

CHANGE YOUR MIND, CHANGE YOUR BODY

*Increasingly
research is showing
that our mind,
perceptions and
beliefs control
our body.
By changing and
developing our
mindset, we can
improve our physical
health, recover
more quickly
from injury and
reduce discomfort
from pain.*

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© May 2016

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For a long time I have been fascinated with the power of the mind and what it may be capable of achieving. In the early 2000s, someone suggested that I read a book by Louise L. Hay. I did, and it made me realise just how much an individual can control their life.

My interest in using the mind to control pain and to heal came a little later when I realised that these factors could be helpful to others and are measurable. I was inspired by the Buddha, who said much about overcoming pain and suffering. I explored the work of Dr David Hamilton, Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn, Shinzen Young, Dr Joseph Murphy, Dr Ernest Rossi, Norman Cousins, Dr Angel Escudero, Hratch Ogali and others. A common thread that emerged is that we can do amazing things when we understand, believe and know how. Of course there are limits, but most of us are probably not even close to the halfway point of what is possible with our minds, let alone reaching the limit.

Here I share some examples which demonstrate that we all have the power to control our pain and strongly influence our recovery with our mind.

Multiple Personality Disorders

Bennett Braun, MD, a specialist in treating multiple personalities at the Rush–Presbyterian–St Luke’s Medical Center in Chicago, reported that many of his patients had several different spectacles—one for each personality—because their vision changed along with their personas. Let’s just think about this. The same person but with a different personality needed a different pair of glasses. This example must be a one-off, surely? No! The American psychiatric press shared a story of patients needing a different drug dosage for an illness depending on which persona they were in. One case showed a woman with diabetes in one persona but not in another, and a young man with an allergy to citrus in one personality was fine in another.¹ All of these examples clearly demonstrate that our mind, perception and belief really do control our body.

Here is a little experiment to help show how you can use your mind to affect your body...

Imagine that you are walking down a dark alley in a city you do not know. A big man steps out in front of you, blocking your way. You turn around to see his accomplice trapping you in the alley. They move towards you menacingly.

What you may have noticed is that your heart rate and breathing increased, just by controlling your thoughts. Now you know that you can make your mind control your body. But you can do more...

Hotel Maids Study

By raising our awareness of the good we are doing to ourselves, we can improve our body. This was shown in an experiment involving 84 female room attendants working in seven different hotels. The amount of physical

work involved in cleaning, moving equipment and furniture as well as making beds was equal to a good workout. The question was asked: "Why are the maids not fitter?" Dr Ellen Langer of Harvard split the maids into two subgroups, with one group told that they were doing more exercise than was expected in one day. One month later, the researchers found that the group with the exercise information had lost more weight and had lower blood pressure than the group without the information.² Just by raising their awareness of their daily activity was enough for the maids to improve their bodies. This demonstrates that by raising our awareness about pain or recovery from a condition, we can have a positive effect on our body.

Superhuman Strength

The phenomenon of "hysterical" or superhuman strength perhaps can best be described by The Silva Method³, which states that any mental and physical change will always come from having the three traits of desire, belief and expectancy. Before expanding on these traits, let's consider examples of hysterical strength.

Marie Payton's granddaughter's attempt to stop a runaway ride-on mower ended in her being trapped beneath it with the blades spinning. Payton freed her granddaughter by simply throwing the mower away.⁴

Jeff Smith was released from beneath a tractor when his two daughters aged 14 and 16 lifted it up enough for him to escape (although one of his arms remained pinned but was later freed by a neighbour using his own tractor). While Smith's tractor was heavy, it was not as heavy as his daughters' wish to save their dad. Their focus and desire to achieve the aim were so high that they entertained no thoughts of doubt.⁵

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So let's break down the desire, belief and expectancy traits to see if The Silva Method can help explain hysterical strength.

• Deep desire for your goal

Do the people carrying out these amazing feats wish to help a loved one to survive a life-threatening situation? You bet they have the desire.

