

The Mind/Body & Body/Mind Effect

IN THE LAST SECTION WE reviewed how important energy is for life and for Optimal Wellness. You learned why we lose it and how to make it! But what is more important than almost any other factor in health? What is the cause or worsens ninety-five percent of all illnesses? What has been associated with dramatic reductions in disease and increased longevity? In fact what is the one thing that is more important than cholesterol, blood sugar or blood pressure or any other risk factor in determining whether you will live a long and healthy life? It is your attitudes, your social network, community and spiritual beliefs. Oddly, the biggest predictors of longevity are eating breakfast and psychological resiliency, being able to roll with the punches life throws at us.

I was browsing my old library (I hate throwing away books because they are like treasures), and found an old book I read in college called *Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer*, the author a leader in the field of Mind Body Medicine, Kenneth Pelletier, Clinical Professor of Medicine, University of California (UCSF) and University of Arizona Schools of Medicine.

It was published in 1977. I wish I could say that a lot has changed since the book was published. We have filled in the gaps, learn more about the mechanisms through which the body affects the mind and the mind affects the body, but the basic truths remain the same.

There is a dramatic and powerful connection between our mind and body, and of our body on our mind, in fact it really should not be called a connection because it is just one bidirectional system. Hans Selye, MD, the man who coined the word stress and first mapped out its biological effects said, "The modern physician should know as much about emotions and thoughts as about disease symptoms and drugs. This approach would appear to hold more promise of cure than anything medicine has given us to date."

It is true. The most powerful pharmacy in the world is right between your ears!

*Imagine if you could turn on fat burning—and
lose weight—by using only your mind!*

We are seeing an epidemic of stress related disorders. Americans live on caffeine and Prozac. We use substances to manage our moods. In fact the four top selling items in grocery stores are all drugs we use to manage our mood and energy – caffeine, sugar, alcohol and nicotine.

Depression, anxiety, autism, attention deficit disorder, memory disorders and dementia are epidemics in our society. They are making the pharmaceutical industry highly profitable. But how do we really deal with the root of this problem? I will tell you what the causes of brain problems are and how to fix them a little later. But first let's look at the power of the mind to harm or heal.

How to use your head to heal

One of my long-term patients came to see me after his wife died. He'd suddenly developed heart failure. His heart just wouldn't pump. It was flooded with grief molecules, hormones like adrenalin, noradrenalin, cortisol and more. *The New England Journal of Medicine* recently published a study about how grief or emotional trauma can cause heart failure, literally a broken heart.

Rather than give him drugs for "heart failure" as I was taught, I suggested he have healing touch, a form of energy and emotional healing. He did and dramatically recovered. Touch, not medication, healed his heart.

We all learned how to read and write in school but never learned how to use our minds to help us with the most important survival skills—staying happy and healthy—that other cultures differ in their training. Herbert Benson M.D., from Harvard Medical School has demonstrated the amazing power of trained mediators from Tibet to control their physiology to slow their metabolism, change

their heart rates, brain waves, raise or lower their body temperature.

He even documented on film an ancient practice called tumo, the generating of internal heat, performed by initiated Tibetan monks. They are wrapped in icy cold sheets and must dry them from their internal heat. It is speculated that they do this by actively burning fat – something called brown fat. They can sit naked on a snowy mountaintop all night and not freeze, keeping themselves warm from their internal heat.

That's something most of us don't have any consciousness of, or control over. Imagine if you could turn on fat burning and lose weight through your mind! That is ultimately the power of our mind and beliefs. Unfortunately we are not trained to address the stressful psychic loads that are the burden of the 21st century. And they are killing us.

Just consider these facts:

- 95% of all illness is caused or worsened by stress
- Low socioeconomic status is associated with poorer health outcomes and risk of death from all causes. This not related to poorer health habits, but to feelings of powerlessness and loss of control
- Internalized racism and stress are associated with high amounts of belly fat
- Stress hormones damage the hippocampus – the memory center in the brain causing memory loss and dementia
- In a study of people who volunteered to have cold viruses injected into their noses, only people with a high level of perceived stress got colds
- Women with metastatic breast cancer survived twice as long if they were part of a support group
- Belonging to a group – a religious group, a bowling club, a quilting group – reduces risk of death from all causes and increases longevity despite health habits.
- In a study of doctors, those who scored high on hostility questionnaires

had a higher risk of heart attacks than those who smoked, were overweight, had high blood pressure or didn't exercise!

