advocacy and support resources for people in prison

If you need help while you are locked up, or when you get out, contact:

In Austin, TX:
AIDS Services of Austin
P.O. Box 4874
Austin, TX 78765
Phone: (512) 458-2437
Web: www.asaustin.org

In Boston, MA:
SPAN Inc.
105 Chauncy Street, 6th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
Phone: (617) 423-0750
Web: www.spaninc.org

In Chicago, IL:
Men and Women in Prison Ministries
10 W. 35th Street # 9C5-2
Chicago, IL 60616
Phone: (312) 328-9610
Web: www.mwipm.com

In Los Angeles, CA:
Center for Health Justice
900 Avila Street #301
Los Angeles, CA 90012
Phone: (213) 229-0985
Prison Hotline: (213) 229-0979
Web: www.healthjustice.net

In New Orleans, LA:
Women With A Vision
215 N Jeff Davis Pkwy
New Orleans, LA 70119
Phone: (504) 301-0428
Web: www.wwav-no.org

In New York, NY:
New York Harm Reduction Educators
953 Southern Boulevard, Suite 302
Bronx, NY 10459
Phone: (718) 842-6050
Web: www.nyhre.org

In Philadelphia, PA:
Philadelphia FIGHT
1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: (215) 985-4448
Web: www.fight.org

If you need resources in a city not listed here, write to us! We will help you track down answers to your specific questions.

Write to us if you know about a great organization that is not yet listed here as a PHN partner.

PHN is a project of Reaching Out: A Support Group with Action and the Institute for Community Justice at Philadelphia FIGHT.

For subscriptions, resources and all other inquiries write to us at:

Prison Health News
c/o Philadelphia FIGHT
1233 Locust Street, 5th Floor
Philadelphia PA 19107
All subscriptions are free, and are mailed First Class.

who we are...

We are on the outside, but many of us were inside before... and survived it. We are formerly incarcerated people and allies talking about health issues and trying to bring about a positive change for all people who are in prison now or ever have been in the past. This newsletter is about all of us.

We will be talking about health issues. For example, what is good nutrition? Where can you get services and information on the outside? We want to take your health questions seriously and break down complicated health information so that it is understandable.

We’re also here to help you learn how to get better health care within your facility and how to get answers to your health questions. Don’t get frustrated. Be persistent. In prison, it’s often hard to get what you want, but with health information, it doesn’t have to be impossible. Join us in our fight for our right to health care and health information.

Read on...

From,
Angelo, Ben, Carla, Cliff, George, Hannah, James, Laura, Ronda, Suzy, and Teresa

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Stay Connected by Edith Sammons
Books Through Bars Contexts Collection
Beat Stress with Yoga Meditation
by Teresa Sullivan

In this article, we discuss the facts about yoga meditation.

The amazing thing about the practice of yoga is that despite the many myths and misinformation that has been peddled, it is growing in popularity. This tells you that it is actually a good thing with practical benefits.

The first fact is that it is not limited to a particular religion. In fact, it is not a religion, though it was inspired by a religion, which is Buddhism. This means anyone can enjoy yoga meditation. No wonder you will find this form of meditation in all continents across the world.

It is also a fact that yoga meditation helps you stay focused in your mind and body. This is done in a manner that is unlikely to lead to injury or strain on any particular body part. The posture is not limited to a particular manner of bowing. Bowing is a sign of respect and therefore not part of achieving much physical benefit.

Dahn Yoga meditation is a little different from other forms of yoga. It is a version that originated from Korea and may be a little different from Indian and Chinese versions. This Korean version emphasizes the body and mind connection. The brainwave vibration is often used while meditating to connect the body and the mind.

