

The Mind-Body

club
psora

From our founder



Training the brain is exactly like training any other muscle of your body. It's challenging at first and there will be resistance but over time it will become easier to control. You are making new neural pathways that didn't exist before. You can think of this visually like digging for a spring garden in the packed winter soil. The more work that has been done to prepare the soil, the easier it will be to plant. Once your garden is planted, you must tend to it regularly and the conditions need to be right for it to flourish. That's how you grow a beautiful garden and that's how you train your mind.



- Miriam Thom



The Mind-Body

As a Pillar of Self-Healing

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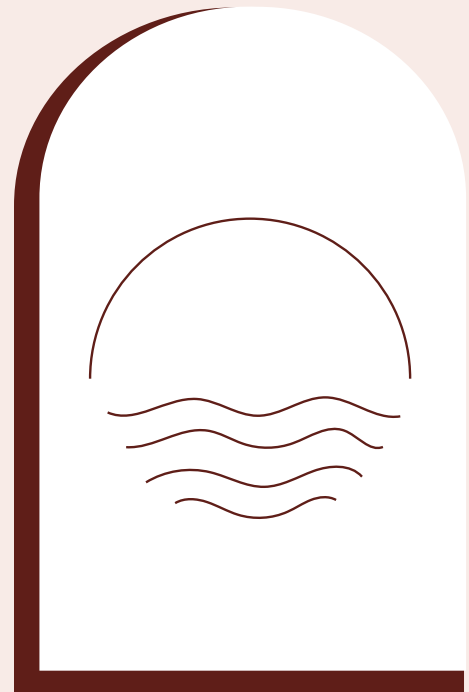
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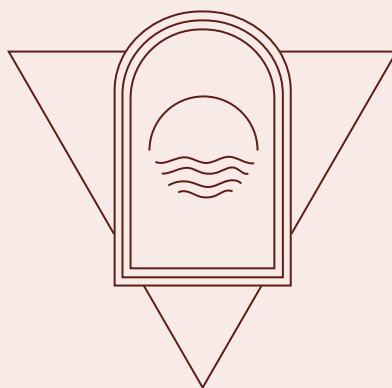
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The Mind-Body

The mind-body is an evolving way of seeing the two most essential elements of the human form, and considering them in union. As we learn more about the nervous system, the brain and their connection to our organs, we see that everything in the mind affects the body and everything in the body affects the mind. Studies show that they should be considered one and the same.

Stress is one of the biggest triggers for skin conditions, working in a negative feedback loop. Your flare keeps you in a state of distress and your body doesn't have the space to heal or regenerate — leading to more inflammation. The tools of the mind can help you connect with your body and interrupt this cycle to give yourself the opportunity to repair.

This pillar, we consider the connection between the body and our stress and emotions. We also trace where the skin meets the immune system and other vital organs, and explore essential healing pathways like the lymphatic system. We look at the various kinds of stagnation that can occur in the body and discuss the impact of subtle physical exercises like breathwork, vagal toning and lymphatic drainage.

Studies on the measurable effects of mindfulness and meditation are changing the way people approach the mind in relation to their physical health. But the role of the mind-body in your healing journey is also one which will empower a stronger connection to your sense of self and your own specific needs — to become more intuitive and listen more closely to what your body is trying to tell you.

The Layers of the Skin

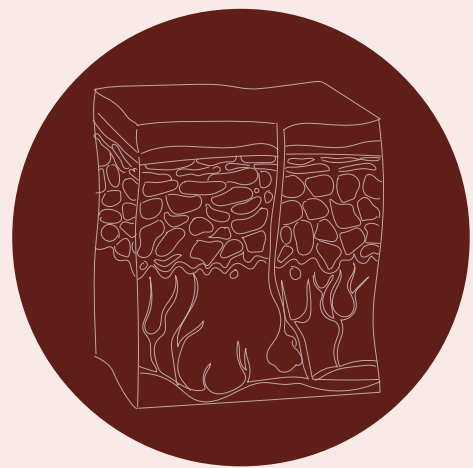
Illness is rarely isolated to where it manifests. The body can be broken down into its parts and through that process we can better understand it as a whole — how everything is connected. To understand the skin, we must first understand its interplay with the systems in the body that generate it. This is what it means to look beyond the surface.



Look down at your hands: your skin is made up of trillions of cells and every one of them is programmed with your unique DNA. There are three fundamental layers to the skin. Here, we take them under the microscopic, going deeper into where skin issues could be generating from.

The Epidermis

The outermost layer of the skin is the only one we can see with the naked eye. Despite being only a millimeter thick, the epidermis is composed of millions of keratinocyte cells that make up our skin, nails and hair. These are the normal skin cells that overproduce during a flare. It's this layer where symptoms of our skin condition will manifest.



