

THE EFFECT OF MINDFULNESS AND STRESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Within the past few decades, there has been a surge of interest in the investigation of mindfulness as a factor in reducing the stress level of students. This article reviews the empirical literature on the effects of mindfulness stress. The present paper highlights the relationship between mindfulness and stress in the college students aged 17-22yrs. Mindfulness is keeping one's consciousness into the reality. Stress is defined as a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs. The samples for the study comprised of 70 college students. It has been observed that college going students have been prone to stressful situations in life due to immense work load and the term mindfulness has been lost inside the pages of the books. Mindfulness plays a very important role in reducing the stress level in the students as earlier research studies have quoted. The scales used for data collection are Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills by Ruth A. Baer, Gregory T. Smith & Kristin B. Allen. Items are rated on a 5 point Likert scale and Perceived Emotional Stress Scale which is a 15-item self-report screening scale designed to reflect the presence and severity of emotional distress. Purposive random sampling method was carried out for the present study which is a non-representative subset of some larger population, and is constructed to serve a very specific need. Descriptive and correlation methods were used for analyzing the collected data. It was found that there is no significant difference in the adjustment of the adolescents when mindfulness exists. The present study aimed to study the impact of mindfulness on frustrated college students.

Keywords- Mindfulness, College students, Stress.

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INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness has enjoyed a tremendous surge in popularity in the past decade, both in the popular press and in the psychotherapy literature (Didonna, 2009a; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The term “mindfulness” has been used to refer to a psychological state of awareness, a practice that promotes this awareness, a mode of processing information, and a characterological trait (Brown et al., 2007; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Kostanski & Hased, 2008; Siegel, 2007b). The word mindfulness originally comes from the Pali word *sati*, which means having awareness, attention, and remembering (Bodhi, 2000). Mindfulness can simply be defined as “moment-by-moment awareness” (Germer et al., 2005, p. 6) or as “a state of psychological freedom that occurs when attention remains quiet and limber, without attachment to any particular point of view” (Martin, 1997, p. 291, italics included in original text). For the purposes of the present paper, and for the sake of consistency with most of the research that is reviewed subsequently, mindfulness is defined as a moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgment. In this sense, mindfulness is viewed as a state and not a trait, and while it might be promoted by certain practices or activities (e.g., meditation), it is not equivalent to or synonymous with them. When slightly different definitions of mindfulness are used in the literature that is reviewed, these shall be noted. Also, interventions using mindfulness have gained prominence in mainstream psychology and could provide a potential solution to many of the problems outlined above.

Mindfulness has become incorporated into a number of well known mental health interventions because of numerous studies demonstrating its positive effects on human health and well-being and ability to reduce a range of stress-related physical and psychological problems (Shapiro and Carlson 2009; Hofmann et al. 2010; Grossman et al. 2004). Mindfulness originates in the Buddhist tradition but is present in all traditions. Buddhist Monk and a key leader in mindfulness Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) reveals mindfulness is, “keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality” (p. 11). While Kabat-Zinn (2003) helped to ignite the mindfulness revolution in the 1970’s and stated mindfulness as, “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment (p. 145). A further definition of mindfulness is provided by Nyanaponika Thera (1992) who helps us to truly

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understand that mindfulness helps us to engage all our senses fully in the present moment the clear and single –minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at successive moments of attention. It is called “bare” because it attends just to the bare facts of a perception as presented through the five physical senses or through the mindfulness meditation is an integral part of these interventions and combines attention training with the development of insight into one’s experience.

Mindfulness-based interventions may be able to provide a cheap, effective, and multidimensional solution to many of the physical and mental health problems encountered at college, while simultaneously improving student’s well-being and ability to self-regulate attention, affect, and behavior, factors that could lead to better academic success (Hall 1999; Astin 1997; Bowlin and Baer 2011; Collard et al. 2008). Because mindfulness-based interventions are taught in a group psychoeducational setting, they have the potential to increase access to psychological treatment for college students.

Review of Literature

Omoegun (1995) posited that young people have a tendency to associate with members of their age group. As a result of this association, the decisions of the group influence the decisions of the individuals who belong to it. Undergraff (2001) stated that adolescents spend more than half of their time in the company of their peers, and therefore it is not surprising that peers play an influential role in the adolescents' lives. He added that credibility, authority, power and the influence of peers are greater during adolescence (that is, senior secondary school age) than any other time in life. A therapeutic meditation practice known as Mindful Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)—defines mindfulness simply as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally." According to Dr. Dzung Vo, a UBC clinical assistant professor and pediatrician with a specialization in adolescent medicine, “Today’s teens face a unique set of stressors from social media, parents, schools, and society”. The author of ‘The Mindful Teen: Powerful Skills to Help You Handle Stress One Moment at a Time’, says mindfulness can be the key to helping teens cope with stress.

