We are starting our second year of The Mind Spa newsletter with the intent of continuing to offer articles on wellness as well as market resources available to you through the Mind Spa. The Mind Spa is a FREE quiet sanctuary located on campus and is available to all faculty, staff and students at OSU.

The Mind Spa is located within the Counseling and Psychological Services (500 Snell Hall) and is attempting to expand services through programmatic endeavors for students such as groups on Mindfulness, Yoga and Biofeedback, as well as offering products for loan, such as new Blu-Light therapy lamps and personalized EmWave biofeedback tools. We are also planning to trial a new product Alpha-Stim Cranial Electrostimulation which will be offered by November 2011 for student clients at CAPS who are struggling with anxiety, depression and/or insomnia.

The Mind Spa has embraced a philosophy which invites one to Be, Restore and Thrive. Each fall; however, we invite you to “Be.” Being is about staying fully attentive in action or inaction. It entails quieting the mind from self-talk and focusing on the present so each can fully experience an activity, a relationship, reading a book, studying for an exam, or being in nature. There continues to be an expansion of research in medicine, psychology and neuroscience that highlights the benefits of mindfulness as well as the outcomes in our daily lives. Specific articles in this term’s newsletter focus on aspects of some of this mindfulness research. But what good is research without application? CAPS has utilized the research and created a place where practical application of mindfulness can be enhanced. Our goal is to provide more students access to the Mind Spa resources. As a result, this year the Mind Spa is collaborating with the Asian Pacific Cultural Center to offer extension services including a Day-Light Bright Light Therapy lamp, the mPower Wellness Workshop and Yoga for Students DVD. Please inquire at the APCC for more information on how to use these resources. The Valley Library also offers for check out the Yoga DVD series for Students, Faculty and Staff as well as Day-Light Bright Light Therapy lamps. By mid-October, the faculty/staff lounge in the library will offer in collaboration with the Mind Spa the Journey to the Wild Divine, which includes the popular Relaxing Rhythms biofeedback program. Finally, there will be a Mind Spa Study Break in the Willamette Room of the Valley Library on Tuesday, November 29th from 7p.m. to 9:30p.m.

What else is new this fall? To broaden the campus’ understanding of positive psychology, CAPS is co-sponsorng (with the Office of the Vice Provost for Student Affairs, the OSU Psychology department, Active Minds and the Women’s Center) a week of activities that focus on Positive Psychology and Happiness. The week of programs is planned for Monday, November 7th

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Feeling a little overwhelmed? You are not alone! It is easy to lose your mind in the midst of juggling all of the responsibilities revolving around academics, finances, families, friends, and various other obligations. While a little bit of stress is healthy and provides the boost needed to get out of bed, study for exams, spend wisely, and take care of yourself, too much stress can lead to utter disaster. A ton of studies have proven what you already know: a high level of stress has disastrous consequences for your body and brain, thereby negatively impacting health, sleep quality, concentration, and mood. So what’s a poor stressed-out soul to do when life’s pressures are heavily interfering with physical and mental well-being? Some might think that tough times require you to be selfish so that you can focus on tending to your personal needs. However, one of the most powerful ways to fight stress is to turn to other people.

If you are struggling to gather the support you need to combat life’s hassles, CAPS is here to help! CAPS provide many resources that can help you get through tough times. CAPS offers individual and group counseling, and even offers groups to help you learn the skills needed to make new friends, manage depression and anxiety, and practice mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation helps you direct your attention in a way to cope with harmful emotions and bring more meaning and compassion into your heart. In fact, mindfulness has been proven to produce beneficial alterations to brain and immune function. Mindfulness training now takes place all over the world to help people fight a broad range of disorders and problems, including burnout, depression, pain, eating disorders, chronic illness, and more.

CAPS also contains the wonderful Mind Spa, which is filled with great tools to center your soul and nurture your spirit. This includes computerized biofeedback and meditation exercises which can effectively promote wellness and healing. The Mind Spa also has a generator of negative ions, which are abundant around moving water and part of the reason it feels so awesome to be near ocean waves, waterfalls, and raging rivers. In addition, there is the glorious Human Touch Robotic Massage Chair, which can soothe your sore muscles and mind and prompt your body to release feel-good chemicals, including endorphins and the hormone oxytocin.

The warm fuzzies we feel from other-oriented emotions, such as love and affection, are largely due to oxytocin, which has targets all over the body and the brain. Oxytocin is naturally released during positive social interactions between family, friends, and even complete strangers. When oxytocin is administered to people in the laboratory, it has been shown to dramatically increase eye contact, trust, social engagement, generosity, and even the ability to read other people’s emotions. Oxytocin is a potent shield from stress and can directly influence how much you biologically respond to stress by calming the brain’s “freak out” circuitry, influencing how much the stress hormone cortisol is released, and lowering how much your heart responds to setbacks. By increasing your social bonds and surrounding yourselves with loved ones, you can boost your oxytocin levels and help shield yourself from pressure and tension.

So, when life gets difficult and hardships make you feel like your sinking, remember how important it is to seek a helping hand. Research has shown that social support can effectively promote wellness and ward off stress, anxiety, and illness. Please take good care of yourself and others and don’t forget that being good to others is also good for you!

**The Happy Movie Screening**

Monday, November 7th. Milam Auditorium, 7:15pm.
Followed by Q&A with Director Roko Belic

Sponsored by The Division of Student Affairs, Counseling and Psychological Services, Active Minds and the Psychology Department.
Mindfulness encourages you to find comfort within yourself, creating an intimate understanding of emotions and feelings. Yet, being mindful doesn’t only mean tapping into your emotions, it also means being mindful towards the foods we are consuming.