This is the layer of ourselves that we present to the world, one which has a dynamic interface with our environment. You also have various immune systems that work at the epidermis level:

— melanocytes which depict the pigmentation of your skin (often referred to as melanin) are considered to be immune cells and are part of the first responders to skin cell growth

— microscopic organisms that make up our skin biome: friendly viruses, bacteria and fungi that reside on the surface of the skin as well as deep in the hair and glands

The Dermis

Below the epidermis, the dermis is the control board for your skin — it responds to your skin's needs with a team of nerves, glands and blood vessels.

This layer of connective tissue is mostly composed of two proteins woven together: elastin and collagen. These give your skin its elasticity and supple nature, what cosmetic companies are attempting to achieve with anti-aging products.

The dermis also has a variety of glands working for it, including:

- our eccrine (sweat) glands secrete water and cool the body during physical exertion
- our sebaceous glands secrete sebum (oil) lubricating our skin



Throughout the epidermis and dermis are nerves and blood vessels — a complex network that serve a variety of functions. Various reactions begin at the dermis level and manifest on the epidermis. Certain nerves crosshatched through the dermis have thermoreceptors that protect us from extreme temperatures. Others provide the incredible sensation of touch. These nerves also display our emotions through a flush in the cheeks and make our hairs stand on end.

This is because the skin is often our first responder to activity inside the body and out. The dermis is where connection to our body's other systems begin, including the immune system. Specifically it's one of the places an immune system response can begin when it senses an invader — where the proliferation of skin cells is coming from when you flare.

The Hypodermis

Underneath the dermis is the hypodermis — also known as the superficial fascia — the deepest layer of our skin connected to the underlying fascia (a thin casing of connective tissue that holds all of our organs, bones and muscles in place). This layer is one of the places in the body we store our excess energy. It is the protective layer between the outside world and our organs.

This is where the skin connects to the switchboard, where all the systems that impact your skin condition (lymphatic, circulatory, immune and others) exist and meet.



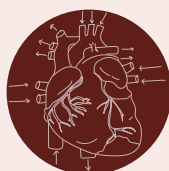
Running like a transportation map through the body, the skin, fascia and connective tissue are the routes in which blood vessels appearing as veins and arteries carry nutrients and oxygen to and from the heart — better known as the cardiovascular system.



Everything is encased together, networked into a complex wiring that communicates and responds to the needs or issues experienced by various systems and body parts. Your fascial chain (part of which is made up of your hypodermis) runs from your feet to the base of your neck and is why an injury in your shoulder may affect your ankle, or lower back pain could be caused by tight hamstrings.



The lymphatic system works at this level to transport infection-fighting white blood cells.



The cardiovascular system works with our lymphatic system to make up our circulatory system — transporting nutrients, blood cells and other essential things around our bodies.



Each of these systems are essential for healing and depend on circulation. This week, we focus on tools to encourage circulation through movement and breath.



Flossing Your Fascia

The fascia is the biological fabric that holds us together. It wraps our muscles, joints, organs and connective tissues in a sinuous spiderweb that runs from head to toe and fingertip to fingertip. If that fabric isn't given proper mobility, areas of tension and tightness develop resulting in trigger points that restrict movement and cause pain and muscle weakness.

This lack of mobility means that pathways like the lymphatic vessels will have trouble pushing past points of stagnation in the body. Physical activity improves blood flow to the extremities while small movements and muscle contractions squeeze the lymphatic vessels and push lymph back to the heart. This movement helps break down stagnation, opening up the pathways for improved circulation.

By bringing awareness and movement into the areas of your body where your fascial tissue is connecting, you can bring more elasticity, resilience and circulation to the whole body and all of its systems.



Pathways + Connections

We've covered the relationship between the gut, brain and skin. Now, we look to the essential connections between these vital organs and the healing that happens in these pathways.

1. The Lymphatic System

The side-kick to our immune system which acts as a channel pushing lymph (immune cells) towards our hearts.

2. The Vagus Nerve

Often referred to as the wandering nerve, the vagus nerve travels through all of our organs and plays a key role in our sensory experience, emotions and the operation of our parasympathetic autonomic nervous system.

3. The Breath

The biggest current in the human body is breath. Breathing moves oxygenated blood to and from the heart and out through our arteries to the far reaches of our limbs. Circulation is key!

All of these biological pathways have something in common: by design, they each hold immense healing potential.

One of the most important pathways for healing, the lymphatic system works with the immune system to eradicate toxins, pathogens, waste and unwanted materials.

