

Mind Over Medicine: Can you think yourself well?

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Can you think yourself well?

- ▶ What if you had the ability to heal your body by **changing your thoughts**
- ▶ Is it possible?
- ▶ Many doctors and researchers are beginning to discover that the purely **physical** realm of illness is only **part of the equation**
- ▶ It's a big part, to be sure, but not the whole tomato!

Can you think yourself well?

- ▶ We all know people who did everything “right”
- ▶ They ate healthy food, exercised, didn’t smoke, got 8 hours of sleep
- ▶ They still got sick and came down with life-threatening illnesses
- ▶ Then there are other people who ate all the wrong food, guzzled beer, sat in front of the TV all day and smoked a pack of cigarettes a day and never got sick!
- ▶ Is it all just genetics?

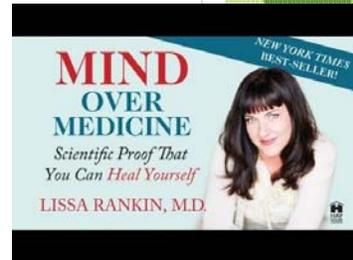
Can you think yourself well?

- ▶ Contrary to what we previously believed, our genes are not fixed.
- ▶ The study of epigenetics proves that our genes are actually fluid, flexible, and highly influenced by our environment.
- ▶ Just because you have a genetic predisposition for x, y, or z, doesn’t mean those genes will actually express themselves.
- ▶ External lifestyle triggers like nutrition, environment, exercise, positive or negative thoughts, and emotions literally affect your DNA

Can you think yourself well?

- ▶ Whether you become sick or stay healthy, as well as whether you remain ill or manage to heal yourself, might have more to do with your mind than you think!

- ▶ The lifestyle choices you make can optimize your body's relaxation response, counteract the stress response and result in physiological changes, leading to better health.
- ▶ The body is a mirror of how we live our lives.
- ▶ So if you're not feeling well, despite doing all the "right" things, take a deep breath and ask yourself: *What do I think might lie at the root of my illness? What does my body need in order to heal?*
- ▶ If you're honest with yourself, the answers could save your health—and your life.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWQfe_fNbs

Mind Over Medicine

- ▶ Another example in the book: “An article in the New England Journal of Medicine featured Dr. Bruce Moseley, an orthopedic surgeon renowned for the surgeries he performed on people with debilitating knee pain.
- ▶ To prove how effective his knee surgery was, he designed a brilliantly controlled study.
- ▶ The patients in one group of the study got Dr. Moseley’s famous surgery. The other group of patients underwent an elaborately crafted sham surgery, during which the patient was sedated, three incisions were made in the same location as in the real surgery, and the patient was shown a prerecorded tape of someone else’s surgery on the video monitor.
- ▶ Dr. Moseley even splashed water around to mimic the sound of the lavage procedure. Then he sewed the knee back up.

Mind Over Medicine

- ▶ As expected, 1/3 of the patients getting the real surgery experienced resolution of their knee pain. But what really shocked the researchers was that those getting the sham surgery **had the same result!**
- ▶ In fact, at one point in the study, those getting the sham surgery were actually having **less knee pain than those getting the real surgery,** probably because they hadn’t undergone the trauma of the surgery.
- ▶ What did Dr. Moseley’s patients think about the study results? As one World War II veteran who benefited from Dr. Moseley’s placebo knee surgery said, ‘The surgery was two years ago and the knee has never bothered me since. It’s just like my other knee now.’

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- ▶ Dr. Moseley's study, a randomized, double-blinded, placebo controlled clinical trial—published in one of the most highly respected medical journals in the world—showed that a significant percentage of patients experienced resolution of their knee pain solely because they believed they got surgery

History

- ▶ The connection between the emotions and disease has been known for thousands of years in cultures all around the world. In the Bible, Proverbs 17:22-23 says: "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."
- ▶ Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) acknowledges the "7 Emotions" that are thought to have a direct correspondence to disease states.
- ▶ And in Yogic traditions, the term *samskara* means the "subtle impressions of our past actions" and it is thought that these impressions can form into patterns that can affect health.