A Zen Buddhist fable highlights a different perspective on the level of desire required to focus on what you want. A man approaches a Zen Master and asks to be shown the path to enlightenment. The Master replies, "Follow me", then stands up and walks the man to a nearby river and into the water. Without warning, the Master forces the man's head under the water and holds it there as the man struggles violently for his life until he is nearly dead. At last the Master pulls up the man, who is gasping for air, and says, "When you want to be enlightened as badly as you wanted to take your next breath just now, come back and see me".

Wanting your recovery or pain reduction as much as you want air, or just really wanting it so much that it becomes your focus, accords with what Napoleon Hill stated: "When your desires are strong enough, you will appear to possess superhuman powers to achieve."⁶

Desire leads on to belief and expectation.

• Wholehearted belief in your goal

Does a person generally believe that they can lift a heavy item like a car? No. Do they believe that a car can be lifted off the ground? Yes. The more we hear of others being able to perform such a feat, the more easily we can set our belief that in the correct situation we would be able to do it. An example is the sub-four-minute mile, which was believed to be physically impossible until Roger Bannister ran it in 3:59.4. Once he did, others had the belief and quite a few people broke the four-minute barrier in quick succession.

• Expectation of achieving your goal

Do the lifters have the expectation of freeing the trapped person? In their intense situation, surely they'd be thinking of nothing else. All they can see in their mind is the person freed from suffering, and that is a key motivating factor in achieving the outcome. The helpers in any superhuman situation have a change in mindset.

Is there any more evidence to back up this change in the rescuers' physical capabilities?

People with multiple personalities, as mentioned earlier, who in one persona have one illness or eye prescription but in another persona have no illness and perfect vision show that the mind can change the body's physical attributes by nothing more than the chemicals and electrical charges that the body produces. What does the body need to do to allow people to perform these superhuman strengths?

"When adrenaline is released by the adrenal medulla...it allows blood to flow more easily to your muscles. This means that more oxygen is carried to your muscles by the extra blood, which allows your muscles to function at elevated levels. Skeletal muscles—those attached to the bones by tendons—are activated by electrical impulses from the nervous system. When they're stimulated, muscles contract, meaning they shorten and tighten. This is what happens when you lift an object, run or throw a punch. Adrenaline also facilitates the conversion of the body's fuel source (glycogen) into its fuel (glucose). This carbohydrate gives energy to muscles, and a sudden burst of glucose also allows muscles to strengthen further."⁷

Another suggestion of what might be happening to the body is that the rescuers have subconsciously sent stronger bolts of electricity to their muscles, perhaps from their focused intention or their new superhuman persona, such as when a person receives a placebo and their body produces the natural equivalent of the fake drug. Here's another way of looking at this:

"You've heard of people being thrown across rooms by shocks, or their hands clamping down on live wires so hard they can't be

loosed? It's not the current that causes it, but our muscles' reaction to the current. If nothing else, it demonstrates the potential for muscle use that's not normally available to us."⁸

So is it the combination of desire, belief and expectancy or something else altogether that pushes the body into the state of releasing superhuman strength? Only more research will give us the answers—and may even help us extend our power of mind over body.

Intention and Visualisation

The power of intention for mind–body healing and pain management is extraordinary. It plays a big part, and only with that focus can we work towards achieving our goals. Here are some examples of intention.

- The late Hrach Ogali helped many people regain mobility after serious spinal accidents. His work was contentious because he would start by telling patients that they would walk again before working on their mind and beliefs. His documentary *Miracle Steps* follows how he helped Gemma Quinn, who had broken her neck, get sensations back in her feet, which doctors had stated was impossible due to the clean nature of the break.⁹

- A 2007 study by the University of Cincinnati looked at the power of visualisation. Out of the 32 patients involved, the 16 in the group who received visualisation alongside their physiotherapy had more movement than the other group of 16 who received only physiotherapy. The people who visualised had set their intention and goals to help them move closer to the desired outcome—something that athletes do prior to any event.¹⁰

- A great example of intention is the "wiggle your big toe" scene from the film *Kill Bill*.¹¹ The drive, determination and belief demonstrated by the character showed that nothing was going to stop her from wiggling her toe and walking again. I know it's a film, but intent and belief are real and we can choose to believe in and respond to any situation that we wish.