It travels around the body alongside the blood — the immune system like the conductor telling it where to send its resources.

The Lymphatic System

The lymphatic system works alongside the blood to transport lymph around the body — a fluid containing infection-fighting white blood cells. Lymph can only move in one direction in your body and if the lymphatic system is working to eradicate a virus, the lymph will pool up in the lymph nodes — major housing units found in the neck, groin and armpits.

Unlike blood which is filtered through the liver and kidneys, lymph is filtered through the lymph nodes. As lymph moves through the lymph nodes, immune cells (T and B cells specifically) are exposed to bacteria and viruses and trained to fight them, while other immune cells break down and eliminate them before the lymph re-enters circulation. This ensures infection does not enter the bloodstream. The role of the lymphatic system (aka this process of lymphatic drainage) is an essential component of the immune system and healing.

Lymphatic drainage and circulation relies in part on the movement and contraction of our skeletal muscles. As we move and our muscles contract, they squeeze the lymphatic vessels and force lymph up and back towards the heart. Movement is not only essential to prevent the stagnation of blood and the oh-so-common cold extremities, but also for the optimal flow and drainage of the lymph and thus, the function of our immune system.

Other factors can impact how efficiently your lymphatic system is running, including how many pathogens it's fighting on a regular basis (remember from Week 2 that this can be connected to gut health). This will impact the number of immune cells available in the lymph and whether these cells are on high alert — setting the stage for an autoimmune response.

The Healing Connection

An optimized lymphatic system aids in creating optimized immune responses and function. When there is proper lymphatic drainage, the body eliminates harmful cells with the rest of our waste. If we want our bodies to operate optimally, fight infection and repair efficiently, there are a few techniques we can implement to help promote lymphatic drainage. These practices include:

- any kind of exercise
- lymphatic massage
- dry brushing
- hot and cold showers
- club psora's personal favourite: breath



Dry Brushing

Dry brushing is an ancient self-care treatment that improves circulation and promotes lymphatic drainage, ultimately improving the look and feel of your skin. This can be a wonderful ritual to work into your prevention routine when you're on the healing side of a flare but it's not something that we recommend during a breakout as it can cause infection to open wounds. Make sure to buy a natural (not synthetic) bristle brush, since natural fibres will not scratch the surface of the skin. These are available online or at your local health and natural food store. It also helps to find a brush with a long handle so you can get to those difficult-to-reach areas like your back. [Read about the full technique here.](#)



HOMEWORK

Incorporate a new ritual into your routine this week: anything that promotes lymphatic drainage (see our list on p. 10). You can also do some research to find a practitioner — acupuncturist or lymphatic massage specialist — who can facilitate drainage, detoxification and anti-inflammation. Both modalities can physically accelerate healing.

The longest nerve in the body, the vagus nerve is one of our great unifiers. It reaches into the throat, lungs, heart, stomach, liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys and gut, connecting these vital centers into a network.



It's also called the soul nerve because it helps facilitate the mind-body connection. A two-way communication highway between the body and mind, it plays an essential role in how we respond to and recover from stress. Activating it can empower a number of healing responses, including reducing inflammation.

The Vagus Nerve

The vagus nerve is called the communication highway for the wide array of information it carries to the brain from the body and the world around us. It works with the autonomic nervous system (ANS) to regulate:

- respiration (breath)
- heart rate
- digestion
- salivation
- elimination
- arousal

Among other functions, as our main parasympathetic nerve, it tells our autonomic nervous system (ANS) when to move between the body's two states of survival: from sympathetic (fight or flight) to parasympathetic (rest and digest).

The sympathetic nervous system is like an accelerator — it increases heart rate, constricts blood vessels and sends blood straight to the brain and heart. The parasympathetic is the brake — it steps in to slow the heart rate, dilates blood vessels and circulates blood to your body's other organs.

Our rest and response states are like the yin and yang. We need both systems to operate and in fact, they complement one another to ideally create homeostasis in the body. Movement between them is very important for balancing stress and relaxation. The vagus nerve is so critical because when stimulated, it moves us from stress to rest.

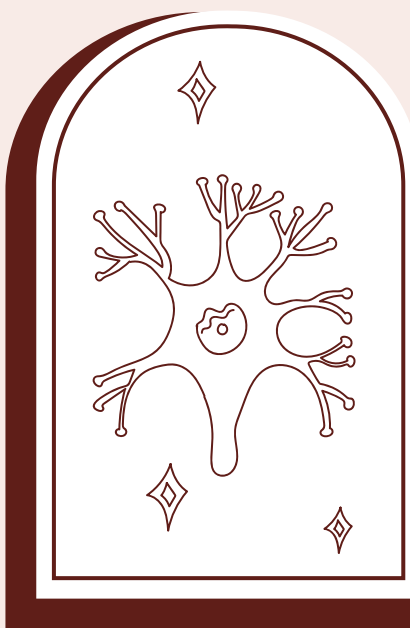
A way to measure which nervous system you are operating out of is to count your breaths per minute.

