The Mind Spa is a quiet sanctuary where any current OSU student, faculty or staff member can learn about holistic health and begin a personal wellness plan.

The Mind Spa has specific programs that can help students learn to connect more fully to themselves and how they feel and manage these feelings. The programs help students learn how to use their breath in optimal ways whether to manage test anxiety, build their tolerance for a sport, or learn better communication skills. Each term we will focus on one aspect of the Mind Spa.

Restore... or revive is about inviting yourself to re-establish a state of health, vigor or wholeness. Thus this term’s articles will highlight the dark, often “gloomy” days of winter in Oregon and what to do about them. Though we don’t have control over the winter weather we do have control over what we chose to do to manage the weather and for the most part our mood. The Mind Spa has various programs that can assist in the restoration process.

One tool is the use of light therapy. The Full-Spectrum Light Therapy box is a helpful tool to assist with seasonal shifts in mood and should be used regularly for most effective results. The light therapy box is the second most utilized equipment in the Mind Spa and students reported learning how to “release physical tension” as a result of light therapy use. Further information about light therapy is provided by Dr. David Kerr, inside this newsletter. The most popular equipment in the Mind Spa; however, is the Human Touch full body massage chair with a 97% usage rate. We’ve recently surveyed Mind Spa users and when asked “what did you learn to do” by using the massage chair, top responses included “release physical tension, relax, calmly breath, and quiet my mind.” Given the feedback, we invite you to release some tension and restore your body by getting a free chair massage!

Other articles in this term’s newsletter include Victor Santana-Melgoza’s article, which provides valuable insight on how to restore oneself and stay active; while Dr. Carlos Taloyo’s article encourages a more mindful practice in staying present and managing mood.

CAPS continues to offer a Mind/Body Health for Graduate Women group that incorporates support and yoga into a weekly routine for members, as well as an Anxiety/Depression Management Group during the winter term. All of our groups are open to students attending OSU. For more complete information or for a more complete list of specialty groups; please visit the CAPS website/group therapy offerings at oregonstate.edu/counsel/typical-groups-offered.
The Wellness Challenge!
Carlos Taloyo, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist, Counseling and Psychological Services

Last Friday, after a day’s work, I locked up my office, rode five floors down the elevator and started walking to my car. I was just a few spaces shy of reaching the far end of the long narrow parking lot before I realized that I wasn’t parked on this lot. I was parked in the adjacent lot and I had parked close. This is one example of how I can go about a task with an unchecked certainty (that I am walking towards my car) only to realize that I have been mistaken. The moment of realization is a moment of mindfulness: purposefully attending, in the present moment and without judgment. I awoke from the automatic pilot of walking to my car, returning to the present moment, purposefully moved towards my car (50 yards back), without lingering negative thoughts or statements to myself; okay, maybe I groaned.

The same automatic pilot is often in effect when we get depressed. So during the winter season, the cover of darkness can be an automatic pilot of depression. Unlike walking down the wrong row of parked cars, we can often persist in automatic processes to the point of being painfully unhelpful. Sitting down to a computer, we may be frustrated by how we are distracted from the task we intend to complete (i.e. studying) with something unhelpful to the task (i.e. Facebook). With depression, we may go into our lives and get stuck in the same mental rut. Our “buttons” can be pushed by events around us that trigger habitual ways of thinking that aren’t helpful and that may worsen mood.

The help that is promised through mindfulness is a movement towards greater awareness and intentionality in our life, choosing rather than responding automatically. We may be triggered by a thought, a memory, a feeling, an image, or any other sensation towards any number of distracting thoughts or feelings. For instance, a song may remind us of a lost love and bring feelings of sadness; receiving a bad quiz grade may lead to feelings and thoughts of doubts about our worth or about our education. With mindfulness we can deliberately change the focus of our attention (often having to do this over and over again) to our breathing or to sensory experience of our body.

The way the mind operates can be divided into “being” mode and “doing” mode. The doing mode can often lead to negative thoughts and feelings because of the doing mode is triggered by the impression that the way things are, are not how they ought to be. “I ought never to have lost my love” or “I ought not to have received a bad grade in the quiz.” If the dissatisfying discrepancy can be resolved with an action, then there is relief and possibly an exit out of doing. However, there are problems for which there are no immediate solutions. Without mindfulness, the doing mode can lead to a constant dissatisfied negative state without resolution. In contrast, the focus of the being mode is to accept and allow what is without any need to change it. In this mode, the pressure to fix or change dissipates in the service of processing our moment to moment experiences.

