



# Health Matters

Great Smokies Medical Center of Asheville

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## Mind/Body Medicine: Immunity, Mood, Stress, and Health

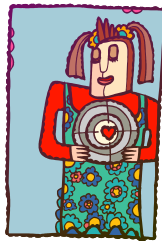
### Changing Paradigms

Eastern medicine traditions have long viewed the mind and body as interconnected and inseparable. Western medicine, on the other hand, has focused almost exclusively on the body, a fact likely related to the development of drugs and scientific technological advances in the 1900s. Additionally, the specialization of medical practice has resulted in the body's being viewed as a collection of parts rather than as part of a larger whole.

At various times in history, discussing the role of the mind in health has been seen as primitive or superstitious.

### What's Old Becomes New Again

The mind is once again being rightfully recognized for its role as a determinant of health. This re-acknowledgment of the potential of mind/body connections has resulted in a focus on interventions to help modulate immunity, promote relaxation, lower blood pressure, cope with illness, decrease stress and pain, and enhance mood. Medical schools offer education in mind/body interventions and many prestigious medical facilities are offering mind/body interventions to enhance outcomes of mainstream medical treatments. An incomplete list of mind/body modalities includes: yoga, massage, breath work, bodywork, meditation, prayer, relaxation, polarity therapy, laughter, visualization, cognitive therapy, tai chi, support groups, qigong, neuro-linguistic programming, hypnotherapy, exercise, flower essences, guided imagery, therapeutic touch, family constellations, art therapy, psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), sound therapy, spiritual healing, homeopathy, biofeedback, acupuncture, mindfulness, auto-regulation, and a variety of cultural healing practices.



### Body

The *body* is the anatomical and physiological structure of an organism. The body has weight, occupies space, and is understood primarily through physical, biological sciences.

### Mind

Often thought of as located in the brain (or even considered to *be* the brain), the *mind* is a vast, innate, invisible, adaptive intelligence present in all cells, including those of the brain. The mind has no weight or mass and is understood through observations, behaviors, and physical sciences, notably quantum physics.

### Mind/Body

Together, the body and mind develop sophisticated and habitual chemical/energetic responses to a vast number of cues. Cell receptors, neurotransmitters, hormones, and the immune system each play roles in mind/body communication that blur the edges of body and mind, affirming their connectedness.

### Cortical Brain/Limbic Brain

The human brain has distinct regions, including the *neocortical* brain (the highly evolved human version of lower mammals' cortical brain) and the *limbic* brain. The neocortical brain is wired for rational, analytical, intellectual thought necessary for conceptualization and planning. The neocortical brain gets the credit (or blame) for many of the advances of civilization. Because the mind/body can literally respond as if thoughts were reality, excessive or repetitive internal mental "chatter" can be stressful. Many adults (and an increasing number of children) in the United States live in an excessively cortical mode.

Unique to mammals, the limbic brain facilitates love, nurturing, relationships,

awareness, and emotions. With input from the cortex, the limbic brain links emotions to endocrine and immune function, in essence programming emotions with powerful pro-health or pro-stress powers. Infants live in a predominantly limbic mode, as do adults when engaged in their bliss, e.g., dancing, appreciating nature's beauty, playing or listening to music, or participating in athletics. Many mind/body interventions are thought to be effective through their enhancement of a limbic state.

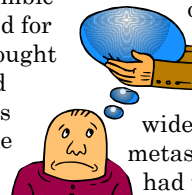
### Personality and Health

The power of the mind/body connection in determining health and personality is no more evident than in people with Multiple Personality Disorder. One personality may be diabetic, while others in the same person are not; one left-handed and the others right-handed; one depressed and the others cheerful; and one severely allergic to a food that the others can eat without problems.

### Belief and Symptoms

The possibility of a belief translating into physical symptoms is simultaneously fascinating and worthy of respect. The book-title-turned-cultural-wisdom, "*You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought*," cleverly exemplifies the power of negativity. Consider, for example, a man who felt devastated upon hearing from his doctor that he had widespread cancer which had metastasized to his bones. Though he had thought of himself as fairly healthy earlier that day, within hours he developed debilitating, severe bone pain. When he found out from his doctor the following morning that the diagnosis was made in error, his pain gradually left.

Apparently, a belief is not only possessed by the mind. It can also possess the mind.



# Mind/Body Medicine, cont.

## Emotions and Organs

Correlations between emotions and body organs prove to be interesting and useful. First elucidated by Chinese medicine and modified through time by Western influence, they include anger/liver, fear/kidney, loneliness and indecision/small intestine, grief/lungs, worry and suspicion/stomach, isolation/endocrine system, and stubbornness or being stuck/large intestine. Such correlations can bring insight to specific emotional and physical imbalances that may not otherwise be understood. Hostility and anxiety are associated with heart and immune system problems. In contrast, open emotional expression enhances cardiac and immune function.

