

# Wellness for Black Girls Podcast

## Ep 7 Mind Body Connection 7/12/2020

[00:00:00] **TaReon Jael:** Welcome to the Wellness for Black Girls podcast, a biweekly podcast that aims to empower millennial Black women on their holistic health journeys by moving through the dimensions of wellness. I'm your host to TaReon Jael, a Certified Health Educator and Clinical Lab Scientist. For more information, please visit [wellnessforblackgirls.com](http://wellnessforblackgirls.com). While, I hope you enjoy listening to and learning from the podcast please remember that it is not intended to be a substitute for a relationship with a licensed healthcare provider. Now let's get into this episode.

Thank you for joining me for episode seven of the Wellness for Black Girls podcast. July has been [00:01:00] coined National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, but we're starting to get away from using the term minority. So to say it another way, July is National BIPOC, or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Mental Health Awareness Month.

So in keeping with the theme for this month, I thought I would share a bit about my mental health journey. I'm going to share this, not for pity or attention, but I'm going to share this with the hopes that by me opening up, it will help normalize the conversations we have about mental health and especially the conversations we have about mental health in the Black community. I also hope that it will encourage others who are battling mental illness to reach out for help when they need it.

In 2009, [00:02:00] a couple of years after college and into my new career, I started going through some things that I couldn't seem to resolve or work through on my own. One of my coworker-friends suggested that I look into therapy, because she knew people who went to therapy and found it really helpful.

I had never considered therapy until she suggested it, but I was open to giving it a try. So I quickly found a psychologist in my area who was trained and experienced in working with people who were experiencing the things that I was experiencing. I began meeting with her regularly. During our sessions, my psychologist uncovered that I was experiencing signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

So I continued working regularly working with her. And I [00:03:00] can honestly say that I found those sessions, which were based in cognitive behavioral therapy, to be truly helpful. And that was my first introduction to mental health and therapy. So about a year later, I moved to another state to start my public health graduate studies.

During my studies, I was introduced to various complimentary and alternative medicine therapies. I was really interested and intrigued by mind body medicine, specifically. This field of medicine focuses on the interactions among the brain, mind, body, and behavior, and the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can directly affect our health.

Different mind-body interventions include relaxation, visual imagery, [00:04:00] meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, qi gong, cognitive behavioral therapies, group support, spirituality and prayer. What I found interesting was the number of mind-body interventions that involve some sort of physical movement of the body.

It's no coincidence that most of these mind-body interventions involve physical movement of some sort. All of the processes that take place in our bodies and the actions that we take in our daily lives are controlled by the brain. We know that the brain functions through a complex network of physical structures, biochemical reactions, and pathways of information, anything that alters the brain structure and [00:05:00] function, whether it's good or bad, also alters how we think, feel, and behave.

The workings of the brain are vast and sometimes hard to grasp, but the concept of the mind can be even harder to grasp. I like to think of it this way. If the brain is the hardware, then it can be said that the mind is the operating system that keeps all of the programs running. These programs are our memory, our ability to focus, our thoughts and expression, how intensely we feel, our choices and actions, our willpower, and how we perceive and interact with the world.

Through these processes, we experience mind-body connection, our body's ability to communicate through these realms.

You know I have some research data to share on the [00:06:00] topic.

Various research studies on mind-body interventions have shown that mindfulness meditation training can enhance coping skills, promote feelings of well-being and strengthen our immune system.

Randomized controlled trials of yoga have shown that yoga participation can improve overall well-being, ease chronic low back pain, combat fatigue, improve energy, balance and flexibility, and possibly help reduce heart disease risk. This is just the bit of data I found on just two mind-body interventions.

Imagine just how much more there is for us to uncover. But until that time we can use what we know right now, we can incorporate some of these interventions into our lives to help bring our mind, body and [00:07:00] spirits into alignment.

I want us to dive into some of the practices that are known for nurturing the mind-body connection.

Since my time in graduate school, I've continued diving into the research on the best holistic lifestyle practices for optimal well-being, especially as it relates to mental health. I've tested some of those research based practices in my own life. And I've found the practices that have consistently helped me.

You'll notice that the majority of these things fall within the physical dimension of wellness, which involves a healthy body, good physical health habits, nutrition, exercise, and appropriate health care. All of these practices and suggestions will be things you've heard

before. They're nothing new and extravagant, but [00:08:00] if we're honest, these are things that we know would be beneficial to us, but we either don't do them at all, or we don't do them consistently.

The key to making them habits is to start practicing them in small steps or taking micro actions. And as we keep taking those small steps, little by little becomes a lot and they start to add up.

I'm going to go over the different practices and provide a quick tip to help us start to incorporate these things into our daily lives.

The first practice involves nutrition. This involves being mindful and intentional about how we fuel our bodies. We know the things we eat and drink affect our mind and body. I'm [00:09:00] pretty sure we've all experienced this firsthand. For example, when we're feeling down, we reach for comfort foods. If we're honest, they are usually foods high in sugar, salt and/or fat, but then afterwards we're left feeling sluggish, fatigued, and unable to concentrate. We end up feeling worse than we did before we grabbed the comfort food. So when it comes to nutrition, let's try adding one serving of a vegetable or a fruit to each meal and upping our water intake throughout the day.