Besides meditation, Dahn Yoga comes with many other practices that benefit the individual. These include DahnMuDo, which is a martial art. The development of good energy through Chakra training is also taught. Healing through this form of meditation aids in...
Free Your Mind

THEN?
“Free Thought”

To freely think and form your own thoughts
Is a blessing in itself.
Many created beings don’t have this function,
Or the ability to recreate and act on it.
This is an expression that
Can’t be controlled or caged.
So to have an independent
Individual thought that is all yours,
Is one of the greatest forms of FREEDOM!

management of diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.
Yoga meditation can be done even if you are just sitting in a chair or on the floor. Or, for those beyond the prison wall, it can be done if you are sitting in your cell. Lowering our stress level is highly important when we are faced with jail time or living with health issues. Besides the fact that we need to keep healthy when doing time beyond the walls, this can become difficult when our minds are not focused and we have to live in a single cell with a person we don’t know.
Yoga meditation helps us refocus our mind and body energy in a positive light.
Yoga meditation can help relax the stressed-out body and give us a clearer insight on life so that we can get through the rest of the day — or to the next moment, if that is what is needed for now.
Before beginning your yoga meditation, try to do some small stretching of the arms, legs and neck. This will help you loosen up the body and muscles before you begin your daily yoga meditation exercise.

The Breath of Life
Here is an easy example of yoga meditation:
First, you need to be sitting in a comfortable
position on the floor or bed — even in a chair will do. Then close your eyes and begin slowly inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Imagine that there is a dot (this dot can be called the tension reliever) on the center of your forehead. Picture it there. As you inhale and exhale, move the dot with your mind throughout your face and body to relax your tense mind and body.
Remember to keep inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. This should take up to twenty minutes. If you are sitting in the yard, you should be able to do this exercise and no one should be able to tell that you are meditating and trying to refocus your mindset.

Next Steps
Consider ordering one of these yoga meditation books:
- Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Zen Meditation in Plain English by John Daishin Buksbazen and Peter Matthiessen
- Going to Pieces without Falling Apart: A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness by Mark Epstein
Also, if you are willing, you can start your own yoga meditation classes or group.
The hunger strikers’ five core demands are:
1. End Group Punishment & Administrative Abuse;
2. Abolish the Debriefing Policy, and Modify Active/Inactive Gang Status Criteria;
3. Comply with the US CSAAP 2006 Recommendations Regarding an End to Long-Term Solitary Confinement;
4. Provide Adequate and Nutritious Food; and
5. Expand and Provide Constructive Programming and Privileges for Indefinite SHU Status Inmates.

They also demand adequate natural sunlight and quality health care.

“...to support these demands, family members and community groups held demonstrations across the US and internationally. More than 7,500 people signed petitions. Phone calls poured in to the governor’s office and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), pressuring them to negotiate with the hunger strikers. The New York Times and other mainstream media sources started paying attention.

On July 20, the Los Angeles Times published an editorial demanding access to interview hunger strikers. In response to a CDCR statement that the media were being shut out “due to security and safety issues,” the paper wrote, “We’d be more inclined to believe that...if California’s prisons didn’t have such an extraordinary history of shoddy medical care and inhumane conditions.”

SEER has put together an Employment Resource Guide. Here are some of the suggestions they offer that can be employed on the inside and may translate to employment on the outside.

PREPARE - Take advantage of whatever jobs, education or vocational training programs are made available by the institution. Maintain connections with outside resources such as SEER. Be knowledgeable of current trends and practices. Make use of a library, computer lab or other resource to help you become computer-literate. Document and record your job skills, volunteer activities and accomplishments, and be able to articulate and discuss them with potential employers.

REMAIN HOPEFUL AND MOTIVATED - Associate with those people and activities that promote good health, self-esteem and self-development. Join positive support groups or begin your own. Know what you are looking for upon release and know your rights. Maintain a good work ethic and attendance. Doing these things keeps you aware and one step ahead.

It is the hope of Prison Health News that each reader understands that maintaining good health, finding gainful employment, and practicing social activism and artistic expression are very important steps toward obtaining personal fulfillment. And, further, that you find this information helpful in your quest. We invite your questions, comments or ideas.
The Society for Employment and Equal Rights (SEER) is a component of the Institute for Community Justice (ICJ) at Philadelphia FIGHT. SEER’s mission states: “We believe that everyone deserves a chance to achieve their goals, and that it is never too late for equal employment opportunities for all.”

SEER started out of two focus groups in October 2010 at the institute to address human rights violations in jail and prison. The conversation shifted, however, to the violations of rights people with a record are facing outside of jail. Employment rights seemed like the area most people were passionate about, leading to this group’s creation.