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Numerous studies have documented the benefits of teaching mindfulness skills to adolescence within the context of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) courses. These skills have proven to be reliably effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression and maladjustment (Ramel, Goldin, Carmona, & McQuaid, 2004; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) and increasing self-regulated behavior and positive emotional states (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The college years are a crucial and challenging developmental period, both for the formation of habits that lead to success and well-being later in life and for learning to cope with stress and the occurrence of psychological difficulties (Hunt and Eisenberg 2010; Mowbray et al. 2006).

Growing up today is very difficult. Teens are overwhelmed with stress from school and families, from pressures, from expectations. Social media is constantly drawing their attention. Adolescents are dealing with some very complex health issues, and many of them are stress-related: depression, anxiety, health-risk behaviors, school problems, family problems and chronic pain, maladjustment for example. Many of them are also dealing with very difficult circumstances in their communities and neighborhoods related to trauma, poverty, violence and racism.

Mindfulness can give adolescents a tool to stop their habitual automatic reactions, which often are harmful to themselves and to others. It allows them to take a break, come back to the present moment, come back to their breath, and re-discover their inner strength and their inner resilience. From that place, they can cope better, see their situation more clearly, and make a wiser decision on how to respond. It involves learning to direct our attention to our experience as it is unfolding, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn 1996). Rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen, mindfulness trains us to respond skillfully to whatever is actually happening right now, be that good or bad. This includes paying close attention to inner states such as thoughts, emotions and physical sensations, as well as to what is happening in the outside world. In line with common definitions of mindfulness (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2003), Bishop et al. (2004) proposed a two-component model of mindfulness: 'self-regulation of attention' and 'attitudinal orientation'. They described mindfulness not as a mode of relaxation, but a form of mental training developing a reflective rather than reflexive mode of responding to internal and external events. One of the recommendations was to 'Take Notice' of events inside and all around us, i.e. learn to practice mindfulness. With regard to adolescents, the last Crime Survey of England and Wales (2011) reported that the majority of volitional and threatening experiences that young people enact or suffer is at

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school. This makes education the ideal place to address issues related to compassion, well-being, motivation and adjustment. Mindfulness, with its experiential focus on developing self-regulation of attention, emotion regulation and strong links to the adjustment of well-being could become an effective tool in this context. Mindfulness improves self-reported goals, behaviour, mindful awareness, and happiness. Beauchemin, Hutchins, and Patterson (2008) reports adolescents with IDD were guided in 10-mins of mindful meditation at the beginning of each classroom period for 5-weeks. Significant improvements were seen in anxiety and social skill, as well as teacher-rated social ability and academic achievement.

Mindfulness is relevant for students who display poorer inhibition and more impulsive, risk-taking behaviors. Ernst, Pine and Hardin's (2006) Triadic Model of Motivated Behavior illustrates that their brain's reward system may be stronger, while the harm-avoidant amygdala and regulatory control systems are weaker, leading to increases in risk-taking. Moreover, reward regions of the brain are more strongly activated when young people make risky decisions in front of peers (Steinberg, 2010), highlighting the importance of interventions that promote an internal, self-accepting focus. According Sibinga, Kerringan, Stewart, Johnson, Magyari, and Ellen (2011), studies of the mindfulness programs in late adolescents and early adulthood have shown increased adjustment, as well as improvements in psychological and physical outcomes. For many young people their academic and life success are affected by numerous stressors from the outside world as they move through the developmental stages of emotional and physical growth which come with a complex array of complex dilemmas and choices (Dahir & Stone, 2012, p. 15). Unmanaged exposure to maladjustment leads to negative physical and psychological effects such as: aggression, anxiety, depression, obesity, and hyper-tension (Sibinga et al. 2011). Mindfulness also appears to have a greater ability to concentrate, confidence and reduced stress levels which appears to help the individuals to do better in school. In a study by Sibinga et al. 2011, several participants were reported saying that they believed using meditation techniques before doing exams helped them, others said how being more present helped them to concentrate on their school work and not "zone out". Many participants also reported an increase in their overall sense of well-being and overall physical health with some putting this down to the yoga and walking meditations; while others believed that their stress related symptoms such as headaches, jaw tightness, nervous leg movement had been alleviated because of their ability to now manage stress better Sibinga et al. (2011). Although there are several