The good news is that we can change our beliefs and attitudes and their effects on your mind and your body. You may need to learn a few new skills, but they are essential survival skills that we never learned in school or from our families. We cannot thrive without them!

Even better news is that it is not only about our beliefs and attitudes. Our mind and brain function is also influenced by what happens in our bodies. By addressing all the keys to Optimal Wellness and Functional Medicine "mental" problems can often be cured without changing your beliefs.

The effects of beliefs and attitudes are so important, but the effects of problems in our core body systems on our mental state and brain function– such as our hormones, immune system, gut, detox system, energy system – and our nutritional status and other environmental inputs – are just as important and mostly ignored by medicine.

For example, a man I saw yesterday was completely stressed out, anxiety, had palpitations, and drank four martinis a night just to calm down. He also had severe muscle cramps and eye twitches.

These are obvious signs of magnesium deficiency. Stress, alcohol, caffeine and sugar all deplete magnesium. He was in a vicious cycle.

What he needed wasn't Valium or Prozac but to address why he was magnesium deficient (toxins, yeast, stress, alcohol, caffeine), fix that through helping him detoxify, treating his yeast, cutting out alcohol and caffeine, and give him enough of the relaxation mineral, magnesium, to calm his nervous system.

That, in combination with tools for calming the mind and the body, can help him

reset his nervous system – using both the body-mind effect and the mind-body effect.

Here is what we know about how to influence the mind body and the body mind system:

- Find the biological causes of problems with the mind by working on all the keys to Functional Medicine I have outlined in the last 7 lessons. It could be mercury toxicity or magnesium or B12 deficiency or a toxic gut chemical or gluten allergy that is changing your brain. So by changing your body you can change your mind!
- Learn how to ACTIVELY relax. To engage the powerful forces of the mind on the body you must DO something, you can't just sit there watching television or drink a beer.
- Try learning new skills such as meditation, deep breathing, yoga, biofeedback, progressive muscle relaxation, take a hot bath, make love, get a massage, watch a sunset, walk in the woods or on the beach.
- Exercise is a powerful way to burn off stress chemicals and heal the mind – well studied and well proven – just do it! It has been proven better than or equal to Prozac for treating depression.
- Clean up your diet from mind robbing molecules like caffeine, alcohol, refined sugars, and eat regularly to avoid the short-term stress of starvation on your body.
- Take a multivitamin and nutrients to help balance the stress response such as vitamin C, the B complex vitamins including B6 and B5 or pantothenic acid, zinc, and most importantly magnesium, the relaxation mineral.
- Use adaptogenic herbs (herbs that help you adapt and be balanced in response to stress) such as ginseng, Rhodiola rosea, Siberian ginseng, Cordyceps, and Ashwaganda
- Take a hot bath or a sauna to help your body deeply relax and turn on the relaxation response.
- Examine your beliefs, attitudes and responses to common situations and

- consider reframing your point of view to reduce stress
- Consciously build your network of friends, family and community. They are your most powerful allies in achieving long-term health.

Now we have come to the end of my introductory lessons about the revolutionary changes happening in medicine today.

I have introduced you to a set of new ideas and concepts that have the power to transform your health personally and to transform health care. It is no small job personally or for our society, but it is essential to stem the impending tsunami of ill health and economic burden facing us, our children and our children's children. The solution is functional Medicine, a fundamental change in our world view about health – a view that helps us get to the core of illness, to learn self-care, to take control and empower ourselves for transformation our own health, and to transform our sick care system to a health care system.

Each of us can contribute and makes small changes that will have a big difference and we can move as individuals and as a community toward Optimal Wellness.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” — anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901-1978)