Developing the skill of mindful awareness is the way to move out of the automatic thoughts and feelings leading to feeling depressed. If you feel sad because of a song you might mindfully choose to focus your attention on something else to subvert the naturally negative automatic process that may start.

Skillfully shifting from being and doing modes is another way to manage thoughts and feelings that are depressing. If you have thoughts of doubt about your worth or about your education because of a bad quiz, try to shift out of the pressure to fix and to do something about the quiz, into the being mode. Some possible ways to shift into the being mode are:

1) Watch the thoughts come and go without needing to follow.
2) Consider thoughts as events rather than facts; it is still for you to decide whether they are true and how to handle them.
3) Write your thoughts down on paper as a way to see them less emotionally and less overwhelmingly.
4) Ask the following questions: Did this thought just pop into my head automatically? Does it fit with the facts of the situation? Is there something about it that I can question? How would I have thought about it at another time, in another mood? Are there alternatives?

Mindfulness is a skill to be developed and the Mind Spa is the perfect place for developing a vibrant and healthy practice. Along with the full body massage chair, you can use the Relaxing Rhythms biofeedback program to learn to practice mindfulness of breath, mindfulness of body, and mindfulness of thoughts as the building blocks for a healthy winter with greater freedom from depression.

We asked students: Have you been able to use what you learned in the Mind Spa, in your everyday life? 71% of students responded to either “Yes, quite a bit” or “Yes, some” on a four point likert scale of responses ranging from “yes, quite a bit; yes, some; yes, just a little; or no, not at all.” So, if you haven’t tried the Mind Spa, what’s stopping you?!
Weathering the Winter Blues

David Kerr, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Psychology Department

Oregon is a beautiful place to live. However, as you may have noticed, it turns quite dark, cold, and drippy here in the winter. You may find that your mood and well-being also change with the seasons. Specifically, you may feel more sad, irritable, or just “blah.” Your sleep patterns, energy, concentration, appetite, and weight may change, and it may be harder to find activities you enjoy. You also might have dark, cold, and drippy thoughts like, “I’m a loser,” “school sucks,” and “things are never going to change.” For some people these experiences stick around for too long and can start to interfere with their daily life, such as socializing, studying, and working. In these cases, these problems may be part of a mental health problem, such as major depressive disorder. A pattern of depression that becomes serious in one time of year (usually Fall/Winter) and goes away in another time of year (usually Spring/Summer) for several years is called “seasonal affective disorder” (SAD).

Studies of the prevalence of SAD are limited, but suggest 1–10% of people have the illness. Other research supports that 27% of people experience “problematic” (if not clinically impairing) seasonal changes in mood and behavior. Thus, having the winter blues may be quite common, and may be very unpleasant and disruptive, even if it is not a clinical disorder.

The dominant theory of why SAD occurs focuses on effects that seasonal changes in sunlight have on our brains. Specifically, sunlight is used by primitive parts of the brain that regulate sleep/wake cycles (circadian rhythms) and perhaps areas of the brain known to regulate hibernation in other mammals. Disruption in these cycles may create a kind of hibernation syndrome whereby the brain tells the body to stock up on food, limit energy expenditure, and hunker down for the winter. Deficiencies in Vitamin D also have been theorized to play a role in the winter blues (our skin produces Vitamin D in response to sunlight exposure, which is reduced in Winter). While these explanations are appealing, studies have not clearly teased apart whether changes in sunlight per se, as opposed to seasonal changes in social and psychological factors are responsible for SAD and the winter blues. Given this, it may be wisest to consider several lifestyle changes rather than to focus exclusively on light exposure.

1) Get active. Don’t let the weather stop you from being active and going outside. Exercise can be social or meditative and can improve sleep. Find new routines, such as indoor exercise, or walks in your rain gear.

2) When it comes to sleep, be boring. Make your sleep schedule as regular and predictable as possible, and get enough sleep.

3) Do it anyway. Depression tells you to stay home and pass up social stimulation. Being alone and inactive can feed a cycle of negative thoughts and depressed mood. So even when you don’t feel like it, try to “do it anyway.”

4) Be with people. The support you get from friends and family helps you handle stress and avoid depression. Make an extra effort to call or spend time with people when you need a lift.