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disciplines and practices that can cultivate mindfulness (e.g., yoga, tai chi, qigong; Siegel, 2007b), the majority of theoretical writing and empirical research on the subject has focused on mindfulness developed by mindfulness meditation. Meditation refers to: A family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006, p. 228). While a myriad of meditation practices including Tibetan and Zen Buddhist meditation styles also cultivate mindfulness, the term mindfulness meditation is typically used synonymously with Vipassana, a form of meditation that derives from Theravada Buddhism (Gunaratana, 2002; Young, 1997). Vipassana is a Pali word for insight or clear awareness and is a practice designed to gradually develop mindfulness or awareness (Gunaratana, 2002). Mindfulness is systematically cultivated in Vipassana practice by applying one's attention to one's bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, and surrounding environment (Bodhi, 2000; Germer, 2005; Germer et al., 2005; Gunaratana, 2002; Wallace, 2001; Young, 1997). While it may be assumed that all meditation practices equally benefit the practitioner, research rather intriguingly suggests that different styles of meditation practice elicit different brain activity patterns (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007; Valentine & Sweet, 1999). For example, mindfulness meditation more than concentrative forms of meditation (e.g., focusing on a mantra) has been shown to stimulate the middle prefrontal brain associated with both self-observation and metacognition (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Siegel, 2007b) and foster specific attentional mechanisms (Valentine & Sweet, 1999). With the advancement of neurological technology, mindfulness researchers are examining distinct components of mindfulness meditation such as focused attention, open monitoring (nonjudgmental moment-to-moment observation of one's experience), and loving-kindness compassion practice and their specific physiological outcomes (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne & Davidson, 2008; Lutz et al., 2009).

Stress

Stress is defined as “a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs.” Dr. Hans Selye, one of the leading authorities on the concept of stress, described stress as “the rate of all wear and tear caused by life.” Stress can be positive or negative. Stress is good

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when the situation offers an opportunity to a person to gain something. It acts as a motivator for peak performance. Stress is negative when a person faces social, physical, organizational and emotional problems. Factors that are responsible for causing stress are called stressors. We have a number of desires, which are not fulfilled due to certain obstacles. There is more or less minor stress, which is encountered every day – a person misses the bus; causing a late arrival for an appointment; the office assistant is ill; delaying the preparation of an important report. There is, of course, much greater stress in life. A boy who always wanted to marry his childhood beloved is jilted for another. A student fails in the school entrance examination and is denied admission.

Harriman (1946) says stress is defined as, “the condition of being thwarted in the satisfaction of motive.” A sense of psychological disorder interrupts a brilliant career. Stressful situations come about everyday everywhere throughout the life, in school, employment, friendships, marriage, and even in relationships with others. stress is a usual component of life. Nonetheless, it must not be allowed to achieve the upper hand. Every one met with stress less or more. Maier (1949) defined, stress as change in the conditions of the organism and through it a different set of behavior mechanism is set into operation. It is imperative to tolerate and to cope efficiently with aggravation and frustration if anyone wishes to have a thriving and gratifying life. Now a day’s stress has increased a lot. Burden and more mechanical life have increased stress and frustration among human being. Related to anger and disappointment, it arises from the perceived resistance to the fulfillment of individual will. The greater the obstruction and greater the will, the more the stressful it is likely to be.

Frustration

Different psychologists have defined the term frustration in different ways. Generally speaking, definition can be classified into two categories, i.e. stress as a state of an organism and stress as a hypothetical construct. Most of them however agree in emphasizing the role of interference. Estes (1958) says that stress included cessation of reward, followed by an emotional reaction which facilitated interfering responses. Some psychological outlined an approach in which stress was treated as a hypothetical construct. Thus it seems that most of the psychologists have laid emphasis upon the interference in the goal directed activity of a person. In the Dictionary of Education (1959), frustration has been defined as, “Emotional tension resulting from the blockage of the desire or

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need or attempt mode or reaction.” Symonds (1966), views stress as, “the blocking or interference of the satisfaction of an aroused need through some barrier or obstruction.” College students come from across the country. Because they are outstanding person in high school, they have higher self-expectations and clear sense of superiority.

