belly and 'listening' with your hands for what the body is feeling. Place a chocolate on your tongue and just let it melt and notice the way the taste changes and how your mind is responding. Gaze at a beautiful landscape with relaxed eyes and notice how it calms the nervous system down.

In what other ways have you naturally practiced mindfulness on your own? Playing an instrument? Stretching or yoga? What ideas do you have for being more mindful day to day?
[<https://au.reachout.com/articles/mindfulness-is-it-for-you>]

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