Generally, we breathe an average rate of 12-16 breaths per minute; when we get under eight breaths per minute, the vagus nerve is activated and we shift into our parasympathetic (rest) state.

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When people say trust your gut, they are in many ways saying, trust your vagus nerve. Visceral feelings and gut instincts are literally emotional intuitions transferred up to your brain via the vagus nerve.

- Christopher Bergland in Psychology Today



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I liked this idea that we have something like a secret piano key, under our skin, to press internally to calm us down.

Stimulating the vagus nerve to the heart has a really powerful effect on slowing the heart rate... And this, specifically, is what relaxes us. The vagus nerve is listening to the way we breathe, and it sends the brain and the heart whatever message our breath indicates.

Edith Zimmerman (first and second quote) and Dr. Lucy Norcliffe-Kaufmann (second quote, bold) in The Cut

The Healing Connection



An engaged sympathetic nervous system is handy in moments of stress.

Unfortunately because of the way we've evolved, this accelerator system is often in operation when we're not actually in danger. The ANS begins in the brain stem (and spinal cord) where our survival functions are housed and links us with 320 million years of survival-based evolution. We bring these automatic survival responses to the shifting demands of modern life. The effect? Our sympathetic nervous system is often on high-alert throughout daily life.

When we are trying to heal any health issue — a chronic skin condition for instance — an overactive sympathetic nervous system means that our body is in a state of stress too often. This stress drains our energy stores and puts pressure on our organs (all connected to the vagus nerve, and all affected by chronic stress). Bringing your body out of a state of stress is to minimize an overly active sympathetic nervous system and engage the parasympathetic nervous system more often, promoting rest, repair and healing.

Vagal Tone

How much time you spend between your two survival states depends heavily on the vagus nerve and how it responds to data inside the body and out — in other words, how it perceives danger and safety. Vagal tone refers to the overall resilience of the vagus nerve — how sensitive it is to distressing data and how quickly it recovers after a moment of stress. A toned vagus nerve means that your body can recover faster after a stress response.

Just like lymphatic drainage, there are techniques you can implement to better tone the vagus nerve. Yoga, qigong, meditation and breathwork are four such vagal toning exercises. In fact, researchers believe the impact these activities have on the vagus nerve is what contributes to their effects of general resilience (the ability to manage stress and calmly problem solve through challenges) and the alleviation of mood — specifically of anxiety symptoms.

Check out our breathwork workshop with Josephine Edmondson on YouTube.

The first thing we do when we push through the threshold of our mother's womb into the material world — is breathe.



We continue breathing as we age and move through life. The rhythm of our breath will become an indicator of our internal state, shallow when we're preoccupied, deep and resourceful when we're preparing to spring into action, constricted when we attempt to hold back a rush of emotions.

The Breath

Inhale. Your heart speeds up. Exhale. Your heart slows down. Bring attention and intention to your breath and you take control of your body.



The breath is recognized differently across the wide spectrum of medicine and culture. Across all modalities, there is an agreement that breath is the most important aspect of life and our human spirit:

- In Traditional Chinese Medicine, they believe in Qi, the vital energy that flows through the body
- In yoga it's called Prana, the life-force
- In western medicine, it's considered respiration and the absence of breath correlates with the flat line of a heart monitor that we so quickly associated with death
- It's even referenced in the bible: "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person." - Genesis 2:7

You might recall from yoga classes, an instructor inviting you to send your breath into a particular area of your body. This is a very simple exercise to help you become accustomed to a method of awareness. Tony Robbins coined the phrase "where attention goes, energy flows." Mentally sending your breath into areas of your body or simply concentrating on the feeling of air going into your nose and expanding your lungs — focusing on making your breath slower and deeper — can lower your heart rate, reduce feelings of anxiety, alleviate negative emotions and even soothe physical pain.

The Healing Connection

Learning how to breathe optimally and down-regulate your nervous system is like a superpower. You may remember tantrums as a child and a parent or guardian instinctively telling you to focus and take a few deep breaths. We may be familiar with the practical effects of breath, but the science, techniques and methodology can take us so much deeper.

