MIND-BODY Medicine

Lissa Rankin

R LISSA RANKIN'S PASSION IS HELPING US to understand that we all have an inner healing power which we can learn to harness when we access the awesome power of our mind. She travels the world lecturing about how we can think more holistically when it comes to health and wellbeing.

You've become an advocate for mind-body medicine. Was there a major turning point that left you questioning the conventional approach to medicine?

When I was working with sick patients from the inner city of Chicago, it made sense that they weren't healthy: they ate poorly, smoked, drank, and never exercised. But then I took a job at an integrative medical practice in posh Marin County, where my patients religiously followed organic, vegan diets, worked out with personal trainers, got eight hours of sleep every night, took their vitamins, and spent a fortune on the best healthcare money can buy - and they were still sick. I started to wonder: What if there's more to health than what they taught me in medical school?

Around that time, I became fascinated with case studies in the medical literature of spontaneous remissions from seemingly "incurable" illnesses: stage 4 cancers that disappeared; an HIV-positive patient who became HIV-negative; vanishing cases of heart disease. I wanted to know whether there was any scientific validity to what some New Age gurus teach - that you can heal yourself. I wondered if we might have some control over whether we're blessed with spontaneous remission from illness, or whether we stay sick. (Spoiler alert - you can influence the outcome!) Mind Over Medicine is a compilation of the mind-blowing data I compiled from the scientific literature regarding these enquiries.

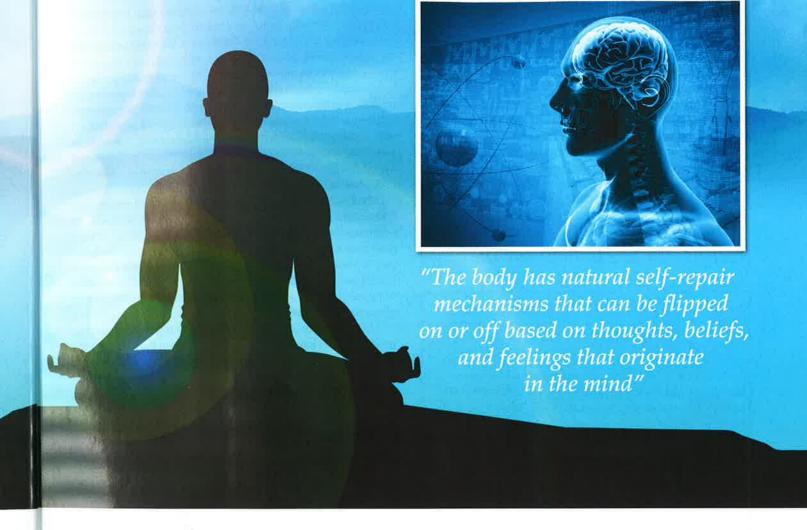


Photo: Monique Feil

What do you mean when you say "you can heal yourself?" The medical establishment has been proving that the body can heal itself for over 50 years. We call it "the placebo effect", and we've been trying to outsmart it for decades. We know that in clinical trials, patients being treated with sugar pills, saline injections, and even fake surgeries, get better anywhere from

The placebo effect is a thorn in the side of modern medicine. It's an inconvenient truth that gets in the way of proving that new treatments are more effective than letting nature take its course. But the placebo effect is nothing to be avoided. It's something to embrace, because it provides concrete evidence that the body is equipped with innate selfrepair mechanisms that have the power to cure. When you cut yourself, your body knows how to mend the cut. When your bone breaks, the bone knows how to stitch itself back together again. We all make cancer cells every day, and the body disposes of them. Infectious invaders, foreign bodies, broken proteins - the body can handle these things, assuming those self-repair mechanisms are functioning properly.

YOUR MIND CAN HEAL YOUR BODY



So that's what I mean when I say "you can heal yourself" - that the body has natural self-repair mechanisms that can be flipped on or off based on thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that originate in the mind.

What do you mean when you say you can flip your self-repair mechanisms on or off? If the body knows how to repair itself, why would we ever want to turn them off?

This was one of the most shocking things I discovered. The nervous system has two modes of operation: the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is dominant during what Walter Cannon at Harvard termed "the stress response", also known as "fight-or-flight". The parasympathetic nervous system is in charge during what Herbert Benson at Harvard called "the relaxation response", which is the opposite of the stress response.

Only when the relaxation response is in effect do the body's natural self-repair mechanisms function properly! It makes sense. When your body is preparing to fight or flee, it needn't worry about preventive maintenance. Why bother eating up cancer cells or repairing broken proteins when you're about to get eaten by a cave bear?

The stress response exists to protect you. It's meant to get you out of harm's way when your life is in danger. But these

days, the average person has 50 stress responses per day. It's no wonder chronic illnesses are at epidemic levels. Every time you have a stressful thought, belief, or feeling, your brain spits out harmful, disease-inducing stress hormones like cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine that shut off your body's self-repair mechanisms. On the other hand, every time you have positive thoughts, beliefs, or feelings, you release healing hormones like oxytocin, nitric oxide, dopamine, and endorphins that shift you to the relaxation response, where your body can get to work repairing what's broken. How healthy are your thoughts, beliefs, and feelings?

So should we just ditch modern medicine? If the body knows how to repair itself, why bother going to the doctor?

To say that you can heal yourself is sort of a misnomer because the scientific evidence concludes that the role of the healer is essential. When a doctor, nurse, or alternative healthcare provider tends and nurtures you, believes in your capacity to heal yourself, and promises you that you won't have to navigate your healing journey alone, your relaxation responses are activated and self-repair becomes more likely.