The majority of SEER members are formerly incarcerated/convicted people. The group prides itself on being strongly driven by those people who have actually experienced the difficulties related to employment discrimination. Their belief is that they can really make change due especially to the inspiration and contribution from the real-life experiences of formerly incarcerated/convicted people.

The central efforts of SEER involve advocacy with legislation, resource gathering/sharing, and building relationships with employers. As a result, SEER has undertaken a diverse range of campaign work, including “Ban the Box” legislation and the Support Center for Prison Advocacy. 

“Ban the Box” is cutting-edge legislation that SEER and other activist groups pushed for, which was recently passed by Philadelphia’s city council. The legislation simply bans the use of the question “Have you ever been convicted of a crime?” from all job applications.

I got involved in SEER by attending a workshop presented at the 9th Annual Prison Health Care & Re-Entry Summit held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center on June 21, 2011. I was moved by the personal testimonies of the presenters (formerly incarcerated and founding members of SEER who had found employment). So, I thought I would take a closer look at their activities by joining forces and offering my help as a volunteer.

I am a formerly incarcerated individual recently released from state prison who has experienced the difficulties of employment-related discrimination due to incarceration and addiction. I have, however, not allowed these circumstances to deter me in my effort toward gainful employment. Thus, my purpose in attending the Re-Entry Summit and joining SEER. Little did I know I would be asked by Prison Health News to actually write an article on this volunteer organization.

I had the opportunity to have a discussion with Kathy Totoki, an ICJ staffer who contributed to the development of SEER, and Rysheen Caldwell, a formerly incarcerated and developing member of SEER. I asked them both what message they felt was the basis for this protest has come about after over 25 years, some of us 30, some up to 40 years, of being subjected to these conditions. Of our 602 appeals, numerous court challenges have gotten nowhere. A lot of us are older now, we have serious medical issues coming on…. And there’s a core group of us who are committed to taking this all the way to the death, if necessary.”

By day 12, medical staff at Pelican Bay said at least 200 hunger strikers in the SHU were “progressing rapidly to the organ damaging consequences of dehydration.” Family members returning from visits reported that their loved ones were extremely pale, shaking, and had lost 20 to 30 pounds. Some fainted or went into diabetic shock in the visiting rooms. Hunger strikers said that medications they had previously received were being denied as punishment. In response, dozens of health care workers from around the world wrote a letter demanding standard of care treatment.

On July 20, hunger strike leaders at Pelican Bay ended the strike temporarily to give the CDCR a chance to begin making changes in response to the five core demands. As a good-faith gesture, the CDCR had agreed to make smaller, immediate changes in SHU policy to provide some educational programs, all-weather caps (beanies), and wall calendars, while it investigated

As hunger striker Todd Ashker said in a statement released by lawyers of the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity Coalition, “The basis for this protest comes just months after Georgia saw the largest prison labor strike in US history. Thousands among all racial groups united to refuse their involuntary, unpaid work assignments for six days in December 2010. They also demanded nutritional food and an end to medical neglect, which can be worse under for-profit health companies. Many strikers were transferred as punishment, and some were beaten severely, at least once to the point of brain damage. But the Georgia strike inspired a national network of supporters and a blossoming of resistance behind the walls. In January, residents of death row in Lucasville, Ohio, went on hunger strike and won some demands. Supporters of these human rights movements in prisons pledge to keep spreading the word and fighting for the demands made by the brave individuals inside who risked all for justice.
How HIV Meds Work, Part II: An Update on HIV Drug Classes
by Hannah Zellman

Because of medical advances, people with HIV can now live healthy lives and a normal life span. For people with HIV to be able to make the best decisions for their treatment, it’s important to understand the basics of how HIV works in the body and how the medications stop HIV from doing its thing. If there is anything in this article you don’t understand, please ask your doctor or write to us.

None of the HIV medications kill or cure the virus. HIV meds will reduce the amount of HIV in your blood and give your immune system the chance to repair and rebuild itself.

HIV medications are separated into classes. Each class of HIV medication works at a different place in HIV’s life cycle. Each part of HIV’s life cycle is another point where drugs can stop the virus from working.

