

HARNESSING YOUR MIND to Boost Your Health

One thing is for certain, we have all underplayed the importance of the mind-body connections in our health. If you're wondering what that even means, you're not alone. It took me years to understand the sheer potency of the *mind* (both emotional and cognitive contributions) to influence our health (or disease) outcomes....one way or the other.

We, as Doctors, often used this awkward term, "psychosomatic". It meant that my patients internal stress caused or aggravated their illness. Among health professionals, that categorization often seemed to garner an eyeroll. It developed a connotation of "crazy" or "irrational". If that's not enough, psychosomatic illness also became a euphemism for the sidebar labeling of a patient as a "*hypochondriac*", someone who is just hyper-anxious about their health.

I'm so done with these terms, in everyday practice. (Yes, the psychological diagnoses are *real*, they are just not most of ours to make).

Today there are wheelbarrows full of peer-reviewed research publications supporting the truth: That our personal beliefs, current thoughts, and present emotions affect our ability to get sick, stay sick or get well. They also significantly effect treatment outcomes, so we should all be paying attention.

By the way, this is true not just for our patients, but for *us*, their doctors, as well!

If you haven't watched the William-Hurt-acted movie *The Doctor* in a while, tune it in. When the doctor suddenly becomes the patient, (as will happen for all of us), he discovers the potency of the mind body connection by heart.

Brain scientists have delineated the neural pathways that spark connections from the cerebral cortex to the adrenal medulla—the part of the brain that is responsible for the body's instantaneous response in stressful situations. These findings precisely map how stress, anxiety, depression and other mental states can alter body function, healing and treatment outcomes.

So, don't shrug it off. If you're dealing with a health challenge, do your inner work. Part of your treatment protocol might just mean finding a mental health therapist to help you develop a mindful approach to managing your fears, stress and/or anxiety. Remember this: **YOU** are not your thoughts! You can *manage* your thoughts to help you cultivate an optimistic outlook. In the long run, it could be *what matters most* in achieving a positive outcome for your personal health.



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