But even so, that doesn't mean we shouldn't take advantage of the miracles of modern medicine. Yes, there are documented cases of people who have experienced spontaneous remissions from cancer, coronary artery disease, stroke, even a gunshot

wound to the head left untreated, but I don't recommend tempting fate. By all means, get treatment for your cancer; go to the ER when you're having a heart attack or stroke; call 911 if you're injured in a car accident. My husband cut two fingers off his hand with a table saw. No amount of mindbody medicine would have reattached those fingers, so God bless Dr Jones, the microsurgeon who reattached all those bones, nerves, arteries and muscles! Medical care, especially emergency medical care, saves lives, and we should take advantage of it.

What I'm saying is that we shouldn't depend on it exclusively. It's important to get to the root cause of why you might be sick or injured in the first place. What predisposed

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that cancer to grow? Why were you susceptible to that infection, when there were probably many others who were exposed to it but didn't contract an illness? What in your life might be causing that chronic pain?

When you can identify – and rectify – issues in your life that make you susceptible to illness, you're more likely to experience a full and lasting cure.

So are you suggesting that if someone continues to be ill, in spite of medical treatment, it's his or her fault?

There's no place for blame, shame, or guilt on anyone's healing journey. Those kinds of pointless emotions only trigger stress responses that make it harder to heal.

No, I'm not suggesting that illness is anyone's fault. What I am saying is that your body is your business, and you can take active measures to influence whether you get – and stay – optimally well. Too many patients just hand their bodies over to doctors the way they hand their cars over to mechanics. But unlike cars, our bodies do know how to heal themselves – at least a percentage of the time – and we can make changes in our lives to reduce stress responses and increase relaxation responses, thereby making our bodies ripe for miracles.

That's the real ticket. It's all about changing the ratio of stress responses and relaxation responses in the body. You can do this by either reducing stress responses or increasing relaxation responses – or ideally both!

So how do you reduce stress responses? How do you increase relaxation responses?

In Mind Over Medicine, I teach the '6 Steps To Healing Yourself', which teaches you exactly how to diagnose the root causes of your illness and write 'The Prescription' for yourself. But in short, you have to tap into the part of you I call your "Inner Pilot Light", the part that knows what's true for you and can act as your inner doctor. Your Inner Pilot Light will help you assess what in your life is triggering your stress responses. Is

it your toxic marriage? Your soul-sucking job? Your two-hour commute? Your nagging mother-in-law? Your chaotic living environment? Your anxiety or depression? Your pessimistic way of viewing the world?

Once you've identified what is triggering your stress responses, it's time to think about how you might increase relaxation responses in your body. Which scientifically-proven techniques for activating relaxation responses will work for you? Meditation? Creative expression? Playing with animals? Laughter? Yoga? Massage? Engaging in work you love? Getting a hug? Being with friends? Sex? Seeing an alternative medicine practitioner? Exercise?

Once you're clear on how you can reduce stress responses and increase relaxation responses, it's time for the fun part — writing the prescription for yourself. But this isn't like any prescription you've likely ever received from a doctor. Perhaps part of your overall prescription will include drugs or surgery, but the prescription you'll write for yourself is a series of action steps you'll be taking to reduce stress responses and increase relaxation responses.

Then comes the brave part – putting your personal treatment plan into action! When you do, you make your body ripe for miracles. *Anything* – including spontaneous remission – is possible.

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You're on a mission to heal America's healthcare system. How do you plan to do that?

If everyone involved in the healthcare system – patients and healthcare providers alike – expanded how they view health in the same way as I teach in *Mind Over Medicine*, our entire healthcare system would start to shift. I believe our healthcare system is badly broken because we've lost respect for the body's ability to heal itself. As healthcare providers, we've become arrogant about our power to control disease, and we've forgotten the healing power of love. Somewhere along the way, we've decided that a patient who heals himself is threatening. Even if we know, as physicians, that the body has natural self-repair mechanisms, we cling to believing that we've achieved a level of mastery over nature. Spontaneous remissions prove that, sometimes, we just haven't. This is a narcissistic wound for physicians, but it's something we simply must get over if we want to heal healthcare.

But the responsibility for healing healthcare lies not just with doctors, but with patients. If, instead of mindlessly handing our bodies over to doctors, we viewed illness as an opportunity to bring our lives back into alignment with our truth, illness would become a compass leading directly to our true north. As a patient, you must trust that you have within you natural self-repair mechanisms that are under the control of your mind.

It's going to require a quantum shift on the part of both patients and healthcare providers in order to rescue our broken healthcare system. But I believe it's possible. It's going to take a grass roots effort. It requires healing the doctor–patient relationship and reclaiming the heart of medicine. I know it seems hopeless to think that healthcare can reclaim its heart, but just as I believe there are no incurable illnesses, I also believe there are no incurable systems.

In the documentary *I Am*, filmmaker Tom Shadyac shared that when animals decide to switch watering holes, it all starts with a shift of consciousness. They drink out of one watering hole until 51% of the animals decide to drink from a new watering hole, and then the rest of the animals all jump. I think we're getting close to that 51%.

This article is supplied by the office of Lissa Rankin and has previously been published in our Swedish magazine *Inspire*.

LISSA RANKIN, M.D. is an integrative medicine physician, author, speaker, artist, and founder of the popular online health and wellness communities LissaRankin.com. Her research led her to discover that patients have self-healing powers beyond our wildest imaginings, which we can effectively manipulate with the mind.



