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Beth's Mind-Body Practice for Healing With Celiac Disease: For All the MARBLES!

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Part One: My Mind-Body Medicine Practice

Beth's Mind-Body Medicine Practice for Healing from Celiac Disease: For all the **MARBLES!**

My Lifelong Commitments – For all the **MARBLES**

1. **Movement:** I accomplish at least four hours of aerobic exercise outside in nature each week.
2. **Affirmations:** I say my four affirmations five times per week as I am doing my morning breathing exercises (See Appendix A).
 - I am light and free of abdominal pain.
 - I have a strong immune system and am never limited by my illness.
 - I am always connected to my inner guidance.
 - My entire being is balanced, vital and healthy.
3. **Relaxation:** I practice my *relaxation exercise five times per week with ease and flow (See Appendix A).
4. **Breathing:** I practice my *breathing exercise five times per week while massaging my abdomen (See Appendix A).
5. **Loving-Kindness:** I practice loving-kindness towards myself and others, while honoring my own needs.
6. **Eliminating gluten:** I am conscious of everything I eat, being careful not to eat gluten.
7. **Spread the Word and the Love:** I spread awareness by speaking with a doctor, nurse, restaurant owner, friend or neighbor about celiac disease, one time per week and I volunteer at the Berkeley Animal Shelter walking dogs one time per week.

*My mind, body, spirit exercise series that I practice five times per week includes:

- A. Breathing/Massage/Relaxation with Affirmations—30 minutes in the morning (See Appendix A).
- B. Connecting to Your Spirit—2 minutes in the afternoon (See Appendix B).

Part Two: Explanation for Choosing My MARBLES Practice

Picture a glass full of marbles. If you move one of the marbles in the glass, the other marbles will shift. They will be affected because they are all supported by one another. This reminds me of the mind, body, spirit connection. If I choose one of the commitments above in my MARBLES practice, such as eliminating gluten, this action will affect my mind, body, *and* spirit. Since I have celiac disease, by eliminating gluten, my body feels better because I am not feeding it a toxic food that I am allergic to, my mind in turn quiets because my gut is happier, and my spirit is able to awaken because it is no longer hiding behind a painful body and sad, stressed out mind. So my mind-body medicine plan is for all the marbles – my mind, body and spirit.

I have celiac disease. Celiac disease an autoimmune lifelong, digestive disorder. Because celiac is lifelong, I have created a practice that is lifelong to promote healing and vitality. The amount of times I practice each MARBLES commitment in one week varies and is stated above.

Upper-Left Quadrant

I have chosen relaxation and breathing exercises (see Appendix A for complete exercises) for my practice because they will benefit my physical, mental-emotional, and spiritual aspects of my being. Balance and wholeness are two major themes in my healing process with celiac disease. So working with all components of my mind, body and spirit, is vital to my healing. I believe that by treating the mind we can influence the body and by treating the body we can influence the mind. The intestine is a “hypersensitive transmitter-receiver of emotions: a hundred million neurons link it to the brain” (Barral, 2007, p. 146). Therefore, breathing into the belly helps my emotional and mental parts of my being. After all, the belly digests food as well as emotions. Belly breathing also helps reduce stress and pain (Cavaliere & Post, 2003).

While practicing my breathing, I am incorporating self-massage into my practice. I am going to follow a breathing/massage technique to soothe my belly which is in distress from celiac disease. I have chosen to do self-massage and breathing together in order to ease my digestion, balance my emotions, improve my mood, and tap into my intuitive center. Getting in touch with this body-based intuition will guide me on my healing.

I will then move into the relaxation part (See Appendix A) of my practice. Relaxation is a great way to cope with the stress I deal with every day from worrying about my strict gluten-free diet. This is important for my practice because the way I mentally and emotionally handle chronic stress can lead to physical harm. For instance, chronic stress can lead to the production of cytokines producing an inflammatory response. The brain and intestine are mediated by many of the same hormones and the nervous system so prolonged stress can negatively affect the digestive system (W. Buffett, personal communication, November 4, 2009). Reducing stress by relaxation is good medicine for everyone, but especially in the case of digestive disorders since we feel our emotions literally in our guts.

