

Balanced Living – June 2019

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Using Your Mind to Heal Your Body



When you're ill or in pain, taking time to look at your habits, diet and attitude may provide insight into what ails you.

"Clearly, the more active you become on your own behalf, the more likely you'll do well," says James S. Gordon, M.D., director of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine in Washington, D.C., and author of "Manifesto for a New Medicine." "Thinking about your illness, what may have caused it and what you can do to speed your recovery, may minimize your need for drugs and surgery because doing so maximizes your capacity for helping yourself."

The following tips may help you move faster from diagnosis to recovery by using your mind to get more involved in your care.

Strive for self-awareness

Heredity and infections cause many illnesses. But some conditions are part psychological, part behavioral, and people often play more of a role in causing health problems than they realize.

Asking yourself questions can help you get at the root of a health problem and on the road to recovery. Start with: How did this condition come about? Is there something going on in my life that could be causing it?

If you suffer from chronic neck pain, for instance, there may be a connection between your pain and the way you sit hunched over your desk all day.

Look at your diet

Take a close look at your diet and eating habits as the next step in the process. An unhealthful diet can cause many health problems, including diabetes, chronic heartburn, heart disease and general malaise.

"Many people eat too much and are overweight as a result," Dr. Gordon says. "And, there's increasing evidence that obesity predisposes you to a variety of illnesses and that maintaining a healthful weight can contribute to longevity."

There are also some common foods many people are sensitive to, such as coffee, milk and red meat, as well as food additives and preservatives.

"Depending on your symptoms, you might consider eliminating these foods for a while to see if your symptoms diminish," Dr. Gordon says. "As a general rule, I suggest people who want to eat more healthfully include large quantities of fiber-rich raw fruits and vegetables in their diets, as well as a morning helping of wheat and oat bran."

Focus on the possible

If you're diagnosed with an illness, take steps to learn about it, including the range of symptoms and outcomes.

"The dominant mode in traditional medicine is to focus on the disease and all the terrible things that might happen," Dr. Gordon says. "If you're diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, for example, you would be told it's degenerative and that, in most people, the disability worsens and becomes permanent.

By accepting this prediction, the disease and your fears about it can take over your life."

As an alternative, stay focused on the best possible prognosis instead of the worst-case scenario.

You may also want to investigate alternative treatments. "If you do some research, you may find a treatment that will at least be a complement to your conventional therapy," Dr. Gordon says.

Understanding Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's is a disease that causes changes in areas of the brain that control memory and reasoning. Why the disease develops is not yet fully understood. At present, it has no cure. But proper care can help most people with Alzheimer's live a comfortable life for many years.

How the Brain Works

The brain controls all the workings of the body and mind. Different areas of the brain control different functions. Certain areas control physical tasks such as walking. Other areas control language skills. Still others control mental tasks such as remembering, concentrating, and decision-making.

Changes in the Brain

In people with Alzheimer's, microscopic structures, called **plaques** and **tangles**, start to form. Brain cells then begin to die. The areas of the brain affected by these changes are the ones that control mental functions such as memory. Other functions, such as movement, are generally not affected until very late in the illness. That's why people with Alzheimer's disease look normal, but cannot form new memories no matter how hard they try.

Who Gets Alzheimer's?

Alzheimer's disease tends to affect people over 65. The older you are, the more likely you are to develop the disease. But people as young as 40 can be affected. All types of people get Alzheimer's. No profession, education level, or race is immune. In some cases, Alzheimer's runs in the family. In other cases, no other family members are affected.

The Effects of Alzheimer's Disease

Symptoms of the disease appear slowly. The average length of time from the first through the last stage is about 9 years. This time can vary widely.

- **In the early stage**, the person seems confused and forgetful. Recent events and conversations are often forgotten. The person may lose important items. However, the distant past may be remembered clearly.
- **In the middle stage**, more help is needed with daily tasks. The person may not know family members, may get lost in familiar places, and may forget how to do simple tasks. He or she may be restless, moody, and unpredictable.
- **In the late stage**, memory, judgment, and reason may be lost completely. Help with every aspect of daily life is generally needed.

Treating Alzheimer's Disease

The goals of treatment are to manage symptoms and keep your loved one comfortable.

- **Medications** may improve symptoms in some cases. The doctor can determine which medications may help your loved one.
- **A management plan** that includes care and supervision is essential.

- **Regular doctor visits** help keep track of your loved one's condition.

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Factors to Consider When Setting Your Investment Goals

There are many factors to consider before setting your investment goals. First, you will need to evaluate your current financial status. To get the best estimate of your status, you can calculate your net worth - that is, your total assets minus your total liabilities. Assets include items such as cash in the bank or credit union, investments, and possessions such as your car and household furnishings. Liabilities are any debts that you owe, such as credit card debts, auto loans, and mortgages.

First, you will need to evaluate your current financial status.

You will also need to identify anything that limits your ability to invest. Limitations can be anything from outstanding debts to a shortage of available cash.

Every type of investment has some risk. However, investors are rewarded for taking market risk. You will need to think hard about your risk tolerance. If you have a high tolerance for risk, you may be able to take more market risk to get higher returns.

How much time do you have to meet your investment goals? This is called your time horizon. The longer you have to invest to achieve a goal, the more likely you are to achieve it. Identify the amount of time you can keep your money invested without withdrawing it. The volatility of an investment is lower over a long period than a short one. A longer time horizon also allows greater results from compounding returns.

Lastly, you need to know how much money you can afford to invest. Can you cut back a little on your spending each month? What is the minimum amount of money you need to live on? Remember, the more you save now, the more you will have later.

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