When we take a breath, oxygenated blood moves throughout the body. When we breathe deeply and slowly (5-7 breaths per minute) we activate our parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest), giving our body time to move out of survival mode or a state of stress and into a state of relaxation and repair. Spending time in this state when trying to heal our skin condition is integral. Our bodies do their most important restoration in the parasympathetic state.

The benefits of breathwork and conscious breathing are lengthy — here are just a handful of the physical body advantages:

- boosts immunity
- reduces cortisol production (stress hormone)
- lowers heart rate and blood pressure
- improves digestion
- reduces inflammation
- promotes good sleep
- balances emotions and hormones
- mental health benefits: helping to reduce pain, anxiety and trauma and enriching creativity



The best promotion of
breath awareness is
this very basic
reminder: where there
is oxygen, there is life.

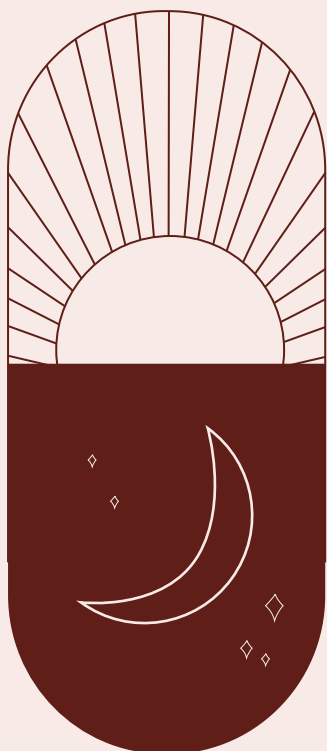
"Trauma often represents the violation of all we hold to be dear and sacred. Such events are often simply too terrible to utter aloud, and hence they often become unspeakable.

But when these traumatic thoughts and memories remain unspeakable or unthinkable for too long, they often impede our brain's natural process of recovery after trauma. They become stuck points that inhibit the mental reintegration that is needed for healing to occur."

– Shaili Jain, M.D., clinical associate professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford University School of Medicine and author of *The Unspeakable Mind*, via Mind Body Green

Focus: Shadow Work + Trauma

If you're experiencing resistance to this week's topics, you're not alone. When you begin to peel back the layers to discover your unique stress triggers, you'll be forced to look at your shadow.



Our bodies hold memory. Powerful and lasting memories are often formed when a strong emotion is attached to them. Sometimes this is jubilant happiness but very often they are linked to something traumatic. Evolving trauma theory suggests that when emotional trauma is experienced, it can get stuck inside your body, cause physical symptoms and prevent future healing.

Complementing this emerging area of study, Traditional Chinese Medicine looks at how different emotions can be connected to different organs or centres of the body. For instance, worry manifests in the spleen, anger in the liver, fear in the kidney, grief with the lungs and joy with the heart. The vagus nerve is the network that runs between each of them, playing a key role in how we experience and process our emotions.

Shadow work is essentially looking at the parts of yourself that you'd rather keep in the dark. Studies are presenting fascinating connections between trauma and epigenetics — specifically the possibility that trauma can create a chemical tag on our DNA that can be passed down in the form of inherited trauma or sensitivities. As it presents in other bodies, it can become the family norm. If it passes through multiple generations and families, it can turn into culture.

One of the greatest things we can do in this lifetime is metabolize our pain and heal our trauma. In the same way that trauma can spread like a contagion, healing and healthy patterns can pass on to our descendants as well. If we spend a lifetime with secrets and memories that we've locked away in a dark room, that room still exists somewhere inside our body and it may be part of the cause for your dis-ease. Healing involves discomfort, but so does refusing to heal. And over time, refusing to heal is always more painful.



JOURNAL

Go back to your diagnosis, if you can remember it. Describe the emotion that is attached to it. Find one word that best describes that emotion and then imagine where that emotion would live in your body: this is your pain point — let's work with it.

Choose a strong memory from your childhood, positive or negative. Describe the emotion that is attached to it. Connect it to something that you still do now in your adult life.

Write a reflection focused on what's been coming up for you in your mind-body work. Are you discovering pain or sensation points in your body? Recurring thoughts or moods that pop up during your 9 minutes? What approaches work best for fitting quiet time into your day? Have you noticed any shifts in your stress levels or state of mind?

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Mind-Body is the hardest pillar of club psora. You've made it to the tail of the snake — a point of rebirth. Before you arrive, a transformation has to occur. Just like the snake shedding its skin, you have to push through the discomfort and resistance to get to the other side and greet your new Self. Honor the struggle and the skin that got you here.

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– Miriam

Be sure to check out our Mind-Body playlist on YouTube!

Next up:



The Self

Don't forget to write in your journal and find 9 minutes of quiet time every day.

We're here for you.

xo

club
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