
Title: Mindfulness Practices Enhance Health Behaviors

Stephanie Bryan, PhD.

(Guest Editor)

Director of Health and Physical Education,
Assistant Professor,
Saint Peter's University Jersey City,
New Jersey,
USA
E-mail: Sbryan@saintpeters.edu

Proposal

Regular physical exercise and optimal nutritional intake are associated with weight management, a decreased incidence of diseases related to lifestyle, improvements in mood, an increased energy output, and increased lifespan. Despite the overwhelming body of evidence demonstrating health-enhancements through exercise and proper nutrition, the majority of Americans do not take the necessary steps to boost disease prevention by utilizing these methods. When comparing the health and longevity of Americans to that of "peer countries", they live shorter lives with poorer health throughout the lifespan.

Self-regulatory abilities can enable an individual to adopt health behaviors that enhance health outcomes. Buddhist monks are recognized for employing meditative techniques that involve directing mental focus. Meditation is a type of mental training that fosters mental control; there are two general factions of meditation, one that cultivates concentration abilities and the other that fosters awareness.

Concentration may be practiced by focusing attention on a single item such as a focal point, for example, the air movement in and out of the nostrils with breathing. Awareness allows for a broader sense of the current state, noting sensations and possibly feelings as they arise moment to moment. Mindfulness is a similar concept that refers to the ability to be aware or connected to the self in the current state, while involving a perspective framed by acceptance and non-judgment.

Mindfulness meditation approaches have been historically employed during a yoga practice, for pain management in individuals suffering from illness, in women enduring the pain and physical exertion of child birth, and in athletics where extreme physical performance is the norm. Emerging scientific literature suggests that mindfulness meditation is a productive method for of improving self-awareness that may in turn enhance the self-regulation of health-enhancing behaviors. The current research suggests that mindfulness meditation is associated with the improvement of health-related behaviors such as exercise adherence and the ingestion of fruits and vegetables, while mindful eating practices are also correlated with optimal body mass index.

The possibility of employing mindfulness practices as a means of improving health behaviors is a "Hot Topic" as the dissemination of this material will surely impact the much-needed development and implementation of health-enhancing nutrition and exercise programming.