Once I feel fully relaxed, I will practice my affirmations, integrating them into my being. My four affirmations that will further my healing process with celiac disease are: I am light and free of abdominal pain; I have a strong immune system and am never limited by my illness; I am always connected to my inner guidance; and my entire being is balanced, vital and healthy. I have chosen these affirmations because they influence my mind, body and spirit, and lead me further on my path toward healing with celiac disease.

In the middle of my day, I tend to have a drop in energy. I have included a practice (see Appendix B for complete exercise) for enhancing my energy and connecting to my spirit because I think energy work is very healing. "Connecting to your spirit" is an uplifting practice that can

put me in touch with the spiritual dimension of my life (Eden, 1998).

Lower-Left Quadrant

In addition to my breathing/relaxation series discussed above, practicing loving-kindness with others is another practice that feeds my spirit. Last week I received an email from a patient with Lyme disease who I have been helping, simply by listening and sharing my own story with her. She wrote, "Thanks Beth for understanding me. Now you know that awful experience you had to go through is finally helping someone else get through hard times - me!" (M. Motwani, personal communication, August 10, 2009). I have suffered with Lyme disease in the past. Ever since, I have been able to relate to others on a whole new level. I have provided patients with someone to talk to who understands what they are going through. I have been able to motivate them and show them that they can heal. I would like to continue to develop my loving-kindness that I have shared with Lyme patients with celiac patients as well. "Interacting with others...gives us the opportunity to explore our disturbing emotions and practice loving-kindness, generosity, patience and compassion" (Dacher, 2006, p. 126). It is healing for me to explore not only my emotions but also support others with their own.

I am also committing to practicing loving-kindness with my family and honoring my needs to strengthen my relationships. I have had a history of not standing up for myself and putting others needs ahead of my own. But speaking my truth will not only better myself, it will also strengthen my relationships with family. Recently, my mother discovered she too is allergic to gluten. As a result, my celiac has become more of a shared experience. I have someone to relate to and talk to about it since she is going through it now as well. I love sharing what I know about celiac and gluten-free foods so that I can help her heal. But since it is more recent for her, she is new to the gluten-free diet and way of life and has become a bit overbearing with

questions. I have realized that I need to set boundaries in order to continue on my own healing process. It is important for me to stand up for myself and tell my mother or anyone else in my family or group of friends when I cannot meet their needs or answer their questions. This will help my relationships because I tend to get irritable and snappy when I get exhausted from answering so many questions. But by setting my boundaries and speaking my truth, I can prevent this irritability from even occurring. I can honor my needs and practice loving-kindness towards all of my friends and family.

Upper-Right Quadrant

Celiac disease is a lifelong digestive disorder therefore I plan to eliminate gluten for life. When people with celiac eat foods that contain gluten, it creates an immune-mediated toxic reaction that causes damage to the small intestine and does not allow food to be properly absorbed. Complete removal of gluten from my diet should result in symptomatic, serologic, and histological remission. By eliminating gluten from my diet, my small intestine will start to heal and my overall health will improve (Lipski, 2005).

I have also committed to hiking outside at least four times per week since exercise can strengthen my immune system, increase my muscular strength and bone mass (Leonard & Murphy, 2005). To work properly, our twenty-six feet of intestines need activity. Hiking can promote stimulation and consequentially elimination. Osteoporosis is an unfortunate and very common consequence of celiac disease and resultant malabsorption of nutrients. Weight bearing exercise such as walking, hiking, and running can aid in remodeling of bone (Rakel, 2007).

Movement can also improve my mood. I get frustrated with the challenges of living everyday gluten free. Exercise has been shown to release hormones known as endorphins which can boost mood. I have also committed to doing my exercise outside in nature. I know, firsthand

how healing nature is for me so moving and being in nature are very healing additions to my practice.

Lower-Right Quadrant

Spreading the word: I can choose healthy gluten-free foods, as I discussed in the upper-right quadrant, but participation of society as a whole needs to increase as well. Societal changes need to be instituted to make it easier for celiac patients to take personal responsibility for their own health. Celiac disease is one of the most common and most underdiagnosed autoimmune conditions in the United States today. It affects 1 out of every 133 Americans. Three million Americans suffer with celiac and only 5% of them have been diagnosed (Green & Jones, 2006). Therefore, I have added spreading awareness about celiac disease to my practice. For me, I get a lot of healing out of helping others. Raising awareness, can provide a lot of sick people with relief if they are properly diagnosed and can eliminate gluten from their diets.

