Mind-body balance

The jury is in: your physical health affects the mind, just as the mind influences the body. And while this creates a chicken-egg conundrum (which came first the chronic back pain or the depression?), there is good news. By connecting the dots and taking steps to improve your physical health, your mind will also reap the rewards and vice versa.



Tied up in knots: stress, anxiety and the body

Long-term exposure to stress and anxiety can put your brain chemistry and body into overdrive, or a state of distress, disrupting their natural balance. The effects? A weakened immune system, aggravated arthritis, trouble concentrating, fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, insomnia, chest pain, high blood pressure or even worse: science has linked long-term exposure to stress to certain cancers, heart disease, and an increased likelihood of accidents.

The pain of depression

Many studies point to the link between depression and physical ailments. It can increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and worsen chronic conditions like asthma. Recent research also shows depression disrupts the brain's production of serotonin and norepineprhine, chemicals that influence the way the brain perceives pain. This means that a person with depression may feel physical pain more acutely.

Finding equilibrium

So how can you improve the health of your body and mind? Tip the scales towards complete well-being and away from anxiety, stress and depression by:

- **Squeezing calm into your everyday routine.** Rather than cramming relaxation time into a two week vacation or a one hour yoga class, only to instantly forget about it once back in the real world, instil moments of calm into your day. Go for a walk, take a five-minute time out to stretch, meditate or connect with a friend.

- **Moving.** Physical activity is one of the quickest and healthiest ways to shed excess stress and anxiety (not to mention excess pounds) and infuse your brain with mood-enhancing endorphins. Thirty minutes of moderate exercise at least 3 times a week is often enough to take a load of stress off and lift the spirits.

- **Laughing (or even crying).** Laughter increases your heart rate, improves circulation and releases mood-boosting chemicals in the brain. If your predicament is no laughing matter, crying can equally help, eliminating the build-up of stress hormones in the body, and reducing muscle tension and blood pressure.

- **Sleeping soundly.** A good night's sleep will help recharge your body and mind, improving your focus, mood and immune system. Trouble sleeping? Exercise early in the day and avoid caffeine and late night snacking to ensure a restful slumber.

- **Eating well.** You are what you eat isn't far from the truth. Treat your body to a well-balanced diet low in saturated fats and rich in vegetables, fruit, whole grains and lean proteins and feel your spirits soar. Limit consumption of alcohol, caffeine and junk foods which drag you down physically and mentally.

Maintaining both a healthy body and mind can help to increase your energy and mental focus. By implementing the strategies above, you can begin to feel connected and balanced in all aspects of your life.