Effects of Relaxation Exercise on Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

People who are mentally healthy and their behaviour and emotions are in their control. They are able to handle life’s inevitable challenges, build strong and long-term relationships, and lead productive, fulfilling lives. When bad things happen, they’re able to bounce back and move on. Mental health has been and will continue to be shaped by the experiences. Childhood experiences, negative life events, genetic and biological factors can also play a significant role, but these too can be changed by experience. Relaxation therapy in mental health refers to a variety of natural techniques designed to help people learn how to relax and be calm. The purpose of relaxation therapy is to decrease stress, anxiety and other psychological conditions. It also encourages a more relaxed state long after the session has ended, and facilitates better coping skills when a person encounters stress and anxiety in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Being mentally healthy doesn’t mean never going through bad times or experiencing emotional problems. We all go through disappointments, loss, and change. And while these are normal parts of life, they can still cause sadness, anxiety, and stress.

The difference is that people with good mental health have an ability to bounce back from adversity, trauma, and stress. People who are mentally healthy have the tools for coping with difficult situations and maintaining a positive outlook. They remain focused, flexible, and creative in bad times as well as good.

In today’s fast-paced, technological world, there are often a variety of stressors around our environment which affects our body as well as mind and we have no control over this, there are quick treatments for physical ailments, but not so for mental ones, so, we need to have some idea to maintain our mental health. In order to understand exactly what is meant by “mental health,” we need to first define what the overarching concept of “health” means.

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In the past, scientists defined health simply as “an absence of disease or illness.” However, when the World health Organization (WHO) was founded, in 1948, the following definition of health was established: “A complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” This definition realizes us that being healthy is not an “all-or-nothing” principle because individuals can at once be relatively healthy in some aspects of life e.g., normal blood pressure of 120/80 mmHg, but unhealthy in others like suffering from anxiety.

There have been some meta-analyses examining the relationship between exercise and anxiety reduction (Calfas & Taylor, 1994; Kugler, Seelback, & Krüskemper, 1994; Landers & Petruzzello, 1994; Long & van Stavel, 1995; McDonald & Hodgdon, 1991; Petruzzello, Landers, Hatfield, Kubitz, & Salazar, 1991). These meta-analyses ranged from 159 studies (Landers & Petruzzello, 1994; Petruzzello et al., 1991) to five studies (Calfas & Taylor, 1994) reviewed. All six of these meta-analyses found that across all studies examined, exercise was significantly related to a reduction in anxiety.

Two meta-analyses have been conducted on this topic (Kubitz, Landers, Petruzzello, & Han, 1996; O’Connor & Youngstedt, 1995). The studies reviewed have primarily examined sleep duration and total sleep time as well as measures derived from electroencephalographic (EEG) activity while subjects are in various stages of sleep. Operationally, sleep researchers have predicted that sleep duration, total sleep time, and the amount of high amplitude, slow wave EEG activity would be higher in physically fit individuals than those who are unfit (i.e., chronic effect) and higher on nights following exercise (i.e., acute effect). This prediction is based on the “compensatory” position, which posits that “fatiguing daytime activity (e.g., exercise) would probably result in a compensatory increase in the need for and depth of nighttime sleep, thereby facilitating recuperative, restorative and/or energy conservation processes” (Kubitz et al., p. 278).

It is easy to assess physical health by taking health status measurements of the body. But mental components of health are much more challenging to assess because internal states are subjective and difficult to quantify.

**CONCEPT OF MENTAL HEALTH**

The World health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (World Health Organization, 2005).

There is no one “official” definition of mental health. Cultural differences, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how “mental health” is defined (World Health Report, 2001, Thomas Wright Sulcer, 2010).

Although, Mental Health, refers to the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. Mental health is a term used to describe either an absence of a mental disorder or a level of emotional well-being. Mental health may include an individual’s ability to enjoy life and procure a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience (About.com, 2006).
Most recently, the field of Global Mental Health has emerged, which has been defined as ‘the area of study, research and practice that places a priority on improving mental health and achieving equity in mental health for all people worldwide’ (Patel & Prince, 2010).

**BASIC COMPONENTS OF MENTAL HEALTH**

While everyone has a unique flavor of mental health, there are many different ideas about what conditions or qualities support a period of stable mental health. Three of the most studied and important qualities associated with conditions of stable mental health include how we think, how we manage emotions, and how we behave in interpersonal relationships.

It can be said that an individual with stable mental health will likely possess a degree of flexibility in how he/she thinks about themselves, thinks about others life situations, and understands available options for the future. The notion of possessing flexibility in one’s thinking patterns includes moving away from an all or nothing thinking patterns (right/wrong, good/bad, success/failure) and taking a more inclusive and open perspective about oneself, others, and options in the future. An example of all or nothing thinking might be “I am so stupid and others are smart”. An example of a more inclusive and less rigid thought might be, “I sometimes have trouble, and I imagine others also struggle, it will get better.”

When it comes to emotion, many of us have trouble managing emotions and sometimes feel hijacked by strong emotions. An individual with stable mental health often takes an approach with his emotions that includes “acceptance of” vs. “control over” emotions. Keep in mind that acceptance of an emotion is not saying we like the emotion; rather, acceptance includes acknowledgement that an emotion is present and giving oneself permission to have and feel the emotion. For example, if you are feeling sad, scared, hurt, or happy you give yourself permission to feel sad, scared, hurt, or happy. Many of us have rules about emotion and this leads to judging emotions as either right/wrong or good or bad. Accepting emotion is not the only step; however, an individual must also express an emotion in a healthy and non-destructive manner. Finding a level of congruence between how I feel and how I express a feeling is a good way of expressing emotion in a healthy manner. For example, when we are happy we might laugh and when we are sad we might cry. Putting on “a happy face” when feeling sad is an example of showing incongruence in ones emotional experience. Finally, keep in mind that expression of emotion is influenced greatly by cultural norms and cultural background.

