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The Center For Connection

Winter Newsletter

This Winter SAY "I Calm My Body....I Smile"!



Recently one of my yoga teachers reminded me in class that during winter, all life cycles undergo a slowing down process. Animals hibernate to protect themselves from the harsh winter environment

and lack of food but also to harness their energy for spring time. After autumn's leaves have fallen, trees and most plants stay dormant until it is warmer and time for flowers to blossom once again. And because we are part of the cycle, the universe also asks humans to slow down as well.

During winter our basal metabolic function increases in order to keep our bodies heated and warm. This basically means we use more energy when it's cold and so it makes sense that our body would ask us to slow down a bit in order to keep our energy balanced. Also our blood vessels contract during winter leaving our muscles and joints more stiff than usual so being easier with our bodies seems logical. Finally, as sunlight decreases, melatonin in our brain decreases leaving many feeling more mentally and emotionally fatigued.

With all the evidence favoring slowdown during the winter, why is it that society puts pressure on us to ramp our bodies up during this time? We are asked to shop 'til we drop, work harder and later until year end and party until the New Year comes. As a result, our immune systems have difficulty managing and often people get sick or depressed during this time. What if going with the flow meant going slow? What would it be like to honor our bodies and slow down instead of pushing against them?

One thing to keep in mind is why the cycle of life provides an opportunity for slowing down. Like I mentioned with hibernating animals and dormant plant life, this is a time of recharging and harnessing energy for what's to come. In essence it's a period of gestation, a time when we are asked to slow down in order to allow for growth, change, replenishing and creation in all aspects of life. But how do we slow down at a time that is so busy for most of us?



Breath: One of the simplest things you can do is take a few moments throughout the day to check in with your breath. Notice the qualities of your breathing and ask yourself: What's it like to inhale? What's it like to exhale? Try deepening your inhale through your nose and exhaling by letting your jaw drop and your breath move through your opened mouth. Do this a few times and let any noise or sighing come also with your exhale. Breathing deeply delivers vital oxygen to organs and muscles, releases toxins from the body, increases endorphin levels and decreases cortisol levels in the brain.



Meditation: While you are noticing your breath, link a mantra or mindful phrase to create a one-pointed focus for meditation. My yoga teacher also reminded me of a mantra that Thich Nhat Hahn says during meditation. On the inhale, 'I calm my body'. On the exhale, 'I smile'. This is such a simple yet powerful exercise you can do when you notice your body is tight, moving too fast, or anxious. You can do this on the subway, at work or while you're on line at the mall getting holiday shopping done. I would also invite you to create your own mantra like, 'I calm my mind...I smile' when you notice your thoughts running a mile a minute. Some of the health benefits of meditating are:

- Decreases respiratory rate
- Increases blood flow and slows the heart rate
- Leads to deeper relaxation
- Enhances immunity
- Increases serotonin (low serotonin is linked to depression and insomnia)
- Decreases anxiety



Yoga: Yoga is like a moving meditation that links breath to movement via postures. If you have a yoga practice you can try slowing down your flow and staying in postures a little longer. If you don't have a solid yoga practice, choose a few poses that you know (about 3-5) and hang out in them for a minute each. Of course, while you're in those poses, saying Thich Nat Hahn's mantra, 'I calm my body...I smile' can also be helpful. Yoga modulates the stress response system by decreasing physiological arousal (reduces heart rate, lowers blood pressure and eases respiration). There is also evidence that yoga helps to increase heart rate variability, an indicator of the body's ability to respond to stress more flexibly.

If you don't have a yoga practice at all consider slowing down the pace that you walk or talk...think for that matter!

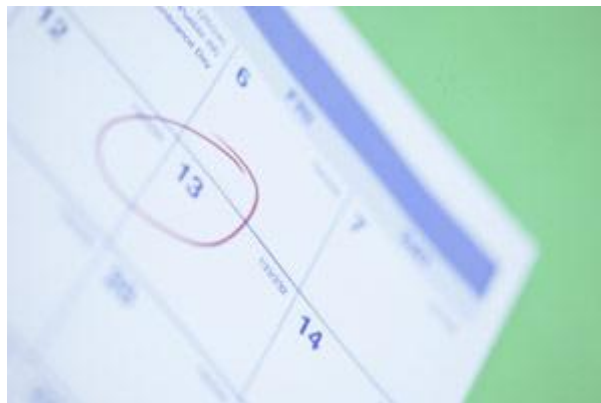


A Word About SAD and Vitamin D deficiency...

I mentioned earlier that one of the changes that occur during winter is the drop in melatonin production due to decreases in sunlight during this time. Along with this, as sunlight decreases so does the potential for us to receive adequate Vitamin D (that we get from direct sun exposure).

Although we all respond to this change in our biorhythm, some experience an exaggerated form of these symptoms known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). The typical symptoms of SAD include depression, lack of energy, increased need for sleep, a craving for sweets and weight gain.

About 70-80% of those with SAD are women and the most common age of onset is in one's thirties. Vitamin D deficiencies can lead to an increase of bone loss, decrease in immune function and increase in SAD symptoms. If you think you are experiencing symptoms of SAD or Vitamin D deficiency please contact a medical professional.



Below is a schedule of events for the winter season:

From Mat to Meal Drop In and Drop INTO Your Body Group, Tuesdays 6-8:30. This group is specifically for disordered eating individuals who are seeking meal support as well as a deeper connection with their body. The group includes a Phoenix Rising Yoga class followed by a supported meal and short group to process experiences. [Click here to learn more.](#)



Get Unstuck: An 8 Week Phoenix Rising Mindfulness Based Yoga Therapy Group - Thursdays from 6:15-8:45pm Jan 20 and 27, Feb 3, 10, 17 and 24 and March 3 and 10. Silent Retreat Day is Sunday, Feb 13th from 9am-5pm. This mindfulness based program offers awareness-building practices that can invite deeper insight into the places in your life that feel *stuck*. [Click here to learn more.](#)



Caring for the Caregiver Weekend Workshop Saturday, Jan 28th 10am-5pm and Sunday, Jan 29 10am-4pm. This workshop is ideal for therapist, medical/health/wellness professionals and body workers who are in need of some self-care. The weekend will include yoga and meditation, periods of silence, mindfulness and an opportunity to process experiences in a supportive environment. [Click here to learn more.](#)



Enhancing Intimacy Couples Workshop Saturday Feb 5th 10am-1pm. This workshop is a collaboration between Dr. Mary Segarra and myself. The workshop will include a partner yoga experience as well as a discussion around how to enhance intimacy in relationships. [Click here to learn more.](#)

