

Harnessing The Healing Power of the Mind



What goes on in your mind is a critical, and often overlooked, factor for everyday health. And it's even more critical to the process of healing, especially in serious illnesses. That's because your mind has a powerful, and direct, effect on the health of your body.

There are three important ways you can harness the power of your mind to heal your body and keep yourself healthy. The first is the ability to choose the beliefs you hold about your health. What you believe impacts what you're willing to do to be healthy. If you don't believe you can get well, you're defeated before you even get started.

The second is the ability to focus your mind and open yourself to exploring and testing new possibilities. Competent health care professionals can assist you in this process, but you need to take an active role in searching for the answers to the underlying causes of your health problems and finding ways to address them.

The third and final ability is to turn thoughts and beliefs into actions. This is your ability to implement what you learn.

When harnessing the power of your mind, you may encounter different obstacles. You can have subconscious mental blocks that keep you from taking action on what you know. You can also have mental blocks that prevent you from objectively evaluating what is working and what isn't.

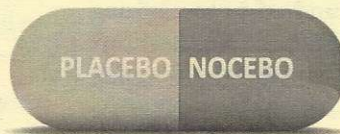
Few people recognize, let alone utilize, the power of the mind in their search for health, but in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing* we'll not only share how important it is, but also provide practical suggestions about how to harness the power of the mind for healing. Before we elaborate on these three ways you can use your mind to heal, and the mental obstacles you may face, let's start by affirming the powerful role the mind plays in both health and disease.

The Placebo Effect

The power of the mind to either keep you healthy or make you sick can be demonstrated by the well-documented placebo effect. The word placebo means "I will please" and refers to the ability one has to heal because of a treatment with no known physical effects.

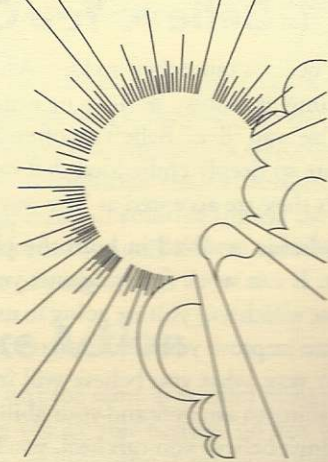
Researchers try and isolate their results from the placebo effect by using double-blind studies where the person administering the treatment does not know its effect. But, what people seldom think about is that a significant percentage of patients (25-30%) typically respond positively to the placebo. How much of this is just the self-healing capacity of the body, and how much is due to the person's belief that the treatment might make them well is unknown, but it does demonstrate that a significant amount of healing can occur without any kind of specific physical treatment.

An entire field called psychoneuroimmunology is dedicated to exploring the power that thought has on the immune system via the nervous system. It has provided ample research showing how positive thoughts and good feelings enhance immunity and the ability to recover from disease. There is also plenty of research showing that negative thoughts and emotions depress immunity, contribute to the development of disease, and interfere with healing. This leads into the discussion of the nocebo effect.



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The Nocebo Effect

The nocebo effect further illustrates the power of the mind over the body. Nocebo means “not pleasing” and this effect occurs when someone takes a placebo but is lead to believe that the placebo has side effects. For instance, people taking a placebo believing that it is chemotherapy have experienced nausea and lost their hair.

The nocebo effect shows that in addition to helping you heal, your mind can also work to make you sick. Constantly worrying about one’s health or imagining one has a disease will actually work to undermine a person’s health.

The nocebo effect further illustrates the importance of learning to work with the mind, and not just the body, if you want to get healthy and stay that way. With an understanding of this mind-body connection we’ll cover the ways you can harness your mind to improve your health. We’ll start with belief.

1. Believe You Can Get Well

A belief is more than an idea. A belief is an idea that is attached to strong emotions, positive or negative, that influences the way you “be” and “live.” Beliefs are often held in the subconscious mind and are so deeply embedded that one just accepts them as truth, that is they are accepted as “the way things are.”

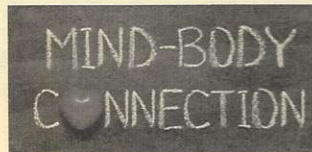
Belief is involved in both the placebo effect and the nocebo effect. It can work for or against your ability to heal. You get to choose which way you are going to use it. You can choose to believe you can improve your situation or choose to believe that you can’t. Either way, what you believe will influence the information you are willing to uncover and your ability to act on what you learn. If you don’t believe you can heal, you’ll struggle, because you’ll lack the motivation to search for answers and will likely dismiss them as unworkable even if you do find them.

Increasing Your Ability to Heal Through Faith

You can increase your faith that you can heal by recognizing your body’s innate capacity for healing. The ability to heal isn’t found outside of you, but rather inside of you. A doctor may stitch a deep wound, or set a broken bone, but it is the innate intelligence of the body that causes the wound to heal and the bone to grow back together. That’s the healing power we’re talking about.

Start by thinking about the numerous cuts, bruises, burns, scrapes, and other minor injuries your body has repaired over your lifetime. Also think about the many minor ailments (e.g. colds, sore throats, headaches) you’ve experienced and overcome. Recognizing and feeling gratitude for this incredible self-healing capacity helps you increase your faith in it.

