

Mind/Body Health Connections

It was 1944 and winter in Auschwitz, the concentration camp for Jewish prisoners and sympathizers in World War II. Dr. Viktor Frankl was a prisoner there.

Frankl noted the effects of discouragement and loss of hope on prisoners: He recorded that in December “the prisoners had lived in the naïve hope that they would be home again by Christmas. As the time drew near and there was no encouraging news, the prisoners lost courage and disappointment overcame them. This had a dangerous influence on their powers of resistance and a great number of them died.”¹

Can Attitude Really Make a Difference?

Science confirms the link between mind set and physical and mental health: “A person’s psychological state is a prominent factor in health.”² “Attitude, social networks, and a healthy diet are woven together in their importance for physical and mental health.”³ These factors affect the immune system and how a person takes care of themselves.

Attitudes such as forgiveness, faith, optimism, happiness, perseverance under stress, and trust in God are linked with reduced risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, infection, ill health, and countless stress-related conditions. These attitudes also lessen the severity of illness and speed recovery when it occurs.⁴

A steady state of grief, worry, hostility, unforgiveness, hopelessness, and depression increase the risk of infection, inflammatory conditions and disease, and slower recovery from sickness.⁵

Many factors contribute to disease. Positive, perky people get sick, and critical, crabby people escape illness. However, a positive mind set is as important to good health as better-known factors such as exercise, and diet. The mind and body are intimately connected.

Remove that “Worry Wart”

Do you have a “worry wart” that needs removal? Are you plagued by a negaholic, naysayer attitude that sends you on mountain-climbing trips over molehills? Practicing the following seven suggestions may help tip your mental scales toward the positive side of life:

1. Smile. Smiling is free—but its benefits are priceless. It lowers stress hormones in the brain, improves memory and learning, and powers up the body's immune system. It also improves your looks!

2. Express Gratitude. People who express gratitude tend to live longer, healthier lives, have stronger bones, fewer heart attacks, and lower blood pressure. Mentally rehearsing or writing a list of daily blessings is a powerful buffer against mental depression and physical illness.

3. Focus on Positives. Continually ruminating over sad events or worrisome thoughts over stimulates a part of the brain known as “area 25” which is linked to many kinds of depression. A researcher noted: “Attitude is one thing humans have great control over, but for the most part people choose to let their attitude run them, or they think their situation has to change before their attitude can change, which is usually not the case.”⁶ Concentrating on positive solutions and opportunities will help “tone down” area 25 and turn off negative ruminating.

4. Forgive. Harboring anger and grudges hurts the heart, increases stress hormones, blood pressure, and increases a host of physical diseases and mental maladies. An act may not be *excusable*, but it is *forgivable*. Charlotte Witvliet, PhD, notes that when people think about their offenders in more forgiving ways their emotional health, sense of control, and physical health improve. Forgiving others and also forgiving oneself allows you to let the injury go. The healing spirit of forgiveness is a gift that God will bestow to all who ask.

5. Get up, don't give up. Successful people are not mistake free—they just refuse to give up. Can you think of a mistake you made that taught you some valuable lessons and caused you to move forward with a new and better plan? Maybe it was not funny at the time, but now it may even put a smile on your face as you think about it now.

6. Nurture your brain and body. Nutrition and lifestyle powerfully effect brain function, mood, memory, and learning. According to Andrew McCulloh, Director of the Mental Health Foundation, UK, we are just beginning to understand the profound link between nutrition and mental health.

Eating whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, and beans has a long-term mood and brain boosting effect that no snack cake can rival! Drinking water instead of caffeinated and sugary beverages improves alertness naturally. Adequate rest is essential for resisting fatigue and irritability. And daily exercise—especially in the sunshine and fresh air, has a calming, stress-lowering effect often more powerful than antidepressants.

7. Get busy about others. Offer to help someone in some way—even a little courtesy like opening a door for someone else—can boost your own health and may even help relieve depression. Studies show that those who spend regular time helping others not only cut their overall risk of death by 35%, but also improve heart health and quality of life.

The Living Word

Chronic anxiety and fear are the opposite of trust. Trusting in God is the most potent weapon against mental and physical illness.

“Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him: God is a hiding place for us.” Psalm 62:8 God has promised to fill you with hope and peace as you trust in Him. When trouble comes, when you are perplexed, when you need a friend, God is there to calm your heart and deliver you. He has a plan for your future, guidance for each day, strength to impart during times of trial and grace to give you courage when you make mistakes. He has a plan for successful, abundant living. He is ready today to help you make choices that benefit your brain-body connection—and experience the difference it makes! He invites you to come to Him for spiritual rest and power for abundant living. Will you receive His plan?

Visit us at LifestyleMatters.com or call 1-866-624-5433 for your resources to build a better brain, body, and lifestyle.

¹ Frankl V. *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Simon and Schuster, New York, NY. 1984. p. 84.

² Beaton R. *Effects of Stress and Psychological Disorders on the Immune System* (article).

³ *Ibid*, quotation by Kathryn O. Tacy.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ Ader R. *Psychoneuroimmunology*. Elsevier Press, USA, 2007. p. 766.

⁶ Ref. 2 and 3.