What are the HIV Drug Classes?
- Fusion and Attachment Inhibitors
- Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (Nukes and Non-Nukes)
- Integrate Inhibitors
- Protease Inhibitors (PIs)

Stopping HIV from Doing Its Thing
HIV attacks specific cells in your immune system, known as CD4 or T cells. The virus weakens your immune system over time, turning your CD4 cells into HIV factories. To do this, HIV has to go through a lot of steps:

Stage 1: Free virus — HIV is in the bloodstream, looking for a way into your CD4 cell.

Stage 2: Binding and fusion — This is how HIV enters your CD4 cell. To get inside, HIV attaches to your CD4 cell using one of two co-receptors, which are like landing docks on the outside of the cell. These co-receptors are called CCR5 and CXCR4. Some people have both kinds of co-receptors, and some people only have one kind.

> Selzentry, an entry inhibitor, blocks HIV from attaching to CCR5s. If you are interested in taking Selzentry, ask your doctor about a tropism test, which will tell you which kind of co-receptors you have. Selzentry will work for people who only have CCR5 co-receptors.

After attaching or binding to the CD4 cell, HIV fuses with it. This process is like HIV unlocking your CD4 cell.

> Fuzeon, a fusion inhibitor, stops HIV from being able to fuse to the cell, kind of like changing the locks on the door so that HIV’s key won’t work.

Stage 3: Infection — HIV gets inside the cell.

Stage 4: Reverse Transcription — RNA is HIV’s genetic instructions or “blueprints.” In order to reproduce, HIV needs to make its genetic instructions compatible with a CD4 cell’s genetic instructions. Your CD4 cells have your DNA in them. HIV has to “photocopy” its RNA and make it look like DNA. In order to do this, HIV uses an enzyme, a chemical tool that sets something into action, called reverse transcriptase. Reverse transcriptase reads HIV’s RNA and makes a “photocopy” of it so that it looks like DNA.

> This is where the Nukes and Non Nukes step in! Nukes are little proteins that look like the reverse transcriptase enzyme. They fake HIV out — HIV thinks it’s using a tool to help it replicate, but it’s attached itself to something that doesn’t work. Non-Nukes work similarly to Nukes, but instead of substituting itself for the enzyme, non-nukes attach to the enzyme and make it useless. It’s like wrapping the tool in duct tape so HIV can’t use it.

Stage 5: Integration — HIV hijacks the central command of your CD4 cell, which is called the nucleus. Once inside, HIV edits its DNA into your cell. It’s kind of like HIV takes the blueprint for your CD4 cell and adds on the blueprint for building HIV. In order to do this, HIV uses another enzyme, called integrase. It’s like integrase unlocks the door to central command.

> Isentress, an Integrate Inhibitor, stops the integrase enzyme from letting HIV into the nucleus to leave the HIV blueprints there.

Stage 6: Transcription — HIV left its blueprint behind, and now the nucleus is an HIV factory. The nucleus produces long chains of proteins that will become HIV.

Stage 7: Assembly — The newly formed HIV starts to put all the parts of itself together.

Stage 8: Budding — HIV pushes its way back out of the cell, taking a little bit of the cell wall with it.

Stage 9: Breaking Free — HIV breaks free of the infected cell.

Stage 10: Maturation — HIV completes the remaining steps needed to become a fully functioning virus. Now, that new HIV can go on to infect more CD4 cells.

> Here comes the Protease Inhibitor! In order to fully mature, HIV needs to take the parts of itself that are still long chains of proteins and cut them into little pieces. To do this, HIV makes a protein called protease that acts like scissors. The Protease Inhibitors gum up these scissors so that HIV can’t finish the replication process.

Making the Most of HIV Medicine
Your doctor will prescribe you a combination of drugs that stop HIV at several points along the life cycle. Scientific advances have made it possible for some people with HIV to take just one pill once a day, because there is a combination of multiple medicines in one pill. Remember, you should never treat your HIV with only one medication! Effective therapy includes three or more drugs, sometimes from the same “class” of drug, sometimes all from different classes.

Ask your doctor about your choices for HIV treatment. Think about your goals for treatment and make sure you tell your doctor. Listen to what their goals are too. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Remember that you’re entitled to information about your disease, your treatment and your health. If you want more specific information about HIV, write to us!