Human beings are inherently social animals and benefit from being in relationships. While this is true, it is takes time and effort to build and maintain relationships. Relationships that seem to support mental health tend to include mutually satisfying interactions, healthy and non-violent communication and behavior, and a basic level of trust in another person. Trust is a major issue in relationships and includes the difficult step of letting down one’s guard enough to allow another person to see who we really are. Many people find that being real and authentic in relationships, to the extent that they are safe and non-violent, brings great happiness and emotional support. Alternatively, living in the world in ways that are not fully you, because of fear of judgment or cultural discrimination, can often lead to stress and feelings of loneliness.
CONCEPT OF RELAXATION

Relaxation is the process taken to relieve all body stress. The different activities that you perform every day may leave your body tired. Different relaxation techniques will help ease the stress. They include deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and meditation. This process help calm all psychological effects. Through relaxation, body is able to relieve all aches experiences from the long day’s activities. It improves the ability to solve problems as well as giving you a motivating feeling.

When stressed, one does not get to feel the joy of living. At times, people affected may never want to share their feelings with their families. This may cause mental deterioration. There are a number of definitions and explanations when it comes to the term “relaxation”. Ultimately, however, this is the process in which the tension among all the muscles in the body is absent. Furthermore, it defines a state of mind in which stressors, negative self talk, and other worries are eliminated from the mind. Relaxation can be done by the techniques of progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery or visualization, transcendental meditation, yoga and hypnosis. These techniques reduce heart rate, skin conductance, muscle tension, blood pressure, inflammatory processes, lipid levels, energy utilization, anxiety and tension (Lucini, 1997; Lutgendorf, Anderson, Sorosky, Butler & Lubaroff, 2000; Scheufele, 2000; Speca, Carlson, Gooey & Angen, 2000).

Noorbala’s study evaluates the effects of TM on mental health of adults in Tehran, capital of Iran, with a predominantly Muslim population. According to a nationwide survey with the Persian version of GHQ-28 questionnaire, the level of mental distress in the country stands at 21%, with women being at greater risk than men (29% versus 15.8%), and depression and anxiety symptoms are more prevalent than somatisation and social dysfunction. A similar survey which was conducted in the city of Tehran has reported 21.5% of the citizens to be at risk of mental disorders (Noorbala, 1998, 2004).

Relaxation, therefore, is both a physical state, and a mental state of mind. In order for an individual to maintain and optimize their physical and mental well-being, relaxation is an essential element. There are numerous benefits of relaxation.

• Energy levels are naturally increased when an individual is relaxed.
• The immune system develops and grows stronger during relaxation.
• Individuals who take time to relax often have a more pleasant personality.
• Oxygen levels, blood pressure, and other functions in the body remain normal.
• By relaxing, you stand less of a chance of developing depression.

It is essential to ensure that you take time for yourself on a daily basis. There are many psychological and physiological benefits of relaxation.

LINK BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND RELAXATION

Good mental health isn’t just the absence of mental health problems. Being mentally healthy is much more than being free of depression, anxiety, or other psychological issues. Rather than the absence of mental illness, mental and emotional health refers to the presence of positive characteristics. In order to maintain and strengthen mental health, it’s important to pay attention to own needs and feelings. Taking care of your body is a powerful first step towards mental health. The mind and the
body are linked. When you improve your physical health, you’ll automatically experience greater mental and emotional well-being. For example, exercise not only strengthens our heart and lungs, but also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals that energize us and lift our mood.

**CONCLUSION**

Mental health is the state of having balanced emotions. At times, the different activities that you experience from life may greatly affect your emotions. However, relaxation is the only process that will ensure you good mental health. It will help you realize on your abilities. This way, you will be able to cope with all stresses of life.

There are different types of mental health problems. Some are caused by the environmental changes while others come without our awareness. However, the different activities you are involved in may greatly affect your mental health. There are the short-lived problems that cure through recreational therapies. Certainly, some problems like the schizophrenia and bipolar disorders are chronic and may never heal.

Researchers have pooled together the results of studies on relaxation training with GAD to get a clearer idea of the effects. Relaxation training has been shown to be better than no treatment. It has also been shown to be as effective as psychological therapies, mainly cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) (Siev J, Chambless DL, 2007).

People with anxiety disorders are thought to have tense muscles. As relaxation training helps to relax muscles, it may also help to reduce anxious thoughts and behaviours. Relaxation training may also help people feel as if they have more control of their anxiety (Manzoni, G., 2008).

Our fast paced society can cause people to push their minds and bodies to the limit, often at the expense of physical and mental well-being. According to the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard University, 60-90% of all medical office visits in the United States are for stress-related disorders. Such stress has damaging effects on health and the immune system. Relaxation techniques are helpful tools for coping with stress and promoting long-term health by slowing down the body and quieting the mind. Such techniques generally entail: refocusing attention (for example, noticing areas of tension); increasing body awareness; and exercises (such as meditation) to connect the body and mind together. Used daily, these practices can lead to a healthier perspective on stressful circumstances.

**REFERENCES**


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