

A woman struggling with a health condition once confessed to me that she honestly believed her body was none of her business. In her mind, her body was much like her car, therefore, when it broke down, she would take it to an expert, hoping he or she could fix it.

Is that how you think about your body? Do you believe it's none of your business? As a physician who spent 12 years training and 10 years practising, I too used to believe I knew your body better than you do. But while I may have a better understanding of arteries, or wield a scalpel more expertly, nobody knows your body better than you, therefore, you're the real expert when it comes to preventing illness and treating yourself.

The placebo effect

The medical establishment has been proving for more than 50 years that the mind can heal the body. We call it the 'placebo effect', and we've proven in clinical trials that a combination of

positive belief and a nurturing healthcare provider leads to clinical improvement of health conditions in 18-80 percent of cases.

How does the placebo effect work? When you're ill, you tend to worry and get fearful, and that fear triggers the amygdala to activate the fight or flight stress response, which in turn activates your hypothalamus, then pituitary gland, then adrenal glands, the latter of which churn out stress hormones such as cortisol and epinephrine into your system. Over time, these hormones can poison your body.

When patients in clinical trials believe they're being administered some new wonder drug, their internal stress responses are turned off, and the counterbalancing relaxation response flips on. And here's the crux of the matter: your body has natural self-repair mechanisms that keep it in balance, but they're only functional when your nervous system is relaxed! When you're physically relaxed, your body is free to do what it does best: heal itself. To optimise your self-repair mechanism, read on.

Reduce stress

Consider all the facets of your life: relationships, professional life, creativity, spirituality, finances, your sex life, physical and mental health, and the environment in which you live. Which aspects are triggering stress responses in your mind and your body? Are you in a toxic relationship? Is your job sucking the soul out of you? Are you stressed about finances? What action steps might you take to minimise these stressors? Sometimes it requires setting boundaries in unhealthy relationships, talking to your boss about how things need to change, or taking leaps of faith that help you make long overdue changes.

While these actions may be challenging and not something you can do immediately, especially if they are big life changes, finding other ways to create physiological relaxation can be easier to achieve right away. Try these scientifically proven ways to activate the relaxation response and get your body healing itself.



1 Meditate

Dr. Herbert Benson, author of *The Relaxation Response*, suggests choosing a word that resonate with you, like 'peace' or 'Om' and repeating it to yourself while passively disregarding everyday thoughts that inevitably come to mind. Do this for 20 minutes a day.

2 Express yourself

Creative expression releases endorphins and other feel-good neurotransmitters, reduces depression and anxiety, improves your immune function, and relieves physical pain.

3 Laugh more

Laughter stimulates your organs, enhances your intake of oxygen, and floods your body with the endorphins that stimulate self-repair.

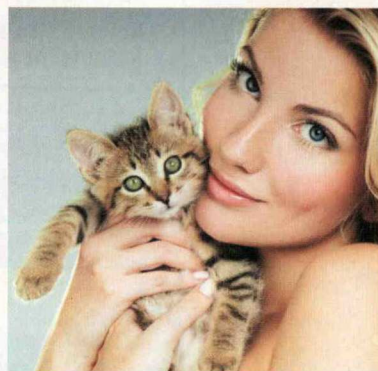


4 Have sex

Women with healthy sex lives live longer, have a lower risk of heart disease and stroke, are less susceptible to contracting breast cancer, bolster their immune systems, sleep better, appear more youthful, enjoy improved fitness, have enhanced fertility, get relief from chronic pain, experience fewer migraines, and suffer less depression – all fabulous excuses to get busy between the sheets!

5 Play with animals

Pets can soothe your nervous system, boost levels of oxytocin and endorphins, and leave you feeling loved and calm.



6 Engage in work you love

While toxic work environments trigger stress responses, doing work you love can do just the opposite. When you feel as if your life has purpose and you're following a calling, the body relaxes and self-repair mechanisms get to work.

7 See an alternative health care practitioner

Whether you're getting a massage, an energy healing session, or acupuncture, being the relaxed patient on someone's table can do wonders for your nervous system.



8 Spend time with friends
 Feeling connected, exchanging hugs, and alleviating any sense of chronic loneliness that predisposes one to illness can work wonders when it comes to relaxing your nervous system, so make time for physical affection, whether it's hugging a friend, child, parent or partner.

9 Attend a religious service
 People who attend religious services reportedly live up to 14 years longer than those who don't. It's thought this is due to a combination of the health benefits that come from being part of a caring community, as well the activation of relaxation responses that accompany activities like prayer. But you needn't be part of an organised religion; joining a spiritually like-minded group, such as a meditation or yoga class, can be just as effective.

10 Repetitive physical exercise

The proverbial 'runner's high' can be achieved by all sort of physical exercise that reduces stress and activates the relaxation responses.

When you tend the garden of your mind, you can be your own doctor and make your body ripe for the kinds of miracles enjoyed by people who experience spontaneous remission from seemingly 'incurable' illnesses.

I'm not suggesting you don't also seek conventional medical treatment; we've made wondrous advances in modern medicine that should be utilised, after all. What I am saying is that your body is still your business, even if you're undergoing conventional treatment, and that it's just as critical, if not more so, to treat your mind to help yourself heal you from the inside out.

But what if you're doing everything to heal your mind but yet your body is still sick, I hear you ask? Blame, shame and guilt have no place in a healing journey, so don't feel any blame towards yourself, as it will only trigger a stress response that limit your body's capacity to heal itself even further. The goal is to do what you can to optimise your body's chances of healing, then to surrender, knowing in your heart that you've done what you can.



Lissa Rankin is the author of *Mind Over Medicine* (Hay House, £12.99). For more information about her work visit lissarankin.com

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