

How Holistic OT Can Lower Pain, Stress, Anxiety & Prevent Disease

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A Pain & Stress Epidemic

Most of us have or will experience pain and stress in our lives. According to a 2010 Stress in America survey nearly 75 percent of Americans said that their stress levels are so high that it causes them to feel unhealthy. Pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined, according to the National Institutes of Health. Pain is the most common reason Americans seek health care.

It is a leading cause of disability and it is a major contributor to health care costs.

According to Herbert Benson, M.D., a leader in mind-body medicine, 60 percent of visits to doctors are in the mind-body stress-related realm that are poorly treated by drugs and surgeries. It is estimated that 75 percent of illnesses and chronic conditions could have been prevented through lifestyle changes, and they can often reverse their progression. Treating people with chronic diseases accounts for 86 percent of our nation's health care costs.

A summary by the American Psychological Association survey stated that Americans seem to get trapped in a cycle where they manage stress in unhealthy ways. They reported a lack of willpower and time constraints impede their ability to make lifestyle changes. There is also a trend among families in which parents are underestimating how much stress their children experience and how that stress is impacting their children's lives.

Children say that they experience physical and emotional health effects often associated with stress.

The more stress a person experiences the more pain they may have, and the more susceptible they are to disease. Of the 9.4 million Americans who take opioids for long-term pain, 2.1 million are estimated by the National Institutes of Health to be hooked and are in danger of turning to the black market.

In response to the epidemic, The Joint Commission issued a "clarified standard" for pain treatment that significantly elevates numerous nonpharmacological approaches. Specifically cited as valuable are "acupuncture therapy, chiropractic therapy, massage therapy, osteopathy, and relaxation therapy."

How a Holistic OT Can Help

A holistic OT integrates mind-body-spirit medicine, prevention and wellness into OT practice; what has commonly been referred to as Complementary/Alternative Medicine (CAM). As more research has demonstrated efficacy of many CAM approaches more OTs and health care practitioners are integrating CAM into their practices.

A holistic OT has training in holistic approaches that go beyond traditional occupational therapy. Occupational therapy is already a holistic profession in how it assesses and treats the individual on all aspects of their being including social and environmental influences. Depending on their background and training, a holistic OT may be able to help you help lower your pain, stress, recover from or prevent disease with the following or additional approaches:

1. Relaxation, Meditation, Mental, Visual or Guided Imagery
2. Diet & Nutrition
3. Bodywork/Manual Therapy/Energy Healing
4. Aromatherapy/Herbs/Supplements
5. Movement activities such as Yoga, T'ai Chi or Meditative Walking

Wellness & Prevention

The *Relaxation Response*, a term coined by Herbert Benson, M.D. is the antidote of the *Stress Response*. It can calm the mind and body, lower, stress, anxiety and pain. It has been shown to slow the breathing rate, relax muscles, and reduce blood pressure. It can increase your attention and decision-making functions.

As your breathing slows and deepens you also increase inhaled nitrous oxide, which counters negative effects of the stress hormone norepinephrine (noradrenaline). This can positively affect gene activities, by triggering activity that is the opposite of that associated with stress. It can prevent disease or illness. Mind-body healing can actually "turn on" or "turn off" gene activity or gene expression associated with disease.

Engaging in activities that produce the Relaxation Response such as listening to or learning effective guided imagery, meditation and relaxation techniques can help you feel more peaceful, better able to cope, and has many health benefits. In order to get started, here are three simple steps to help you relax.

Any activity as long as it is pleasurable and brings you into the present moment – not thinking about the past or future, such as going for a walk can induce the relaxation response. Gardening, fishing, cooking, knitting, or engaging in creativity can connect you with this calm and peaceful state.

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