

# Exploring the Mind-Body Connection

Recognizing and Resolving the Mental and Emotional Issues Behind Physical Health Problems



There is a tendency in Western medicine to separate mental and emotional issues from physical health problems. This has never been the case with traditional medicine. All systems of traditional medicine have seen strong connections between the mind, emotions, and spirit and physical health problems.

The truth is that healing is rarely a process that involves only the physical body. It also involves thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. In fact, healing actually begins in the mind with the belief that it's possible to get well.

## Placebo and Nocebo Effects Illustrate Power of Thought

The power of thought in health is demonstrated by the existence of the placebo effect. Placebo means "I will please," and refers to the fact that a certain percentage of people will get well on any treatment, as long as they believe it will help them. The percentage varies, but it is around 30% of all patients.

The very fact that it's possible to heal from a placebo, shows the power of belief in the healing process. This power should be utilized when we're seeking to recover from various health problems. We need to believe the medicine we're taking or the therapy we're using will work, or we won't even try it.

The power of the mind in health is also demonstrated by the nocebo effect, something many people don't know about. Nocebo means "not pleasing." The research into the nocebo effect shows that not only can your mind help you heal, it can also make you sick.

This research involves giving a person a placebo and telling them that it's a medication with potential for side effects. When this is done, some people will experience negative side effects on the placebo. For instance, people taking sugar pills believing they are chemotherapy drugs will experience nausea and lose their hair. The implication of this is that mental attitudes and emotional issues can also be a root cause of physical health problems.

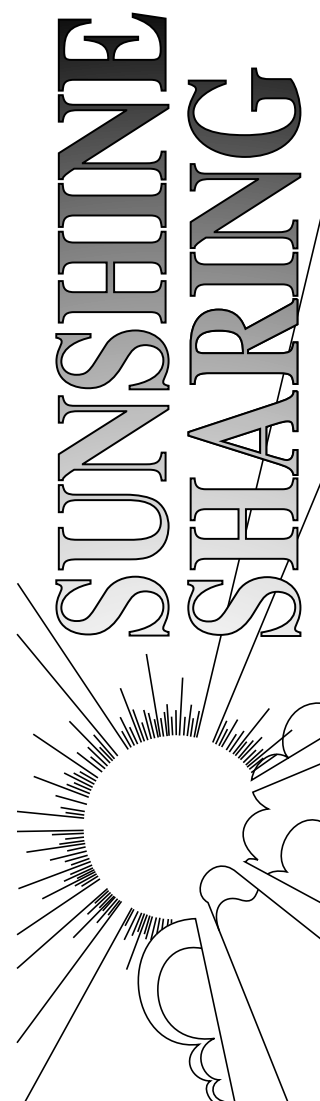
If using medications or physical therapies helps us get better, that's great. But sometimes, a person doesn't respond to therapies that should work, or the problem keeps returning and the person never seems to be rid of it. When this happens, we should consider the possibility that mental attitudes, emotional issues, or past trauma may be a factor in their health problems.

## Shifting Your Focus from Disease to Health

To utilize the power of the mind in healing, people need to start by shifting their focus from disease treatment to health building. Experts in positive thinking stress that you tend to create what your mind focuses on. Unfortunately, when it comes to health, people rarely focus on health. Instead, they worry about the disease or the treatment. They may suffer from fears that they will get the same diseases their parents did, because it "runs in the family." This attitude keeps them from doing things to prevent these problems.

This also extends to how to handle disease. If a person tells themselves, "I'm going to fight/beat this disease," the focus isn't on health. It's focusing on disease. Experts in positive thinking also suggest that when you are against something, you tend to strengthen it. So, when seeking healing, a person needs to change the very nature of the questions they ask. They should stop thinking, "How can I get rid of this disease?" and ask themselves, "What do I need to do to be healthy?" This shifts the mind from thinking about what they don't want (disease) to thinking about they do want (health).