You can further increase your faith in your ability to heal when you recognize that the instructions on how to make and operate your entire body are found in every cell in your body. Your body started with a single cell that multiplied to form every part of your body. Furthermore, all of the complex processes that keep you alive every second of every day—breathing, circulation, digestion, metabolism, and elimination—all occur automatically without having to give them much thought.



So, if you think about it, the body has a far greater capacity to heal than most people acknowledge. Put some faith in that.

To take this idea further, many people don’t believe that this ability to heal is accidental. Many people believe that a Divine Intelligence created all life, including our bodies. If this is your belief, you may also want to trust that this same intelligence wants you to be healthy. Trust that if you ask for help you will receive it and if you seek for answers from the Creator, you will find them.

Using Affirmations to Aid Healing

As a practical exercise to help boost your faith, you can use positive affirmations. Repeat statements like those that follow, out loud, in front of a mirror, every day. Do this regularly, and with emotion, and these ideas will turn into beliefs that will guide you to turn them into reality.

I am healthy
My body is healing as it should
I am recovering my health
God wants me to be healthy
God is helping me regain my health
I am grateful for my health



The goal is to picture what you desire as if you already have it. This harnesses the power of the mind to help you create it.

Overcoming Negative Beliefs About Health

As we’ve already indicated, beliefs can also work against you, which is what happens in the nocebo effect. Sometimes well meaning health professionals, friends, or family members can plant ideas in your mind that interfere with your healing or help to create health problems.

For example, if a child is repeatedly told that they are weak or sickly, that story may become an inner belief that they will start to act on. If you accept ideas with strong negative emotions attached to them, they become beliefs that work against your ability to heal. It is especially damaging to your ability to heal if you’ve been told you have an incurable disease or that you only have a short time to live by someone in whom you have trust.

This is why it is important to find health care professionals who understand the power of the mind in health and will help you believe in your ability to heal. Such practitioners will give you hope for a positive outcome and are able to encourage you to not give up in your search for answers.

You can also use affirmations to help overcome these negative ideas, such as:

All things are possible to those that believe
With God all things are possible
What the mind of man can conceive, and believe it can
achieve (a quote from Napoleon Hill)

You can also remind yourself that other human beings, no matter how smart they may be, are not perfect and do not know the final answers. Remember also that many ailments that were thought incurable in the past now have cures. If you persist, maybe you’ll be the one to discover answers others have overlooked.

2. Search for Answers

When we get sick, we naturally want to know what's wrong. Most people think that getting a name for their disease is a diagnosis, but having a name for your disease doesn't help much in the process of resolving to be healthy. The idea that you have a disease and need to get rid of it shifts your mind's focus onto the illness instead on your health and ability to heal.

Experts in the field of positive thinking claim that whatever you focus your mind on you will magnify. Instead of thinking about what you don't want (which is to be sick) you need to shift your thinking to what you do want (which is to be healthy).

Thus, to heal, you really need to figure out what laws of good health were ignored, which eventually led to being sick. To put it another way, if the body has this incredible, innate capacity to keep things in balance and heal when tissues are injured, what is interfering with its ability to do so?

If you are sick you need to identify the root causes of poor health and start working on a program to create good health. Unless you do, you'll wind up seeking symptomatic relief instead of real health. This is true even if you're using natural remedies like herbs and supplements to provide symptomatic relief.

Look for the Cause, Don't Treat the Effect

The following fictitious and somewhat silly story illustrates the difference between treating the symptoms and fixing the cause.



Once upon a time there was a clumsy carpenter. He regularly hit his thumb with his hammer, causing his thumb to become badly swollen and painful. He went to a doctor who said, "That finger is badly inflamed, let me write you a prescription for an anti-inflammatory."

The man took the medication and noticed that it helped the thumb a little, but because he kept striking it with the hammer, it continued to get worse. The pain was becoming difficult to bear. So the man went to another doctor. This one prescribed a painkiller.

The painkiller really helped take the pain away, but it also made the man's fingers a little numb so that he wound up hitting his thumb more than ever. Soon the thumb was very raw and badly damaged. So, the man sought out a third doctor, a surgeon, who said, "That thumb is badly diseased, I think we should cut it off before it damages the rest of the body."

Not wanting to lose this thumb, the man went to a natural healer, who after hearing his story suggested that the man find a different job, since he was obviously too clumsy to be a good carpenter. Following this advice, the carpenter became a salesman. His thumb healed and never caused him problems again.

The causes of most health problems are more subtle than this, but it illustrates the idea. The disease (i.e. pain, symptoms, imbalanced functions) is not the cause of ill health, it is the effect of ill health. Treating a disease without figuring out what's causing the body to be diseased is like trying to heal a finger that has become infected because of a sliver, without removing the sliver.

Real health care should be about figuring out these causes and correcting them. Once the cause of the problem is removed, the self-healing capacity of the body will return the body to the highest state of health to which it is capable. As the herbalist Samuel Thomson put so succinctly in the early 1800s, "Remove the cause and the effect will cease."