But because of the imbalance level of national college education, too many talents in campus, some advantages will be not prominent. On the other hand, teaching method in university is different from the high schools, such as more courses and fewer class hours, flexible teaching methods and so on, which makes the students who may master science learning method in high schools can not adapt the college life. On the one hand, these student hope to maintain the best like in high school, on the other hand, they can not stabilize learning emotion, producing lost emotions and boredom and burnout in learning psychology. G. B. Vonhaller (1966), defined, stress as, “the state of an organism resulting when the satisfaction of motivated behavior is made difficult or impossible, when goal is blocked.” Bhatia (1969), “Stress is the blocking or thwarting of one’s needs and desires.”

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

The sample of the study was college students in the age group of 17-22. The data for this purpose was collected from Amity University, Haryana campus which was the inclusion criteria for the present study. Another aspect of inclusion criteria was that those participants who were physically and mentally fit were the ones chosen for the study. The method of data collection thus is purposive random sampling.

TOOLS

1. Mindfulness Scale
2. Emotional Perceived Stress Scale

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1. Mindfulness scale:

Mindfulness was measured using Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS) by Ruth A. Baer, Gregory T. Smith & Kristin B. Allen

. Items are rated on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or very rarely true) to 5 (almost always or always true). Items reflect either direct descriptions of the mindfulness skills, or they describe the absence of that skill and are reverse scored. High scores reflect more mindfulness. The KIMS is a 39-item self-report inventory and is used for the assessment of mindfulness skills. Mindfulness is generally defined to include focusing one's attention in a nonjudgmental or accepting the experience occurring in the present moment (Baer et al.,2004). This measurement may be helpful to professionals who teach mindfulness by clarifying strengths and weaknesses in their client's development of different mindfulness skills. Scoring ranges as

Never or very rarely true =1

Rarely true =2

Sometimes true =3

Often true =4

Very often or always true =5

Reliability: The instrument has good internal consistency. Alpha coefficients for

Observe, Describe, Act with awareness and Accept without judgment were .91, .84, .76,

and .87, respectively. Adequate to good test-retest reliability with correlations for the

Observe, Describe, Act and Accept scores being .65, .81, .86, and .83, respectively.

Validity: Demonstrates good content validity. Has good concurrent validity, correlating

with the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS: Brown & Ryan, 2003).

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2. Perceived Emotional Distress Inventory:

The Perceived Emotional Distress Inventory (PEDI) is a 15-item self-report screening scale designed to reflect the presence and severity of emotional distress. The measure assesses anxiety, anger, depression, and Hopelessness. In responding to each PEDI item, subjects report to what extent they had experienced each emotional distress-related symptoms (“during the past month, including today”) by rating themselves on a 4-point scale. A Global Severity Index (GSI) is determined simply by summing the ratings for each individual items that comprise the PEDI. The total score for the inventory range from 0 to 45 points. Higher scores correspond to higher levels of perceived emotional distress.

RESULTS

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation of 70 students on mindfulness and stress

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
mindfulness	12.2571	7.35967	70
stress	3.0857	2.58055	70

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Table 2

Correlation of 70 students(male and female) on the dimensions of mindfulness and stress

Correlations

		mindfulness	stress
mindfulness	Pearson Correlation	1	-.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	70	70
stress	Pearson Correlation	-.457**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	70	70

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 show that the mean score for stress is 3.0875 and standard deviation is 2.58055 for 70 students. For mindfulness the mean score is 12.2571 and standard deviation is 7.35967 for 70 students.

Table 2 shows the relationship between males and females college students on the dimensions of mindfulness and stress. The correlation between males and females on stress comes to -.457 and that of mindfulness comes to -.457. A look at the correlation table indicates that both the values are statistically significant.

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Thus the results of the study reveal that there is significant relationship between mindfulness and stress between college students. The null hypothesis is rejected that there is no significant difference between males and females on the dimensions of either mindfulness or stress and an alternative hypothesis is accepted that there is a significant negative correlation between mindfulness and stress. This indicates that as mindfulness increases, stress decreases.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to find the relationship between mindfulness and stress in college students. The study reveals that there is significant negative correlation between mindfulness and stress between college students. The null hypothesis is rejected. The alternative hypothesis established is there is a significant relationship between mindfulness and stress.

Based on an examination of empirical literature, research studies conclude that mindfulness and its cultivation facilitates adaptive psychological functioning in reducing the level of stress in college students. There is clear convergence of findings on mindfulness and stress, all of which suggest that mindfulness is positively associated with stress and training in mindfulness helps reduce stress. Although the present study shows that there is no relationship between mindfulness and stress, further research should continue to explore other potential applications of mindfulness and stress.