The second practice is rest. Proper sleep is absolutely critical to good physical and mental health, because inadequate sleep can trigger the [00:10:00] body's stress response. Rest also involves taking the time to allow ourselves to sit, be still, and to breathe deeply. One thing we can do to practice better sleep hygiene is to limit screen time before bed. The one thing I started doing last fall was I started putting my cell phone on the charger in another room in the house. And I realized I had to do this to break my habit of mindlessly scrolling social media right before bed, which caused me to lose much needed sleep time. And then mindlessly scrolling first thing in the morning, which was causing me to start the day from a not so good head space. Studies have shown that scrolling through our phones first thing in the morning switches our brain into beta brainwaves. [00:11:00] These brainwaves are associated with fight or flight. This can then cause our brain to associate lying in bed with being stressed, which then makes it hard to sleep. I don't want to get too heavy into the science here, so to bring it back, let's aim to create a peaceful environment for sleep and rest by putting our phones away at night.

The third practice is physical activity. Physical activity propels blood around the body and helps clear out toxins. Physical activity and movement also improves our mood by boosting the production of those feel-good neurotransmitters and endorphins. When it comes to exercise, it doesn't have to be a long, drawn out routine. [00:12:00] Just 10 to 30 minutes of movement can be beneficial. I like to break this up into increments of five to 10 minutes throughout the day when I can. The point is to do something that gets us out of our heads and into our bodies.

The fourth practice is to work on fostering a healthy mindset. The mind is the center of any change we want to make. When our minds are in the right place, everything else flows. And when our mindset isn't aligned with our body and spirit, our actions won't follow. And if they

do, they don't follow easily and consistently. They don't flow. Some strategies that we've talked about in previous episodes include prayer, meditation, and journaling.

The fifth [00:13:00] practice involves health care. Self care does not mean we should stop seeing our healthcare providers or avoid conventional medicine altogether. Part of self care means knowing which healthcare provider to see and when. The goal is to collaborate with your healthcare team to prevent illness, create and maintain good health, and treat any symptoms and conditions that may arise. A quick start on this practice is to find or reconnect with your primary care provider and therapist. Try searching your health insurance company's provider directory and/or the Psychology Today and Therapy for Black Girls directories.

The six practice involves connection. I've mentioned in previous episodes about the many benefits of having strong, healthy, social support [00:14:00] networks and how being in community edifies our spirits. In episode four, we touched on how social support is one of the most well-documented psychosocial factors influencing physical health outcomes, like lower mortality rates from cardiovascular disease, cancer and infectious disease. Connection also helps our mind by improving our ability to cope with stressful situations, alleviating the effects of emotional distress., promoting lifelong good mental health, and enhancing self esteem. And in episode five, we were reminded how in community, we find a safe place to connect intellectually through conversations, socially and emotionally by being a source of social support for one another, and spiritually through collective prayer and in [00:15:00] linking arms and lifting our voices for a cause we believe in. We can bring more connection now by simply calling a friend or a loved one and even better having a Zoom meetup with the whole family or a group of our friends.

The seventh practice involves creativity and having a creative outlet. Many times as Black women, we feel that we can't always be ourselves. Society often tells us that we have to present ourselves in a way that is more acceptable or palatable to others. Our hair must be a certain way. Our bodies must be a certain shape or size. Our voices and our speech must be quiet and soft and articulate. Our demeanor must be submissive or gentle. And we spend so much of our lives day to day feeling as [00:16:00] though we have to squeeze ourselves into that box of what a "lady" is. Usually that ideal of a "lady" is based on a European ideal. This squeezing into this narrow ideal leaves us feeling stifled and stuck. So having a creative outlet helps us on our journey to wellness. This outlet is a safe space to express ourselves uninhibited. Let's explore and spend some time doing those things that allow us to feel free. And let's commit to doing those things for a few minutes each day.

So these are the seven practices to help us nurture our minds and bodies and in turn, enhance the mind-body connection. I hope you found these self care practice tips, helpful, [00:17:00] useful, and practical. This year has taken a toll on all of us, especially for us in the Black community. So it's absolutely essential that we prioritize our self care right now. In the last podcast episode, I mentioned us doing a summer self care challenge together, but I've decided to postpone it for another time. Doesn't quite feel like the right time to do it. And I'm also thinking about restructuring things, but I haven't quite decided yet, but you all will

be the first to know when I have something concrete. So be sure to follow the podcast on Instagram @wellness4blackgirls for updates. You can also follow my personal IG page @tareonjael.

You can also find show notes with links to references and resources by heading to [wellnessforblackgirls.com](https://wellnessforblackgirls.com) [00:18:00] and clicking on episode number seven. Again, I hope you found the information in this episode helpful, and will try using some of these practices in your life and together we'll continue moving through the dimensions of wellness.