Factors to Consider in Restoring Health

There are many underlying factors that contribute to the development of disease. A good holistic practitioner can help you identify them, but ultimately you need to do some self-examination and figure out what you can do to take better care of yourself. Some of the factors one should think about include diet and nutrition, exposure to toxins, lack of exercise, insufficient sleep, chronic dehydration, poor posture, and chronic, low-grade infection.



Besides these physical factors, you should also look for mental and emotional causes of illness. Think about the things in your life that are causing you stress, making you feel sad, depressed, unhappy, or angry. You may need to adjust your mental attitude, make changes in occupation or relationships, or seek counseling for unresolved emotional trauma. It sometimes helps to look at what was happening in your life during the 6-12 months before becoming ill and ask yourself if these events had a role to play in the breakdown of your health.

3. Take Action

Positive thinking or faith isn't the same as wishful thinking. If wishing you could be healthy was all you needed, no one would ever be sick. But belief isn't a passive thing. Genuine belief propels you into action. So, if you believe you can get well and have identified things you can do to improve your health you have to start testing them by doing them.

Returning to the issue of the placebo and nocebo effects, it's important to choose to do the things you feel most confident about. Accepting a treatment you feel is harmful, or even ineffective, activates the nocebo effect. Pursuing a course that you believe will be helpful, even if it's not the best choice, activates the placebo effect.

For example, if you have greater faith in the medical route with a problem, try it first. If you are being pressured to accept a medical treatment and you don't feel comfortable with it, perhaps you should explore alternatives. The bottom line is, don't let other people scare you into any treatment or program with which you don't feel comfortable.

The Proof is in the Results

Your mind can cause you to dogmatically cling to ideas even when they don't work. So, whatever course of action you choose, you need to be willing to alter it if it isn't working.

If you've found a genuine underlying cause of your ill health and a positive action to rebuild your health and start acting on it, you'll start feeling better. This often happens in a few days and

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shouldn't take longer than a few weeks. However, if you aren't seeing any results after three to four weeks, what you're doing probably isn't working.

If this happens, don't give up. Simply search for other approaches and keep trying them until you discover what does work.

Motivating Yourself to Follow Through

If you have a course of action, but are having a hard time motivating yourself to do it, you need work on harnessing the power of your mind to move you to action. Here are some suggestions.

One way to motivate yourself is to make yourself accountable to someone else. Decide the issue you're going to work on (exercise, dietary changes, a supplement program, or other activity) and commit to do so in writing both to yourself and to someone you trust who is interested in your wellbeing. Commit to reporting to this person once per week on your progress. Simply knowing you're going to have to tell a trusted friend or family member about your progress will greatly increase your ability to follow through.

If you do slip up acknowledge what happened and try to figure out why. Think about what happened and use the power of your mind to figure out ways to prevent the obstacle before reaffirming your goal and moving on.

Overcoming Mental Blocks to Healing

If you're having trouble motivating yourself, you may wish to ask yourself the question, "Do I really want to be healthy?" That may seem like a strange question, but it's an important one. Sometimes people think they want to be healthy—but they actually have huge psychological blocks that are keeping them sick.

Here are examples of the subconscious habits and beliefs that can prevent you from doing what you need to do to be healthy. First, being sick can earn sympathy, love, and attention. Children may discover that their strict parents are kinder to them when they aren't feeling well, which gives them a subconscious desire to be unhealthy. This can carry over into adulthood.

Being sick can also help you avoid responsibilities you don't feel capable of tackling. It gives you a legitimate excuse to stop doing things you really don't want to be doing.

Another possibility is you may feel like you deserve to be sick. You may feel that your illness is some sort of recompense for hurting someone or is a just punishment from God. If this is the case then it wouldn't feel right to think you can get well. You should meditate on whether being sick is actually helping anyone or if God would wish any of his children to suffer.

You may also find yourself believing the cost of your health is too high in terms of money, time, or needing to give something up. If this is the case focus your mind on how good it will feel to be healthy and affirm the positive benefits are worth the price.

Your mind is endlessly creative and these are not the only subconscious blocks you may have to healing. If you suspect something is blocking you from being healthy, meditate and pray to help you uncover any hidden benefits you might have from being sick. You may wish to seek some type of counseling to help you work through these issues if you have them.

We've only scratched the surface of how your mind can make you sick or help you heal. Hopefully, we've opened your mind to the value of exploring and utilizing this powerful ally in your journey to health. Start thinking your way to better health today.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about harnessing the power of the mind to aid you in healing contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also learn about the mind-body connection and how to use the mind to aid healing from the following resources:

Head First: The Biology of Hope by Norman Cousins

Peace, Love, and Healing by Bernie S. Siegel

Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine by Larry Dossy,

The Pleasure Prescription by Paul Pearsall

You Can Heal Your Life by Louise L. Hay

Feelings Buried Alive Never Die by Karol K. Truman

The Heart's Key to Health, Happiness, and Success by Steven Horne

Minding the Body, Mending the Mind by Joan z. Borysnko