

The Mind Body Connection

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To begin with the mind and body are not two separate entities! In the past, they have been treated as such however as we discover more about our wonderful bodies we have begun to acknowledge what our healers of the past always knew - what affects the mind also affects the body and vice versa. An example of this is the influence of Serotonin on both mood and cellular function throughout the body. I think of Serotonin as being like Chamomile for the brain in that it plays a part in our feeling of calm and our in our ability to think more clearly. Research suggests that when we have sufficient levels of Serotonin, it allows for messages between the brain and the body to travel more smoothly and efficiently (L Tecott, 2007). This in turn means that the cells in our bodies get their instructions in a clearer and more timely manner. When we are facing ongoing physically, cognitively and or emotionally demanding situations, our Serotonin levels can drop and this is linked to the drop in the performance of the cells throughout our bodies. When Serotonin levels are insufficient, each cell does not metabolise efficiently, like a fire that doesn't burn hot enough, less energy and more "smoke" is produced. In the body this translates to less energy output and more free radicals (unattached oxygen molecules) circulating throughout the body. The result of which can be felt as lethargy and loss of vitality. This in turn also plays a part in low mood and adds to the difficulty in functioning, that those with anxiety disorder and depression experience.



Mental health conditions are often referred to as being "all in the mind" however as the above illustrates the effects of mental health conditions are felt throughout our whole self. This understanding helps in part to explain why those experiencing mental health conditions, like anxiety disorders and depression, cannot simply "snap out of it". Recovery from these conditions takes time, as the health of our whole self needs to improve, not just our outlook.

Recently there has been much talk of "The Mind/Gut Connection". Discussion on this topic and research into the connection between our mood and the health of our gut has been around for some time however it now appears that the public interest in this is gathering momentum. Checking out the local bookshop I noticed at least three new releases on this topic! The premise of the mind/gut connection is based on the understanding that, in addition to allowing the nutrients from what we eat to travel into our body, the gut also metabolizes neurotransmitters such as Serotonin, vital to our ability to manage mood. In this way, when our gut is suffering our mood also suffers. The goal of building and maintaining good gut health starts with understanding what dietary requirements suit you best. Generally, it includes eating a broad range of healthy foods. We have all heard about the benefits of a good dietary intake of anti-oxidants e.g. vitamin C, the function of which are to support our

immune systems to “mop up” the extra oxygen molecules, which helps contribute to improved health and vitality. Including foods that contain anti-oxidants such as fruit and vegetables, as part of a balanced diet, not only contributes to a healthy body, it also contributes to a healthy mind. A regular intake of dietary anti-inflammatory agents is also believed to play a part in improving mood e.g. Turmeric.

Additional ways in which we can support mental health is to support our general health by being mindful of the basics: getting enough sleep (7 to 8 hours for adults and 10 to 12 hours for children and adolescents); 20 minutes of mild to moderate exercise daily and just as importantly taking time out to rest body and mind. Practices such as meditation and yoga are great examples of ways in which we can support our wellbeing. Fun fact: Golden Bacillus, *Myobacterium vaccae*, found in soil has been shown to stimulate serotonin production (C. Lowery et al 2007) so I would suggest considering gardening as another activity worth a go.

I believe our health goals are more likely to be achieved when we consider ourselves as a whole and not just the parts. When it comes to us, the whole will always be greater than the sum of our parts.

For more information about mental health concerns the following sites are recommended:

Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au

Black Dog Institute: [www,blackdoginstitute,org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

References

Serotonin and the Orchestration of Energy Balance by Laurence H. Tecott, *Cell Metabolism*, Volme 6, Issue 5, 7 november 2007

Identification of an Immune-response Mesolimbocortical Serotonergic System: Potential Role in the Regulation of Emotional Behaviour by Christopher Lowery et al. published online on March 28, 2007 in *Neuroscience*.