5) Moderate your substance use. Alcohol is a depressant—so it is not a great antidote for depression. Substance use can impact your mood, sleep, appetite, weight, and social relationships.

Other options are available for individuals with more serious symptoms of SAD or winter blues. First, effective treatments for non-seasonal depression, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and antidepressant medication also are effective for SAD. Second, controlled trials support that symptoms of SAD (as well as of the winter blues and non-seasonal depression) respond positively to full-spectrum light therapy. Light boxes can be purchased online, are available for a two-week rental period at Student Health Services (for 511) and are available for use at The Mind Spa (5th Floor Snell Hall; http://oregonstate.edu/counsel/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad-light). However, intermittent, irregular use would not be expected to be effective (e.g., Golden et al., 2005 reviewed treatment trials that gave individuals at least 3,000 lux-hours of exposure, at least 4 days per week, and in most trials individuals were told to use light boxes as soon after waking as possible). We recommend that those interested in using light boxes consider a period of regular and repeated use, read manufacturer’s instruction carefully, and consider consulting with a counselor or therapist about how to maximize benefit. Counselors at CAPS encourage students to use light therapy in coordination with counseling and/or medication for the best results.

For some people, making lifestyle changes and improving self-care will help them weather the winter blues. But if you think you are experiencing a more significant depression or are having thoughts of suicide, it is time to get help from a counselor or therapist. Call and make an appointment today at Counseling and Psychological Services (541.752.3268) during regular business hours, and please know that you can call the national Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK at any time.

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New Mind Spa Consultations

The Mind Spa is now offering ½ hour consultations with a licensed psychologist on how to use equipment in the Mind Spa for more personalized instruction (though there may be up to 3 people at a time depending on demand).

Please call 541.737.2131 to schedule a ½ hour tutorial on either Tuesdays at 10 or 10:30am or Fridays 10 or 10:30am. Consults will begin the week of January 24, 2011.

Winter Revival

Victor Santana-Melgoza, Multicultural Resource Coordinator, University Housing and Dining Services

As I think through the Winter term, one word that definitely does not come to mind is ‘revive’. The weather that is Oregon, in all its cloudy and rainy gloominess, doesn’t conjure up a sense of renewal. Even the tempo of the term doesn’t have the same energy as Fall or Spring. But, I think there is merit in thinking about restoring oneself. One common analogy in restoring oneself is the image of a well. If we only take from the well without putting something back, soon there will be no more to give. With that mindset, what are the parts of ourselves that can be made whole during the Winter months?

Mental Health

Keeping mentally healthy is important during the winter months. Fortunately, there are several ways of restoring oneself during this part of the year. One way is to make an appointment at the Mind Spa (call 541.737.2131). The Mind Spa has several tools to help renew including a full body massage chair, fresh ionized air and light therapy. Another way to keep mentally is to laugh. There’s a reason why they say laughter is the best medicine; it has been shown to have many benefits including reducing stress and strengthening the immune system.

Relationships

One part of our lives that can sometimes get missed is relationships with the people in our lives. Whether it’s a coworker we keep meaning to have coffee with, or a personal relationship that we just haven’t made time for. Winter might be a time where you can find time to extend yourself to people that just didn’t make it on to your calendar in the past.

Physical Health

As with every New Year, there is a common benchmark used to begin reviving our physical health. Don’t let that be the only starting point. Take advantage of the different ways to get involved with your physical being. Try a Yoga, Hip-Hop, or Bollywood class. Register for Weight Watchers at work (btw, it’s free to all PEBB members). Start walking with a friend, or renew your membership at a local gym with a friend.

Learning

Learning something new is a great way to keep your brain active; either start a new passion or revive an old talent. Take a class in one of your favorite subjects, learn a new language, pick up an instrument, or even pick up a new hobby. Learning something new can have a direct impact on your feeling of accomplishment and wholeness.

Making meaning out of being restored can look and feel different for everyone. These are just a few ways to start thinking in what ways and in which areas do we need to restore our spirit. Don’t let the rain be an inhibitor to refilling what is needed in your life and rather, let the Winter be that time of restoration.

Want to be included in an upcoming newsletter? Share a quote, poem or drawing related to your personal wellness practice OR share what aspect of the Mind Spa was helpful to you...Thanks!

Please email: Michele.Ribeiro@oregonstate.edu if you have comments and/or suggestions on this issue or an upcoming newsletter.