If we choose to survive the diagnosis, our chances of recovery are much higher than if we choose to be a victim. This is supported by a King's College London study that explored the views and beliefs of breast cancer patients three months after their mastectomy. Patients who had a fighting spirit or denial had a much higher rate of survival after five and 10 years than those who felt hopeless and helpless.¹²

Occasionally, doctors can get in the way of our setting our goals

and intentions when they say things like "You will never walk again" or "You only have three months to live". Build your own intentions and goals, and don't let others tell you what you can and cannot do.

Personality and Behaviour

The Institute of Noetic Sciences has collated many studies that looked into people who have recovered from cancer or had a case of spontaneous remission.¹³ The researchers reported eight characteristics associated with remission and survival:

- Changing from dependency to autonomy combined with activities, attitudes and behaviours promoting increased autonomy, awareness of themselves, others and their environment, love, joy, playfulness,

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satisfaction, laughter and humour.

- Facing the crisis, despair, sadness and pain, and discovering they have the power to find a new way of life that is fulfilling and meaningful.

- Taking control of their lives (personal, professional, emotional, spiritual, medical) and living each day fully, combined with a willingness to evaluate their beliefs and attitudes and change old beliefs and attitudes that are no longer appropriate or adequate.

- Becoming comfortable with and expressing and accepting their positive and negative emotions/feelings, their needs, wants and desires (physical, emotional, spiritual), and being able to say no when it's necessary for their wellbeing.

- Having at least one strong loving relationship, a strong connection to another person, an activity, an organisation(s), changing the quality of interpersonal relationships with spouses, friends, family, neighbours, doctors, nurses, etc., in a positive way, and having motivation to help others.

- Working in partnership with their physicians and participating in decisions related to their health and wellbeing.

- Finding meaning in the experience of cancer, finding reasons to live, accepting the diagnosis but not the prognosis, seeing the disease as a challenge, and having belief in a positive outcome and a renewed desire, will and commitment to life.

- Choosing activities and practices that promote increased awareness and reduce stress (e.g., imagery, stress reduction, yoga), and showing renewed spiritual (soul) awareness that often results in a spiritual practice (e.g., prayer, meditation, religious affiliation, connection to nature).

The eight characteristics are all within our control by changing the way we think, behave and act. This all starts in the mind, and with the correct power of intention we can increase our chances of staying healthy and recovering from any illness.

Noesitherapy: Stopping the Stress Response

Angel Escudero, MD, has performed many operations with no anaesthetic other than his mind technique, *noesitherapy*. It may sound a little "out there", but it is effective. The first part of his instruction is to fill your mouth with as much saliva as you can. Dr Escudero states: "Fluid, liquid saliva is produced by the salivary glands under the stimulation of the vagus, a part of the parasympathetic nervous system."¹⁴

According to the person who trained me in this technique, the reason why this works is that saliva removes a pillar from the stress process, stopping the next stress response being activated. The second part of noesitherapy is to say to yourself, while keeping the saliva in your mouth, "My right arm [or any other body part] is completely psychologically anaesthetised". Say this with conviction and purpose over and over again.

It may sound too simple to be true, directly suggesting to yourself that you are out of pain, but the many examples in the BBC documentary series *Your Life in Their Hands* show its effectiveness.

When training in this technique, I discovered how quickly everyone on the course could attain a level of pain relief within a few minutes. Has Dr Escudero found the secret formula of saliva, or is it just the power of direct suggestion? Either way, lots of people have had operations with nothing more for pain control than noesitherapy. What other things could we directly suggest our body to do?

