

Health: The Mind-Body Relationship

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We all know that our behaviors have an impact on our health. For instance, our exercise habits, and whether we smoke or drink all affect our physical health. One concept that we tend not to consider is that our minds also have the ability to produce thoughts that can dictate what the body does and in turn, affect our health.

Many studies have been done on the effect of attitudes, beliefs, and faith on disease and healing which have shown that people with a positive outlook on life tend to have better recovery rates. In one study, patients who had survived seemingly incurable cancers all had positive attitudes and faith. Our feelings are also linked to our immune system and can affect the body's ability to fend off diseases.

Helplessness versus hardiness is another issue that has been studied. Those who feel helpless tend to feel powerless and are most likely to become ill as a result of a stressful situation. These same situations may cause different results for someone who reacts to a situation by seeing it as an opportunity for personal growth. The book *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* takes us step by step through some mental and physical exercises which proved successful for patients with numerous ailments, but can also have positive effects on anyone. Some methods of improving overall health are:

1. Try to see stress, fear and doubt as a challenge and not as a threat. Although we do not have control over our circumstances, we do control the way we respond to them.
2. Follow these guidelines, since both physical and mental factors affect health: A. Exercise three times each week, B. Eat a healthy diet—limit caffeine, fat, sugar, and eat a lot of fruits and vegetables, C. Meditate daily—this is explained in the book and there are many other sources of information on meditation.
3. Monitor how we view ourselves. Seeing ourselves as healthy people can help tremendously!
4. Don't expect to be in control all the time. Things will inevitably change, but change is the only constant in life.
5. Stay conscious of our attitudes and beliefs and remember that they are powerful.
6. Stop judging ourselves negatively and accept ourselves as we are.

Source: Minding the Body, Mending the Mind, Joan Borysenko, Ph.D.