Psychosomatic

- ▶ The term *psychosomatic* is normally associated with “imaginary illnesses.”
- ▶ In fact, the term simply relates to the physiological connections between mind and body.
- ▶ In modern scientific terms, this connection happens through tiny molecular structures called *neuropeptides*

- ▶ Peptides, a form of ligand, are tiny bits of protein that are produced throughout the body.
- ▶ They are found in hormones such as endorphins, serotonin, and insulin, for example, and are key elements for life.
- ▶ *Neuropeptides* pave the way between the brain (i.e. our emotions) and the body.
- ▶ When a thought triggers an emotion, neuropeptides transmit those feelings through neuropathways and extracellular fluid.
- ▶ Eventually these peptides will connect with cellular receptors throughout the body where they will have an impact on the functioning of body systems at all levels.
- ▶ The same chemicals that are run our body and our brain are the same chemicals that are involved in **emotion**.

Placebo

- ▶ Clinical trials show that up to 80% of patients given a placebo heal themselves with the power of the mind alone.
- ▶ How does this happen?
- ▶ There is documented evidence that beliefs, thoughts, and feelings can cure the body.

Placebo effect

- ▶ Fake treatments, such as sugar pills, saline injections, and sham surgeries, are routinely used in modern clinical trials to determine whether a particular drug, surgery, or treatment is truly effective.
- ▶ First started appearing in the late 18th century: from Latin, literally 'I shall please,' from *placere* 'to please.'

Placebo

- ▶ It wasn't until late in the 19th century that the idea of using placebos in clinical research began to emerge.
- ▶ Then, in 1955, the Journal of the American Medical Association published a seminal article by Dr. Henry Beecher called "The Powerful Placebo," which made the case that if you dosed people up with drugs, many got better.
- ▶ But if you gave them plain salt water or some other inert ingredient, about a third of them were also cured, not only in their minds, but in real, physiological ways that could be demonstrated in the body.

Placebo

- ▶ We know that the placebo effect works.
- ▶ But what are the physiological mechanisms that explain how thoughts, feelings, and beliefs may translate into physiological change?
- ▶ No one knows for sure, but several theories have been postulated.
- ▶ Thinking positively about getting well may stimulate natural endorphins, which help ameliorate symptoms, relieve pain, and lift your mood.
- ▶ The reverse is also true: when patients who responded positively to placebo were given the opioid blocker naloxone, which blocks natural endorphins, the placebo suddenly stopped being effective.

Placebo

- ▶ The placebo effect is proof positive that the body is brilliantly equipped with natural self-repair mechanisms that can kill cancer cells, fight infectious agents, and retard aging

Placebo

- ▶ If a person believes they will get better and at the same time they are being nurtured by caring clinical researchers, that may also relieve physiological stress
- ▶ Stress is known to predispose the body to illness, and relieving stress can initiate physiological relaxation, which is necessary for the body's self-repair mechanisms to operate properly.

- ▶ As first described by Harvard professor Dr. Walter Cannon, the body is equipped with what Cannon named the stress response, also known as the fight or-flight response, a survival mechanism that gets flipped on when your brain perceives a threat.
- ▶ When this hormonal cascade is triggered by a thought or emotion in the mind, such as fear, the hypothalamic pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis activates, thereby stimulating the sympathetic nervous system to race into overdrive, pumping up the body's cortisol and adrenaline levels.
- ▶ Over time, filling the body with these stress hormones can manifest as physical symptoms, predisposing the body to disease over time.

- ▶ Just as the stress response exists as a survival mechanism designed to help us stay alive in emergency situations, the body also has a counterbalancing relaxation response.
- ▶ When the relaxation response is elicited, stress hormones drop, health-inducing relaxation hormones that counter the stress hormones are released, the parasympathetic nervous system takes over, and the body returns to homeostasis.
- ▶ Only in this rested, relaxed state can the body repair itself.
- ▶ Anything that reduces stress and elicits a relaxation response not only alleviates the symptoms the stress response can cause, but frees the body to do what it does naturally—heal itself.