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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## Exploring the Mind-Body Connection

With this understanding, let's explore the mind-body connection by looking at some examples of how attitudes and emotions may be behind various health issues. While this information isn't comprehensive, it is a great starting point to your thought processes.

The best way to see if there are mental and emotional issues underlying your own health problems is to ask yourself questions. Quiet your mind and focus on what is happening in your body. Start by asking yourself questions like, "What is this pain or sickness trying to teach me?" or "What is this part of my body trying to tell me?" You can also ask more specific questions, based on the part of the body involved, as suggested in the information that follows.

### Head and Face

The head is the mental aspect of our nature. Problems in the head often involve being "lost in one's thoughts," which means getting overly caught up in thinking instead of being or doing. The statement, "This gives me a headache just thinking about it," shows how excess mental activity can cause pain in the head. Good questions to ask if you have problems in your head are, "What actions could I take to resolve what I'm thinking about?" or "What does my heart say about this matter?"



The face is the primary part of the body that presents us to the world. For example, we talk about "saving face" or "putting on our best face." We also face things in life. Problems with the face may involve not being genuine, trying to put on a "false face." It can help to ask, "What do I need to *face* in my life?"

The eyes help us perceive truth. Eye problems may involve denial of reality. If you have problems with your eyes, ask yourself, "What do I not want to see?" or "If I could see clearly, what would I see?"

The ears involve understanding and responding. When we don't feel understood, we say "listen to me." Not hearing is shutting out the information others are trying to give us, especially in our relationships. Contemplate, "What am I unwilling to hear?" or "What would I hear if I could hear clearly?"

### Neck, Shoulders, and Back

The neck helps us hold our head up high. We say a proud or stubborn person has a stiff-neck. In contrast, bowing the head is a sign of submission. If you have chronic neck problems consider questions like, "What am I submitting to (bowing to) that I shouldn't?" or "In what ways am I being proud or stubborn?"

We carry all sorts of burdens on our shoulders and backs. We can "shoulder too many responsibilities." When people try to apply too much pressure we might say, "get off my back." If you have problems in these areas, ask, "What burdens am I carrying that I need to let go of?" or "Who or what is on my back?"

The spine supports the body and needs to be supported in turn. We show support by saying, "I've got your back." We also give people a pat on the back to show support. When we feel betrayed by someone we trusted, we say they "stabbed us in the

back." If you have chronic back pain, ask "In what way do I feel unsupported?" You can also ask "How do I feel betrayed?" If the pain is around the shoulder blades, you might even ask, "Who stabbed me in the back?"

### Chest, Heart, and Lungs

This chest area is associated with emotional and social life. We experience both love and loss in our chests. When hugging people we love, we bring our chests together.



A source of problems in this area is tension between the desire to be ourselves and do what we want and the desire to have relationships, to love and be loved. Relationships require us to give up some of our freedom in exchange for the love and support of others, but we still need to have room to be ourselves in that relationship.

Our desire to be free is expressed in the breath when we talk about breathing freely. When we're overly controlled, we feel stifled and say we need "room to breathe." People we are close to, such as parents, often "smother us with love," but being smothered doesn't really make us feel loved. If you have problems in your lungs and chest, ask yourself, "What must I do to be able to breathe freely?"

When we don't get the love we desire and/or we lose a source of love, we grieve. Grief is often called heartache, because we feel pain and tension in the center of our chests. We may close down emotionally to protect ourselves from this pain, a condition known as hardness of heart. When we experience pain in the chest, heart problems, and so forth, we can ask, "What have I lost that I need to let go of?" or "How can I open my heart to love?"

### Abdomen or Belly

The abdomen houses the digestive organs which absorb what we need and reject what we don't. Problems in this area can often relate to feelings of being unable or unworthy of having our needs met. These needs may be physical or emotional. If you have digestive problems, questions you might ask yourself include, "What physical or emotional needs do I have that are not being met?" or "What could I do to take better care of myself?"

Sometimes we can't *stomach* something, meaning we feel unable to process a problem or a situation. It takes time to digest information as well as food. If you have stomach problems, think about, "What in my life am I unable to digest?" or "What am I having a difficult time swallowing?"

