

How Stress Makes Us Sick

In my obsessive pursuit of understanding the cause of disease, I finally understand that what we are calling disease is really **Dis-Ease, the lack of ease**. In other words, it is **stress**.

Every thought we have is processed through a part of the brain called the limbic system. Since we are wired for survival, we are constantly performing threat assessments. Each thought is perceived as a “threat” or “non-threat”. When we process each thought through our autonomic nervous system, we either send them through the brain and body as **sympathetic (fight or flight)** or they are sent through the **parasympathetic (rest and digest)** stimulation route.

Emotions [thoughts and feelings] turn out to be the most powerful “talker” to our genes. In the 20th century we discovered DNA and it was understood that these things inside of our cells are making our cells do what they do. However, many believed that the cause of disease was “bad genes” inherited from our parents. Epigenetics has shown us that that concept is incorrect. Epi-, which means “above”, informs us that genes are in fact being controlled from something outside of the cells. They are receiving vibrational instructions from above! However, they then follow those commands. Nutrigenomics is the science of how food “talks” to our genes and it is a present day hot topic. Scientist are busy trying to figure out how to come up with the best nutrients and diet to interact with our unique genes. However, here is the problem: Our emotions are bossing the nutrients around. There is an order to the way things interact with our genes -- and emotions trump nutrients.

Emotions interact with genes first. We initially experience emotions, then we have hormonal and chemical reactions and then we have physical reactions.

Here is an example. Let’s say someone jumps from the bushes towards you. You first feel frightened, then you release adrenaline and then your heart races. Actually, adrenaline causes an entire checklist of symptoms throughout your brain and body. Pupils dilate, mucous membranes expand to allow for better breathing through your nose. Blood flow shifts away from salivary glands causing a dry mouth, breathing increases, blood pressure and heartrate increases, blood flow shifts away from gut and sex organs to extremities to fight or to run from a fight. All of this is preceded by an emotion.

People are manifesting disease because they are processing too many thoughts through their fight or flight nervous system and neglecting their relaxing parasympathetic stimulation pathways. Essentially, they are practicing fight or flight thoughts and have become very good at it. Any time we continue to practice an activity the brain will wire it in place. For instance, experienced drivers drive “mindlessly” because driving is now *wired in*. We simply decide where we want to go, get in the car and go! We all did the same thing as we learned to walk, talk, read, write, etc. We now do those things with ease. It is what learning means. So, when we have upsetting thoughts and feelings that cause the blood pressure to be elevated, continuing that practice will wire elevated blood pressure in place, just like we did driving, walking and talking. We are still in a health care system that hasn’t figured out that something invisible is causing something in the physical. We cannot see, quantify or measure thoughts and feelings. Science demands proof of things, this is its limitation. One of the most liberating ideas of my adult life and career was when a doctor at an Institute for Functional Medicine conferences explained to the physicians that we are not scientists! Doctors are clinicians, we are not able to measure everything about our patients. Patients cannot prove their pain, their fatigue or anything that is perceptual. Emotions are not provable. Yet we all know them from our own experiences. The dictionary is full of them. However, no one knows our self-talk and self-criticism, but our feelings are continuously talking to our genes causing our cells to behave the way we do.

Here is how our emotions trump nutrients.... When we are feeling one way, we release one set of hormones and chemicals and if we eat a certain food item we then metabolize the food one way. However, if we are feeling differently, we release different hormones and chemicals and metabolize the same food item a different way. If we are stressed and eat an apple we may release the stress hormone cortisol and take the sugar from the apple and turn it into fat, instead of taking the sugar and putting it away as starch and making sugar available to burn later. However, in a relaxed, happy mood we may be full of endorphins and metabolize it normally. Similarly, if we have a painful memory we can release inflammatory chemicals and then experience pain somewhere in the body. The body part hurts, but we didn’t actually hurt it! We feel things emotionally before we feel them in our physical body. Understanding this will help people understand their own power to control things in their bodies. When we are feeling angry, happy, disappointed, as well

a feeling inadequate or unworthy, we are actually asking our genes to give us expression of that feeling. We must learn that it is necessary to pay attention to how you are feeling emotionally.

You see there is really no disease, just expressions of stress.

The solution to stress is meditation. The purpose of meditation is to shift your focus away from the past or future into the present moment and to relax. Focusing on your breath is paying attention to your ongoing creation. When you cultivate this relaxation practice you begin to wire your brain into relaxation. It is possible to change your brain at any age.