- ▶ Positive belief and nurturing care may also alter the immune system.
- ▶ People treated with placebos may experience boosts in immune function which result from flipping off the stress response and initiating the relaxation response.
- ▶ Placebos may also suppress the immune system.
- ▶ In one study, rats were given the immunosuppressive drug cyclophosphamide (mixed with saccharin water).
- ▶ Then the drug itself was removed and the rats were fed only the saccharin water (a placebo).
- ▶ Their immune systems stayed suppressed, even when they were no longer getting the drug, suggesting that even rats may respond to positive belief and nurturing care with measurable physiological immune responses

- ▶ The mind-body link may also be mediated by executive functions of the prefrontal cortex of the brain.
- ▶ The fact that placebo responses are disrupted in people with Alzheimer's disease supports this theory.
- ▶ Many with Alzheimer's disease fail to respond to placebos, supporting the idea that an area of the brain related to belief, which may be damaged in a neurological disease state, affects whether a patient responds to placebos.
- ▶ Evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers says that what the brain expects to happen in the near future affects its physiological state.
- ▶ Trivers suggests that those with Alzheimer's don't experience a placebo effect because they are unable to anticipate the future, so their minds cannot physiologically prepare for it.

Placebo

- ▶ Placebo responsiveness also correlates to activation of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens, a region of the brain involved in reward mechanisms.
- ▶ Scientists studied the brains of people after they were given money to see how much dopamine they released in the nucleus accumbens.
- ▶ The more the nucleus accumbens responded to a monetary reward, the more likely those patients were to get well with a placebo

Placebo

- ▶ Whatever the mechanism, it's clear that the mind and body communicate through hormones and neurotransmitters that originate in the brain and then leave the brain to signal other parts of the body.
- ▶ What we think and how we feel can translate into physiological changes in the rest of the body.

The Nocebo Effect

- ▶ The nocebo effect: a person has more symptoms or side effects after a placebo
- ▶ Researchers believe it may be partly explained by a substance in the body that sends messages through the nerves.
- ▶ When a person is anxious, for instance, the substance is activated and the person feels more pain than a person who isn't anxious.
- ▶ The nocebo effect can be seen in the brain: brain-imaging studies have shown that pain is more intense when a person expects more pain than when they don't.
- ▶ This is linked to changes in certain brain regions on the imaging studies.

Stress

- ▶ Stress and negativity can do a number on our immune system
- ▶ They can boost our chance of getting infections, slow down the healing process, increase inflammation and even speed the growth of some cancers.
- ▶ The prevalence of stress in primary care is high; 60% to 80% of visits may have a stress-related component according to the journal of the national medical association
- ▶ Over the past 5 years, 44% of Americans have reported an increase in psychological stress according to the American psychological association

- ▶ The standard of care provided by the healing professional has a huge impact on patient health.
- ▶ What they say and do, how they treat patients, how much time, presence, genuine nurturing and listening they offer, these things matter.
- ▶ They have a very real, measurable effect on clinical outcomes.
- ▶ Most healthcare providers WANT to provide exceptional levels of contact and care.
- ▶ But they're also getting increasingly squeezed by a system that doesn't allow it to happen. And, in the end, not only are patients suffering...doctors are suffering, too.

Spontaneous Remission Project

- ▶ Online database called the Spontaneous Remission Project.
- ▶ This database includes an impressive annotated bibliography of 3,500 references from more than 800 journals in 20 different languages, documenting cases of unexplainable spontaneous disease remission.
- ▶ They defined spontaneous remission as "the disappearance, complete or incomplete, of a disease or cancer without medical treatment or treatment that is considered inadequate to produce the resulting disappearance of disease symptoms or tumor."

Spontaneous Remission Project

- ▶ The bibliography includes some astonishing cases: An HIV-positive patient became HIV-negative.
- ▶ One woman with untreated metastatic breast cancer had breast, lung, and femur tumors that resolved spontaneously
- ▶ The plaques blocking a man's coronary arteries disappeared without treatment.
- ▶ A man's brain aneurysm disappeared.
- ▶ A man with a gunshot wound in the brain recovered with no treatment.
- ▶ A woman with cardiomyopathy in heart failure got better.

Mind Over Medicine

- ▶ Lissa Rankin lists 6 steps you can do to flip off your stress responses and activate your relaxation responses so the body can heal itself

1. Believe You Can Heal Yourself

- ▶ If you believe your condition is “incurable” or “chronic,” it probably will be.
- ▶ Scientific data shows that what you believe about your health is likely to come true
- ▶ If you fill your mind with negative beliefs about your health - like “I’ll always be sick,” you’re poisoning your body with cortisol and epinephrine, thereby deactivating your body’s natural self-repair mechanisms.
- ▶ Thoughts have power!