The pancreas both digests food and stabilizes blood sugar levels. Pancreatic problems can signal a lack of sweetness in our lives, that is a lack joy and happiness. Consider asking, "What could I do to make my life sweeter?" or "How can I find more joy and happiness in my life?"

The liver and gallbladder can be associated with anger as in the phrase, "This galls me." Bile is bitter and when we hold onto anger we hold on to bitterness, which congests the gallbladder. If you have liver or gall bladder problems, ask yourself "What am I angry (or bitter) about?" or "Who do I need to forgive?"



## Basic Tools for Mind-Body Healing

Because the body heals from the head down for many problems, it is important to have tools that can help heal the mind. These tools will help you overcome the mental and emotional issues that were discovered by exploring the mind-body connection.

Working on shifting your attitude from a negative one to a positive one is a good place to start the process. This involves noticing your negative thoughts and consciously replacing them with positive ones. The table on the right lists examples of negative ways of thinking and positive thoughts you can replace them with. You should pay attention to which side your thinking trends.

Affirmation and visualization are two specific tools that you can employ in this process. Affirmation is a verbal technique, while visualization is a nonverbal technique.

### Affirmations for Health

An affirmation is a present-tense statement that affirms what you want as if you actually have it. So, if you had a broken bone and wanted to speed the healing of that bone you would affirm, “My bone is whole and strong.” Notice the present-tense, “My bone is,” rather than the future tense, “My bone will be.” This is a vital key to making affirmations work because it is laying hold of what you desire now rather than in the future.

Examples of general healing affirmations would include statements such as these:

- My body is healthy and strong.
- My body is healing as it should.
- I have a strong immune system.
- I am healthy, happy, and prosperous.

To get the most benefit out of an affirmation, you should write it down and post it somewhere you will see it every day. During the day, when negative thoughts arise, replace them with your affirmation. So, as you start to worry about the disease or problem, simply start saying your affirmation, either mentally, or if possible, out loud. Since your mind cannot hold two thoughts at the same time, the positive thought crowds out the negative thoughts.

If you are a person of faith, affirmation can be helpful when combined with prayer. Pray for the outcome you desire and then affirm that the matter is now in God’s hands, such as “God grants me health and strength.” This is an exercise of faith as faith is holding in your mind the outcome you desire as if you already have it.

### Using Visualization

The second method for helping to create positive thoughts is visualization. Visualization involves getting into a relaxed state and

Negative Thinking	Positive Thinking
Thinking about what you don't have	Being grateful for what you do have
Worrying about your problems	Praying and believing that you will find solutions to your problems
Worrying about bad things that might happen in the future	Setting goals to get what you want and focusing your mind on achieving them
Thinking about all the things you don't like about your life	Thinking about all the good things in your life
Focusing on the weaknesses and shortcoming of yourself and others	Seeing the good in yourself and those around you
Trying to avoid stress and problems	Making time for pleasure and finding ways to enjoy life
Dwelling on the bad things that have happened to you in the past	Forgiving those who have hurt or offended you and letting go of the past
Feeding your mind with negative and discouraging information, news and entertainment	Feeding your mind with positive and inspiring information, news and entertainment

breathing deeply while you picture the final result you desire in your mind. Again, it is important to see what you want, not what you don't want, and to picture yourself having it in the present.

For instance, if you have an injury, visualize your body healed and whole again. If you don't feel you have the love or support you need in your life, picture yourself having it and how it would feel. If you don't feel you can handle a situation in your life, imagine having the help you need to successfully handle it.

Use these techniques to help change any issues you uncover when seeking to understand the mental and emotional issues behind specific health problems. Along with affirmations and visualizations, you can also use plant medicines in the form of flower essences, essential oils, and herbal remedies to further help this process.