Being mindful to what you are eating starts with respecting your body and its individual needs. We are all created equal, but that doesn’t mean we are all the same. Tap into your health by recognizing when your hunger kicks in, and respecting your body by satisfying that hunger with nutritious options. Kick your current diet to the curb, and appreciate that supplying your body with fruits, veggies, and a moderate amount of exercise is all it takes to feel great.

Skipping breakfast occurs frequently in a college student’s life, but those ten extra minutes it takes to eat breakfast fuels your body to make it through a rigorous day. There are so many healthy options that are not only easy, but quick! Cook up a bowl of oatmeal, complemented by a glass of milk. Fry up an egg or two, and grab a banana before you head out the door. Eating breakfast kick starts your day with a boost of natural energy, and leaves your energy drinks wondering what they did wrong.

Drinking water can be a difficult task when you are stuck in a classroom or find yourself speed walking across campus to get to a test. I found that having a water bottle in my backpack is the only way I will drink water throughout the day, and have noticed myself breathing a little less heavily when I finally drag myself up to the fourth floor in Milam. Not only that, sipping on water gives me something to do during a long lecture. If the taste of water isn’t something you necessarily enjoy, then chop up some lemons or limes to throw into the mix and get a little flavor along with a full day of peak hydration.

An important aspect of eating is making sure that you find a balance throughout your day. You don’t want to find yourself in a moment when you are saying, “I’m so hungry! I could eat like a million corn dogs right now!” or “I’m so full, my stomach feels like it’s gonna’ explode.” These are two statements that you really want to avoid. It’s uncomfortable for your body to go without food for prolonged periods of time, and it’s equally uncomfortable to push your body past its limit of being full. Try to eat three solid meals a day, and keep snacks close by while you tread water until your next meal. Keeping yourself on an even keel creates a familiar system for your body to rely on.

Being Mindful to what you’re eating starts off with choosing items with your mind, rather than with your stomach. Experiment on your own with some veggies you never got the courage to try, and maybe you will surprise yourself with something that you really love. There will be times when you try something that doesn’t suit you, but being healthy isn’t a test, and there isn’t just one right answer. So try, try, try, and try again! You will be stunned by all the ways you can create a nutritious meal, and you will be even more stunned by how great you will begin to feel.

To learn more about eating healthy, and being well in general, visit blogs. oregonstate.edu/bewell or make an appointment in the Mind Spa at CAPS.

You can start eating mindfully at any stage of your life and beginning is the easiest part. No matter how you are eating right now, or how you have chosen meals in the past, it is never too late to start eating healthier!
The Mind Spa is continuing to offer ½ hour consultations with a licensed psychologist on how to use equipment in the Mind Spa for more personalized instruction.

Please call 541.737.2131 to schedule a ½ hour tutorial. Consults will begin the week of October 3, 2011.

The Mind Spa as Antidote to Stress: A Brainy Reason to Give Yourself a Vacation
by Dr. Salaheddine Ziadeh, Psychologist, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Have you ever found yourself trapped in a vicious cycle of behavior that took you nowhere? Have been stressed out to the point of exhaustion, helplessly repeating what you knew was pointless and useless, and yet couldn’t find a way out? If you answered in the affirmative, then you’d benefit from giving your brain a vacation at the Mind Spa. And, here’s why.

New research in neuroscience has revealed that our brain may work with or against us depending on our state of mind. And it is purely neurological. The brain’s neural circuitry changes in response to our mental state and behavior. Specifically, brain regions associated with mindful and goal-oriented behavior (i.e., prefrontal cortex) bloom or shrivel over time, and so can the brain regions linked to compulsive and repetitive behavior (i.e., sensorimotor striatum). Interestingly, these brain sectors appear to listen to one another and operate in balance, with the mindful part of the brain counterbalancing the compulsive one. That is, the more mindful you are, the less likely you are to engage in compulsive behavior, and vice versa.

The notion that the brain loses its capacity for mindfulness under stress is well supported by recent animal studies. In one experiment conducted at the University of Minho in Portugal and reported in the Journal of Science, for instance, the researchers observed that, when lab rats are stressed out they lose their “elastic” thinking and engage instead in repetitive behavior (e.g., compulsively pressing a bar for food they don’t intend to eat). In other words, they lose their mind—the freedom to choose and ability to do what makes sense. Associated neurological findings are telling in this regard. Under stress, the brain suffers from shrinkage in the mindful region of the brain and a simultaneous growth in the compulsive sector occurs. One implication is that a stressed brain becomes over time increasingly predisposed to compulsive behavior (and less mindful behavior) and, therefore, more deprived of its capacity for freedom and choice. Due to this change in neural circuitry and density, a stressed brain becomes at some point more prone to stress, and an ever-shrinking capacity for mindfulness develops.

The good news is that the brain enjoys a certain degree of plasticity by virtue of which stress-induced changes may be reversible. In the animal study reported above, for example, taking a “vacation” from stress was enough for the lab rats to recover. Neurological examination of their brains showed an interesting development. The neural connections in the mindful region of brain (prefrontal cortex) grew back whereas the ones in the compulsive part of the brain (sensorimotor striatum) weakened and withered. In other words, taking a “vacation” enabled the mindful sector of the brain to regrow and develop. One cognitive (and behavioral) implication is that vacation time allows the brain to reestablish its executive and planning powers, and break free from the shackles of compulsion, as it regains its capacity for mindfulness.

Now, how can you give yourself a vacation on campus? Come to the Mind Spa at CAPS and release your stress before you start spinning in circles: eating mindlessly, binging on power drinks, writing and rewriting your paper, reading the same sentence over and over and not getting it ... For the sake of your brain, STOP! And give yourself what you deserve: a Mind Spa vacation.