## Mindfulness

Every emotion, positive or negative, is translated to the physical body, thereby increasing or lowering stress levels. The practice of Mindfulness, the life's work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, creates a compassionate and non-adversarial relationship with symptoms by merely acknowledging negative sensations, feelings, and thoughts, enabling them to come and go unaccompanied by stressful emotions.

## Support Groups

David Spiegel, M.D., demonstrated the mind/body's healing potential at Stanford University School of Medicine in 1989. Half of 86 women with late-stage breast cancer received standard medical care while the other half received the same standard medical care plus weekly support sessions in which the women could share their grief and their triumphs. Women who participated in the social support group lived twice as long as the women who did not.

A similar study of breast cancer patients in 1999 showed that helplessness and hopelessness are linked to lowered chances of survival.

## Prayer

Larry Dossey, M.D., is prominent among researchers inquiring into the effects of intercessory prayer. Dossey and Duke University cardiologist Mitchell Krucoff oversaw a study at Duke in which heart patients about to receive invasive cardiac procedures consented to be anonymous, random recipients of remote prayer by members of various religions from India, Nepal, Israel, and the United States. The recipients of prayer experienced 50 to 100 percent fewer complications than those in

the control group who weren't recipients of prayer. Dossey found that faith or belief is not required to benefit from empathic prayer, that people don't need to know they are recipients of prayer to benefit, and that there is no right way to pray. Dossey describes the energy evoked during prayer as *love*.

## Meditation



A 16-week trial of transcendental meditation (TM) in patients with coronary heart disease was conducted at Cedars-Sinai

Medical Center in Los Angeles. Fifty-two participants were instructed in TM and 51 control patients received health education. At the beginning and end of the trial, the patients (average age 67.3 years) gave fasting blood samples, had medical history reviews, and underwent tests of blood vessel function and heart rate variability to objectively measure autonomic nervous system function as a measurement of heart health. At the end of the study, patients in the TM group had significantly lower blood pressure, improved fasting blood glucose and insulin levels, and improved autonomic nervous system function. These benefits were accomplished without changes in body weight, medication, or psychosocial variables.

## Laughter as Medicine

Norman Cousins designed and successfully implemented his own recovery from a debilitating rheumatic illness and, later, a heart attack by the use of laughter. Scientists have observed that laughter boosts immune function by increasing natural killer cells and T cells, promotes sleep, increases pain tolerance, improves circulation, and helps people feel better. Laughter results in increased levels of endorphins, a "feel good" brain hormone, and also lowers the stress hormone cortisol.



## Family Constellations

While the inheritance of health risks from one's ancestors is fairly well known, the inheritance of family fates from one's ancestors is less so. Founded by Bert Hellinger, family constellations bring awareness to what is blocking solutions to life's problems. Hellinger has repeatedly observed how unresolved suffering is passed from generation to generation, without conscious awareness,

from events such as unexpected deaths, forgotten family members, and injustices suffered or perpetrated by members of the family. He also observed that bringing awareness to these deep-seated family entanglements and honoring one's ancestors and their fates in healthier, more appropriate ways can bring resolutions to "stuck" emotional issues and illnesses.

## Pros/Cons

Therapies that enhance mind/body functions are low risk, often affordable, and relevant to many life situations. Some modalities can be learned by self-study at home, while others require the services of an expert.

In the United States, mind/body modalities are often initiated by patients and used adjunctively to mainstream medical care, rather than as primary treatment.

Mind/body interventions require active participation that has been shown to improve treatment outcomes compared to passive acceptance of a diagnosis.

Learning to change habits that haven't necessarily been supportive of health can take time and persistence.

Randomized, double-blinded, placebo-controlled studies, Western medicine's gold standard of scientific investigation, may fall short of being able to definitively assess the effectiveness of mind/body interventions.

Excessive practice of mind/body interventions defies common sense and risks over-stimulating the mental sphere.

## Expectations

The premise that the body innately heals is apparent throughout life in the routine healing of fractures, lacerations, and wounds. Though miraculous cures of illness from mind/body interventions do occur, such *documented* cases are statistically rare. Achieving focus, relaxation, an improved sense of wellness, and lowered stress levels can be the reward for consistent, ongoing implementation of the mind/body practices to which an individual is drawn. Although GSMC practitioners do not specialize in mind/body medicine per se, mind/body interventions are a natural consideration in a holistic practice.

**All content in this newsletter is intended to be informational and is not to be taken as medical advice or to replace medical care.**