Alternative Options for Health: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Yoga, one of the elements of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction sessions, is specifically designed for the wide range of abilities of participants, including those with physical limitations.

Certified Physician Assistant Beth Mulligan has been practicing Western medicine for 25 years. While training at Duke University, she developed a personal interest in martial arts, yoga and meditation and became a black belt in tae kwon do. Flash forward two decades, and Mulligan has combined her vocation with her passion to bring the first mindfulness-based stress reduction program to the Coachella Valley.

Today, Mulligan uses stress reduction to help patients with a variety of conditions, including Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, post-traumatic stress disorder, heart disease and back problems. Mulligan sees dramatic transformations in some patients during her eight-week sessions held at Eisenhower Medical Center. For example, a 55-year-old executive who had undergone recent back surgery was dealing with chronic pain. Mulligan believes the stress of his job was contributing to his discomfort. After just a few weeks of yoga and other stress-relieving techniques, he is nearly symptom-free.

Mulligan's stress-relieving techniques include meditation and what she describes as "mindful eating." "In class we try to pay attention to those little voices in our head and figure out what they're all about," she says. "We do that through meditation."And, what about mindful eating…? Mulligan explains, "We slow down enough to slowly eat one raisin." While she is trying to teach people to savor every moment, slow down and relax, one of the beneficial side effects is that people often lose weight.

The relaxation exercises such as mindful eating and meditation are accompanied by lectures on communication, re-evaluating personal and professional relationships, and honing in on lifestyle changes regarding diet and exercise.

"People may come in for high blood pressure or headaches, but what they get from it in addition to relief from their symptoms is they just start to enjoy life more," says Mulligan. "I ask them after a couple of weeks, 'How's your headache?' and they just look at me blankly because they forgot that's why they came. That's really cool."

STRESS REDUCTION COURSE: An introductory lecture about the course will be held on September 18. The eight-week session begins September 25. Two-hour lectures are held once a week, with an additional all-day Saturday session. Compact discs are included for home practice. The cost is $225. Call 760-568-1234 for registration.

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