IMPLICATIONS

Mindfulness is the minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us. Mindfulness is keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality. Mindfulness also means paying attention to the moment without judgment and intentionally pausing before reacting. It is a gentle effort to be consciously present. It can be developed through the practice of meditation, which can be defined as the intentional self-regulation of attention from moment to moment. Mindfulness originates in the Buddhist tradition but is present in all traditions. Mindfulness can help kids to thrive at school.

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Parents

They can be some of the most frustrating and embarrassing child behaviors—temper tantrums, lashing out at others, impatience, and short attention spans. Research has found that having a sense of mindfulness, or the ability to be present and think before reacting, can provide children with the skills they need to better understand their feelings, to pay more attention and to make wiser decisions. Mindfulness is a wonderful way to help children manage their emotions, reduce their stress

1. Take on a Family Mindfulness Challenge: When you model the mindfulness you want to see in your children, they understand it on a whole new level. So, give it a try. You can sit on a chair or floor with your back straight but not tense. Close your eyes and use your other senses, like listening. A simple minute of befreathing is one great way to start.

3. Set a Time: Just like athletes schedule practice sessions to improve their skills, having a designated mindfulness time helps make it a go-to habit. Before bed is a wonderful time, as the mindfulness practice relaxes everyone into a more peaceful state. As your family gets used to practicing mindfulness, the special space in your home can serve as a good place to go when anyone in the family needs to take a break from anger, or frustration. If you practice moments of calm, it makes going to that space in moments of stress easier.

6. Designate Mindful Boundaries: Having established boundaries promotes a feeling of consistency and safety. They provide a perimeter, within which children can exercise their autonomy. If the boundaries are mindfully thought out in advance, then there is less reason for you to constantly say no. It's equally important to create situations where a child can experience autonomy. Shapiro asserts that children need a degree of autonomy to develop a sense of responsibility over their lives. They also need clear boundaries, which gives them a sense of safety, and a clear idea of who is the parent and who is the child. The author suggests that you ask yourself, "What is most needed in this moment? Is it space, autonomy, or a

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boundary? Or maybe it's some of each: you can run around the park, but here's a line you can't cross—a non-negotiable line.”

For Teachers

1. **Choose a time for mindfulness.** We are creatures of habit! Try to always practice mindfulness at the same time. Many teachers find mindfulness helps their class settle down after recess or after lunch.
2. **Create the environment.** Make it clear that mindfulness is a special time: clear off desks, perhaps move to the carpet, or have all chairs face the front of the room. Ask students not to take bathroom breaks and refrain from talking and moving for a little while.
3. **You share.** Because children respond well when we relay our own experiences, you can share with the students if, how, and when you are using mindfulness in your life. If you share a recent story of when you were overcome with emotion or used mindfulness to help you deal with an emotion, they can hear how it is applied.
4. **They share.** Many young students like to share what they've noticed or experienced during mindfulness, or maybe something that was challenging or distracting. Sharing also allows others to be aware of things to notice while practicing mindfulness that they may not have heard otherwise.

Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. When people feel stressed by something going on around them, their bodies react by releasing chemicals into the blood. College requires significantly more effort from students than high school. College students probably find that their fellow students are more motivated, instructors are more demanding, the work is more difficult, and they are expected to be more independent. As a result of these new demands, it is common for college students to experience greater levels of stress related to academics.

Ways of reducing and managing stress.

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1. **Avoid procrastination.** Putting off assignments or responsibilities until the last minute can create more mental and physical stress than staying on top of them. Procrastination can affect many aspects of daily life, such as the quality of your work, the quality of your sleep, and your mood.
2. **Manage yourself.** Most people talk about managing time in order to have more of what life has to offer, but it's only in managing ourselves that we really see a difference in our lives and are able to handle any stress life throws at us. Manage yourself and other things will fall into place.
3. **Control your environment by controlling who and what is surrounding you.** Life is like a teacup. There's only so much "stuff" that will fit into it. If you fill your cup with the wrong things and the wrong people, you won't have time for the right things and right people. The wrong things and people bring stress. The right people and things bring joy and contentment. Choose who and what gets your time and attention.
4. **Be good to yourself.** Acknowledge yourself for the good you do! Be gentle with yourself when things don't go as you might have wanted them to. There are just some things that you can't control — no matter how much you want to. Love yourself for who you are right now — at this very moment.
5. **Exercise your body.** Health and vitality depend on your body's ability to use oxygen and food effectively. One of the ways to help that happen is through exercise. Exercise also releases endorphins, which have been shown to improve one's mood, making it a great way to deal with stress! Move your body every day!

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