Awareness in the medical community is one of the most important factors to address first. With more awareness, there can be more diagnoses. The more doctors who are aware of celiac disease, the more patients who suffer from it will finally get relief in being properly diagnosed. Over the years, celiac disease has received little attention especially from the pharmaceutical industry because the therapy is dietary. The United States is so locked into using pharmaceuticals to treat everything that they pay less attention to conditions that cannot be treated with drugs.

In 2004, a National Institute of Health Consensus Conference on celiac disease called for better education of health professionals. There is an obvious need to educate the medical community about the prevalence of celiac disease and the health consequences of it. Recent studies from Columbia University have indicated that it takes an average of nine years from the

onset of symptoms to diagnosis someone with celiac disease in the United States (Green & Jones, 2006).

The world does not make it an easy place to live in for celiac patients. So, in my practice, I would also like to include making schools, restaurants, and hospitals more aware. When I came out of my first surgery a couple years ago, the nurse at the hospital I was at told me I had to eat something before I could be discharged. She put crackers in front of me. I was already wearing a food allergy bracelet but clearly that was not enough. I told her I cannot eat gluten. She looked puzzled and left the room. I fell asleep again and when I woke up, there was oatmeal in front of me. I told the nurse that I couldn't eat that either because it could be contaminated with gluten. She got frustrated and left again. My mother went out and got me some gluten free crackers to eat and I was finally discharged from the hospital. These experiences should not have to be so frustrating for people. It's enough that I had just had abdominal surgery and was in a lot of pain. But then to worry about being poisoned on top of it by a nurse, who is supposed to have my best interest in mind, was horrifying. I would like to raise awareness in hospitals, because it will help other celiac patients and it will help me knowing that I could take something from this negative experience and use it to help others.

Practitioners can do their best to educate patients on which foods are "safe" to eat but restaurants need to provide those options too. If chefs in restaurants are more aware of what gluten is, then it will make a celiac patient's life a lot easier when they eat out. It is my responsibility as a celiac patient to ask the waiter questions or inform the waiter that I cannot eat gluten. This comes along with me honoring my needs and speaking my truth, as I spoke about in the lower-left quadrant. However, the waiter and the chef must do their part by understanding how to cook a gluten-free meal. What an incredible shift forward it would be if a waiter at any

restaurant could tell someone with celiac disease which items they could order safely without worries of contamination. Our society could aspire to be even more aware as to offer gluten-free options printed clearly on the menu of restaurants as if that were the norm. What a positive change that would be! I am inspired just thinking about these improvements which proves how healing it is for me to be able to share my knowledge with others and help people. So in my practice, I am committing to raising awareness in hospitals, restaurants and schools.

Spreading the love. I am committing to not only spreading awareness about celiac, but also to spreading my love to animals, in particular dogs. Dogs are incredibly healing for me. They make me smile and laugh. When I used to live in Wyoming, I volunteered at an animal shelter and had never felt happier. I am committing to volunteering again here in the Bay Area so that I can help dogs in need which in turn helps me heal. I will volunteer my time once per week at the Animal Shelter in Berkeley walking dogs. I am hoping to “spread the love” by improving the life of the dogs in the shelter and increasing their chances of adoption. I have chosen to volunteer because not only will I help dogs, but I will help myself too. Dogs are a wonderful outlet for me. They provide unconditional love and playfulness. When I walk my sister's dog, it is a time for me to give my love and attention to someone else. I don't always need to be so focused on my celiac disease. It is enough work to watch everything I eat and manage my pain around my healing gut. So walking dogs gives me a freedom from all of this, a way to share my love, be outside in nature, and help an adoring innocent animal in need.

