



HIPPOCRATES: 'The natural healing force within each one of us is the greatest force in getting well.'

MIND FULL BODY



West has met East to prove positive emotions really can empower health and wellbeing, as **Divya Kohli** explains

We are living in a 'golden age' when it comes to understanding the connection between the mind and body. Over the past 30 years, there has been a wellspring of scientific interest in 'stress' and the complex effect it has on the body.

We are waking up to factors beyond food and exercise as determinants of good health. We are delving deeper and are actively encouraged – unlike the post-war generation – to consider the impact relationships, finances, time management and our environment are having on how we feel physically.

But what if we could find a way that didn't rely on outer change, or avoiding the stresses of daily life, to manage increased anxiety, uncertainty and the effect of the socio-political landscape? That would be revolutionary, wouldn't it?

Well, not if we look to the East, where traditionally the mind and body have been seen as one. Training the mind and managing emotions as a path to wellbeing has been documented in texts by eastern scholars and mystics for thousands of years.

However, in the West, it seems that it has been the evolution of science that has contributed to the step change in acknowledging the power of the mind both on, and in, the body.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Mind-body medicine is now a funded and growing area of research and application, borne out of ample studies that demonstrate a clear link between thoughts, feelings and emotions and the role they play in physical health, even to the extent of potentially reversing the effects of disease and trauma.

Related to this is neuroplasticity, also known as brain plasticity, it refers to the discovery of the brain's ability to re-organise itself, both physiologically and functionally, throughout a person's life, and the way it does this is based on the changing

environment, behaviour, thoughts and emotions of that person. It replaces the former belief that an adult brain was pretty much set, or hard-wired.

While the idea of neuroplasticity was proposed well over 100 years ago, it's only recently been possible to 'see' inside the brain using functional magnetic resonance imaging and confirm its adaptive ability. This could have some far-reaching consequences for the way we live, our health, culture, treatment and education.

The brain's resilience and ability to adapt means a person can recover from stress and trauma, learn new things and overcome entrenched beliefs and social conditioning. The limits are as yet unknown.

However, it also shows how vulnerable and sensitive we can be, not only to external influences such as relationships and deadlines, but also to our own internal 'self talk' and the messages we choose to believe.

Epigenetics, an emerging area of science that studies changes in organisms caused by modifications in the way genes express themselves (rather than by changes to the genetic code itself), has shattered the belief that genes and DNA control our biology and determine health.

Rather, DNA is controlled by signals from outside the cell, including messages that arise from our thoughts and environment. In other words, what we think and feel, our environment and even what we eat can influence how our genetic traits express themselves.

Cellular biologist Bruce Lipton is a leading authority on how emotions can regulate genetic expression (explained in

his books *Spontaneous Evolution* and *The Biology of Belief*). According to Dr Lipton, the health of your body is not dependent on your DNA, but rather lies within the mechanisms of your cell membrane – and those mechanisms are affected by... yes, you guessed it... your thoughts.

You are not controlled by your genetic make-up, says Dr Lipton; instead, your genetic 'readout' is primarily determined by your internal environment, which he defines as 'your thoughts, attitudes and perceptions'.

This has far-reaching implications when looking at the effect stress has on the

occurrence (or non-occurrence) of a health condition or illness, and similarly on how we can empower ourselves to manage a condition and heal by re-programming our core beliefs.

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UNIVERSAL CHANGES

The emergence of quantum theory at the turn of the 19th century defied the belief that a physical material universe (Newton) was at the heart of what could be known in science. Physicists including Max Planck and Thomas Young started to explore the relationship between energy and the structure of matter. A dramatic shift occurred from thinking the universe and our biology are solely physical and mechanical. With the advent of quantum physics, scientists have acknowledged the invisible, immaterial realm, elevated its status, with some even going as far as to say it's more important than the material realm. To really understand human biology, we need also to comprehend non-physical factors.

As the pioneering engineer, physicist and inventor Nikola Tesla predicted: 'The

FIND YOUR BALANCE

PRACTISE HEART BREATHING FOR CALM

The heart-focused breathing method by HeartMath is a technique that focuses on the heart, the area of our being that emanates the most powerful energy field from our bodies (even more powerful than the energy field of the brain). The technique promotes a sense of wellbeing and coming back to one's centre. Practised regularly, it will calm the nervous system and unify your physical, mental and emotional being.

THE TECHNIQUE

Place one or both hands over your heart and breathe in deeply – think of yourself breathing in through the heart. Do the same thing as you breathe out. Try to breathe a little more deeply than normal (HeartMath recommends you breathe in for about 5–6 seconds and breathe out for 5–6 seconds. But if this is uncomfortable or not possible, then do it at your own pace).

BE SURE TO PRACTISE

Establish your own natural rhythm. Your breathing should be smooth, unforced and pleasant. Do this for about 5 minutes. As you practise, you will be able to continue for longer. It can be beneficial at the beginning and/or end of the day. You can also do it at any time when you notice you have been triggered into a stress response – there is no more important time for a few minutes of heart-focused breathing.



ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE: Studies show that a positive environment, such as a tidy house, can actually boost your immunity and physical health.

day science begins to study non-physical phenomena, it will make more progress in one decade than in all the previous centuries of its existence. To understand the true nature of the universe, one must think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration.'

FROM THE HEART

This groundbreaking way of looking at the universe extends right into our daily life and the way our bodies function. For example, it has been found there is far more to the heart than its ability to pump life-giving oxygenated, nutrient-rich blood around the body.

Through new imaging technology, the heart has been found to generate the largest



ENERGY EMITTED FROM THE HUMAN HEART HAS A DIRECT IMPACT ON THOSE IN CLOSE PROXIMITY

electromagnetic field in the body. Incredibly, this field can be measured up to several feet outside of the body and also between two people standing near to each other. Therefore, the energy emitted from the human heart has a direct impact on its surroundings and those in close proximity.

Scientists at California's HeartMath Institute have been studying this electromagnetic field for two decades and have pioneering evidence the field contains 'emotional information'.

When we feel compassion, love and understanding, the heart 'beats out' a very different message. Indeed, the energy field emitted by the heart communicates

extensively with the brain and body. The heart has a system of neurons, with both short- and long-term memory, that send signals to the brain, which in turn affects our emotional experience.

These signals, or 'intelligence' as the HeartMath Institute calls it, are intimately involved in how we think, feel and respond to the world. From this, researchers have gone on to demonstrate how positive emotions create physiological benefits in the body, while negative emotions do the opposite.

You can boost your immune system, for example, by conjuring up positive emotions, and you can work with the heart itself to change or manage your response to a stressful experience (see panel, left).

One thing's for sure, across physics, biology, chemistry and psychology, we've entered a new era of not just discovering the magnitude of the mind-body connection, but realising how we can empower ourselves from within to determine our health and wellbeing.

It's revolutionary, though speak to a monk, yogi or dedicated meditator, and they'll probably give you a knowing smile. **B**