### Using Plants as Mind-Body Remedies

Just as traditional medicine has recognized links between physical health problems and our mental-emotional state, traditional herbalism has recognized that herbs do not just work on the physical body. Plants are also living creatures and affect the mind and emotions as well as the body. In working with the mental and emotional aspects of health, plants are most commonly used in the form of flower essences or essential oils, but the herbs themselves may also have an impact on mental and emotional state.

Edward Bach, an English homeopath created flower remedies to heal diseases arising from mental, emotional, and spiritual problems. The *Shock and Injury Flower Essence Blend* is based on Bach's Rescue Remedy and helps a person recover from shock and trauma. It contains the flower essences of impatiens, star of bethlehem, cherry plum, rock rose, clematis, arnica and red clover

This remedy can be helpful to take when exploring your mental-emotional state. Take it at the beginning of the questioning/contemplation process to help you stay present and focused. It can also help you resolve any past trauma that comes up.

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## Head Area Remedies

Essential oils that aid meditation and mental focus can help you move out of your mind and reconnect with your emotions and body. In addition to the ***Shock and Injury Flower Essence Blend***, oils like frankincense, myrrh, and amber can be used to aid the process of recognizing and utilizing the mind-body connection for healing. Try inhaling them or applying them to the wrists or forehead prior to contemplating what's going on inside.

Specific flower essences that can be helpful in this self-inspection process include black-eyed susan, which can help a person look at the shadow part of themselves, the darker aspects of their personality that they don't want to look at, and golden ear drops, which can help a person connect with and work through painful memories from childhood. Another potentially helpful remedy is agrimony, which is for people who hide their true emotions behind a cheerful face. It helps them let down their facade and admit the pain and suffering they are experiencing.

## Shoulders and Back

An interesting remedy for the lungs, ears, and back is mullein. Mullein flowers are a traditional ear remedy, the leaves are for the lungs, and the root is for the spine. Emotionally mullein helps a person listen to the voice of their conscience and act with integrity.

The ***Personal Boundaries Flower Essence*** can help you find the strength to shoulder your responsibilities. Other flower essences that help here are elm, for feeling overwhelmed and olive for feeling depleted and exhausted after a long struggle.

## Chest Area Remedies

When dealing with hardened emotions that are affecting the heart and circulation, rose is one of the best. Taken as a flower essence or inhaled as an essential oil, it can help open your heart so you can experience love and connection to others. It is part of the ***Broken and Hardened Heart Flower Essence Blend***, which also contains golden ear drops and yerba santa.

Yerba santa is a helpful herb for opening the lungs and easing constriction in the chest. It is used as a flower remedy for people who are having problems with their lungs because they have suppressed the grieving process.

When the breathe is stifled due to being emotionally repressed or smothered, essential oils with a vaporous characteristic will help to open up the lungs and help a person develop their inner strength. These oils include eucalyptus, camphor, ravensara, cajeput, and pine. Pine is helpful as an essential oil and flower essence for people who are burdened with undeserved guilt and need to forgive themselves and let go of the past.

## Abdominal Area Remedies

Peppermint helps with digestion, both physically and mentally. It helps to balance thinking and being and is helpful for digestive upset caused by excessive mental activity. The herb, flower essence, and essential oil can all be used for this purpose.

Other remedies that can help mental and emotional issues associated with digestive problems include chamomile and dandelion. Chamomile decreases irritability and peevishness, calming the nerves and aiding digestive function. Dandelion helps people whose digestive system and liver are having problems because they're too uptight and don't know how to relax and go with the flow.

If you've been struggling with an illness, these tools are a great place to start healing. Just remember that the most important thing is to believe it is possible to get well and keep searching.

## Additional Help and Information

To learn more about the mind-body connections and remedies that can help you heal physically by addressing mental, emotional and spiritual issues contact the person who gave you this newsletter or consult the following resources:

*Strategies for Health* by Steven Horne

*Feelings Buried Alive Never Die* by Karol K. Truman

*Messages from the Body* by Michael J. Lincoln

*Flower Essence Repertory* by Patricia Kaminski and Richard Katz