My Final Thoughts

A life-long, gluten-free diet is the only treatment for celiac disease. But I believe there is so much more I can do to help myself in the healing process. Eating gluten for so many years not only made me physically sick, but also emotionally and mentally sick. Gluten poisoned not only

my gut, but also my brain. The brain and the gut are so closely connected that it was inevitable that my leaky gut would end up as leaky brain as well. My toxins that I was accumulating circulated my blood and infected many of my organs and brain making me feel sick all over. So this practice that I have created will help me cleanse not only my gut, but also my brain and my whole being. And now, because I have experienced the transition to a gluten-free life, I can assist others in doing the same. My personal work is a sacred responsibility, a way that I can help others and create a better world. My mind-body medicine practice is to provide lifelong healing for my whole Self (mind, body and spirit) as well as for others. It is for all the **MARBLES!**

Appendix A: Morning Breathing/Massage/Relaxation Series

Comprised of exercises created by (Cavaliere & Post, 2003, p. 165), (Leonard & Murphy, 2005), and me.

Lie face up on a comfortable but firm surface, with your knees up, feet flat on the floor. You can let your knees fall into one another or put large pillows underneath them. Relax the muscles in your feet, legs, pelvis, back, and abdomen. Now complete the following steps:

1. Breathe deeply into your belly without forcing or rushing either the inhale or exhale. As you continue to breathe in calm waves, in and out, sense your muscles and bones giving in to gravity. Feeling the weight of your body, be aware of the loose, open, comfortable state of the bones and joints in your body. Expand the inhale in the lowest part of your belly, down to the pelvic floor, and as you gently take in more oxygen, let your rib cage and entire chest fill. On the exhale, let your chest and rib cage recede first, then let your belly empty.
2. While breathing, use the fingers on both hands to massage your belly in a patient, gentle, nurturing manner. Massage from the left side to the right side, tracing the approximate track of the colon. Then gently massage at the beginning of the colon—the ileocecal valve on the lower right—and near the end of the colon—the sigmoid on the lower left.
3. Massage under your left rib cage while encouraging the tissue toward the navel. Massage across to the right rib cage and repeat. Breathe deeply and laterally in the area you are massaging.
4. Massage tight and sensitive places on the chest and rib cage. Then gently massage your lower abdomen, from your navel down to your pelvic bone.
5. Now place your hands back by your sides and focus again on breathing deep and slowly in and out. Think of breathing in and smelling a beautiful blooming rose and then exhaling smoothly blowing out a candle. When you exhale, blow out any pain, bad thoughts or judgment.

Move into the **Relaxation** part:

6. Completely relax. Do a body scan. If you feel any part of your body tense up, relax that part and breath fully into it.
7. If your mind wanders, bring the focus back to your breath.
8. Now as you take the next breath, imagine you are breathing in healing gold light. Imagine the gold light flowing through and infusing every cell in your body. Continue to stay relaxed.
9. Now begin to practice your affirmations one at a time, pausing in between each one until you feel you have integrated it into your being, and then move on to the next one.

10. When you are finished saying aloud or silently your affirmations, continue to focus on your breath and sit with how you are feeling from the breathing, relaxation, massage and affirmations you have just given to your entire being.
11. Thank your mind, body and spirit for participating today and take one more deep breath and smile!

Appendix B: Mid-day Exercise: Connecting to Your Spirit

(Eden, 1998, p. 21).

1. Stand tall. Take a moment to ground yourself by spreading your fingers on your thighs, breathing deeply, feeling your feet on the ground, and being conscious of your connection to the Earth as the energy pours out of your fingers, down your thighs, and into the ground.
2. Take a deep breath in, open your arms wide, and bring them into a prayer position in front of your chest.
3. With another deep breath, open your arms wide, lifting them up. Reach toward the sky. Release your breath. Bask in the knowledge that you are not alone in the universe and that you are worthy of this blessing from the heavens. You may feel a tingle, a buzz, or heat in your hands. You have been inviting healing energies from the cosmos.
4. Scoop this energy into your arms and bring your hands into the middle of your chest. There is a vortex here called Heaven Rushing In, and "heaven" rushes into your heart with healing, with a glimpse of your true nature, and with a peek into who you are in the larger plan. Even when you do not receive guidance or inspiration, know that they will unfold in their perfect time.
5. If there is a specific area in your body that needs healing, place your charged hands over that area and let the energies stream in.

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