Placebo Pain Relief

Henry Beecher, MD, made two interesting discoveries about our mind and pain during his time in the army. During World War II, he ran out of morphine while treating injured US soldiers. He continued injecting the injured with just saline. Amazingly, 40 per cent of the soldiers reported pain relief from the placebo.¹⁵ (A University of California study was the first to prove that when a painkilling placebo was taken, the brain produced its own natural analgesics which are like the

body's own version of morphine.¹⁶) Then Dr Beecher found that, compared to civilians, soldiers had a higher pain threshold and needed less morphine for the same type of injury. He concluded that this was due to how their circumstances changed because of the injury: the soldier was out of harm's way, whereas in civilian life the person might stress over getting to work, providing for their family and paying medical expenses.¹⁷

This suggests that if we can control our emotional response to our pain, we are able to focus on controlling the discomfort as a purely physical sensation.

Suffering, Pain and Resistance

Author Haruki Murakami recounted: "Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional."¹⁸ But how can we reduce or even remove the suffering? Shinzen Young provides an answer in his "pain equation".¹⁹ Simply put, it states that

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suffering (S) is equal to pain (P) multiplied by resistance (R), that is, $S = P \times R$. To suffer, we need pain and resistance. So let's say we don't resist the pain and just accept the discomfort, meaning the resistance is at zero. What would be our amount of suffering? According to the pain equation, even if the pain is 100, the suffering would be zero, leaving us with just the sensation of discomfort.

Many mind–body and medical techniques can help us deal with just the pain and discomfort: neurolinguistic programming submodalities, metaphors, hypnosis, breathing exercises, decatastrophising, intention, virtual reality and meditation, to mention a few.

This pain equation clearly demonstrates how we can gain control over our pain and suffering. Most of the suffering of our pain comes from the story, expectations and worries we have about how it is going to affect us in the future or what it was like the last time we had it. If we just accept the pain as part of where we are at this moment, we can build a better future for ourselves.

Resisting something that we don't want seems to make sense. However, the problem with this is that we tense up and don't allow for things to flow. I was once asked to hold a £1 coin tightly in each of my clenched hands and not let go of them or open my hands. The person then offered me a £10 note, but because I was holding the coins so tightly I was not open for anything else to come my way. I had stopped the flow.

When we accept the discomfort, this opens us up to possibilities and creates a foundation on which to build the rest of our life—just by not resisting but accepting. Flowing with everything exactly as it is in the moment allows the discomfort to be felt and to leave the body. The saying that "a feeling only has one purpose and that is to be felt" rings true here. If we resist and don't allow the feeling to be expressed, it will sit inside us and manifest as illness or something else until it has been felt through to the end. Resisting pain, as the equation suggests, would cause suffering. However, we now know that accepting and feeling a feeling through to the end is a great way that we can gain more control over our discomfort and our life.

The Mind Rules

We've learnt that multiple personalities create different physical conditions, that raising your awareness of your life can change your body as it did for the maids, that noesitherapy can directly turn off your pain, and that certain characteristics are most likely to ensure recovery. We've also learnt that you can harness the power of the placebo and control your emotional reaction to your pain and suffering. So we now know that we truly can

affect our recovery and levels of discomfort with the use of our mind. We can do this with a variety of techniques ranging from meditation, hypnosis and visualisation to changing our perceptions and beliefs.

What has been shared in this article is just touching the surface. There is so much more we can do by changing our mindset to improve our body. I hope this article has whetted your appetite to learn more about our potential in this area. ∞

About the Author:

For over 20 years, Mark Baker has had a passion for the subconscious mind and its power to affect the body. His interest grew when he realised that the results of the mind can clearly be demonstrated on the body through pain recovery or reduction in discomfort, and so can be measured and recorded. As a result, he set up his blog <http://www.possiblemind.co.uk>. He went on to train as a psychotherapist and a hypnotherapist, specialising in pain management and recovery. Mark Baker is the author of *Your*

Body, Only Better (2015), a collection of cases and techniques that help develop belief in the power of mind, available in Kindle or paperback from Amazon or <http://books.possiblemind.co.uk/>. He can be contacted by email at info@possiblemind.co.uk.

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