Find The Right Support

- ▶ Your body can heal itself, but it does so best when you’re tended, nurtured, and cared for by a health care provider who helps relax your nervous system, alleviates your fear and overwhelm, and shares your positive belief that you can get well.
- ▶ How can you find this kind of doctor? Don’t be afraid to interview your health care providers.
- ▶ Ask whether they believe you can get well and find someone optimistic, who will partner with you on your healing journey,
- ▶ Choose someone who listens to you, respects your intuition, cares for your wellbeing, and ensures you that you won’t be facing your illness alone.

Listen To Your Body & Your Intuition

- ▶ Nobody knows your body better than you, not even a doctor. Doctors may know the arteries of the leg or the anatomy of your organs better than you, but you know what's best for your own body, better than anyone else.
- ▶ Your body is YOUR business, not just your doctor's business
- ▶ Listen to what your body is trying to tell you
- ▶ Your body is one vehicle your intuition uses to speak to you: If you have a physical sensation in your body - pain, tightness, nausea, clenching, dizziness - ask your body what it is trying to communicate to you.
- ▶ Then listen up - this is the wisdom of your body trying to communicate to you

Diagnose the Root Causes of Your Illness

- ▶ Your doctor may give you one kind of diagnosis - like high blood pressure or fibromyalgia or colon cancer, for example.
- ▶ But the kind of diagnosis Lissa talks about in her book gets at the root of what might have triggered the stress responses that deactivate your body's self-healing mechanisms, thereby making your body vulnerable to illness.
- ▶ What aspects of your life are stressing you out? Where is your life out of alignment with your truth? What relaxation response-inducing activities - like meditation, creative expression, laughter, engaging in work you love, massage, yoga, or playing with animals - have you been neglecting?

Write the Prescription for Yourself

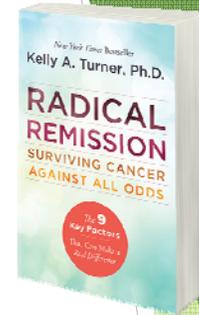
- ▶ Ask yourself, “What does my body need in order to heal?”
- ▶ Your Prescription may include not just diet changes, an exercise regimen, and a conventional medical treatment plan, but also getting out of a toxic relationship, quitting a soul-sucking job, adding a meditation practice, taking steps to get out of debt, picking up a hobby, going to church, or following your life’s purpose.
- ▶ Be as specific as you can. Then muster up the courage to put your plan into action!

Surrender Attachment to Outcomes

- ▶ After you’ve done everything you can to make your body ripe for miracles, it’s time to surrender.
- ▶ Some patients do everything “right” and spontaneous remissions happen. Others do the same - and they’re still sick. Why does this happen? No one knows
- ▶ Perhaps our souls come here on this earth to learn lessons, and illness can be a spiritual practice, a way to learn our life lessons and a part of our soul’s destiny.
- ▶ She advises people to trust The Universe, surrender attachment to any particular health outcome, and let any health condition you face be an opportunity for spiritual awakening

Radical Remission

- ▶ Kelly A. Turner, PhD studies people who have experienced what she calls “radical remissions.”
- ▶ Kelly’s book is called *Radical Remission: The Nine Key Factors That Can Make A Real Difference* .
- ▶ What Kelly discovered is that the people who experienced radical remissions were not passively sitting by, waiting for a miracle.
- ▶ They were making nine significant changes in their lives, only two of which might be recommended by a forward-thinking physician.



Radical Remissions

- ▶ So what were the 9 key factors that these patients with radical remissions employed?
- ▶ Dr. Turner goes into much more detail about these 9 key factors in the book.
- ▶ Each factor has its own chapter, as well as stories of how patients used these factors to participate actively in their healing journey.
- ▶ But here are the nine overlapping factors her research uncovered:

1. Radically changing your diet.
2. Taking control of your health.
3. Following your intuition.
4. Using herbs and supplements.
5. Releasing suppressed emotions.
6. Increasing positive emotions.
7. Embracing social support.
8. Deepening your spiritual connection.
9. Having strong reasons for living.

Resources

