

Health Begins in the Mind: Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Health

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Although many of us are generally satisfied with our health, it is encouraging to realize that slight improvements and simple adjustments can make a world of difference in terms of more energy, increased stamina, higher resistance to disease, slowing down the aging process, improving sleep, managing stress, etc. If we “intend” to be healthy, we adopt attitudes and behaviors that support our intention, but our thoughts remain the starting point -- they can help or hinder our journey. Do you recognize any of these “unhealthy” mind notes?

1. It will never happen to me.

Alarming cancer rates, increases in degenerative illnesses as well as rampant heart disease remind us daily how easy it can be to “lose” our health. Surprise, shock, fear and depression often overwhelm the person who “suddenly” becomes ill. However, while the diagnosis is sudden, the disease itself has likely been building for years. Many diseases are preventable but we first need to acknowledge that “it” can happen to anyone, including ourselves. Our lifestyle, eating and physical activity habits create a context for wellness or disease. We also have genetic dispositions over which we may have little control, but we can take full responsibility for the lifestyle elements that we do control. If we don’t, who will?

Healthy results come from taking concrete steps such as eliminating exposure to cigarette smoke, drinking more water, eating more fruit, reducing our sugar intake, exercising more, managing our stress, keeping an open mind.... Health is optimized one decision at a time. When it comes to building better health, intent is everything, but it needs to be followed-up with action!

2. I Will Take Care of It Later.

Health-oriented individuals pay attention to their bodily symptoms and are determined to understand what a particular symptom means and why it is manifesting itself at this time. Take a moment to reflect upon your own health. Go back 5, 10 years if you need to. Do you notice that the same health problems keep occurring over and over? Or are new symptoms appearing each week, each month, each year? What is your body trying to tell you? A symptom is a way for our body to communicate with our mind. If we choose to ignore the signals, aren’t we telling ourselves that our own body and health are not important?

When do these signals become important enough for us to deal with them?

Healthy results come from creating a lifestyle that doesn't put off until tomorrow what can be improved today. When it comes to wellness, procrastination can have devastating results. Many people tell themselves that they will take care of it soon but they never get around to it. This "check mentality" (as in v - it's done when it really isn't) perpetuates the illusion that we are taking care of our health.

3. That's just the way I am.

Failing to recognize our inner locus of control when it comes to personal health planning is an old paradigm that needs to be challenged. Each one of us has significant control over our nutrition and lifestyle yet many of us fail to recognize this personal power. For example, we have the power to choose what we eat and drink every day, but we must choose mindfully, realizing that food is not only delicious to eat but is it also nourishment for our body's systems (cells, muscles, bones, organs). We have been conditioned to adopt a mindset where our health is typically someone else's responsibility -- doctors, health specialists, nurses. We can update this way of thinking and recognize our role as "personal health manager". It begins with each one of us.

Healthy results come from being honest with ourselves, listening to our body, and doing what needs to be done in order to feel better, prevent disease, and increase our overall quality of life. Accepting responsibility for our own health is one of life's most important and consequential decisions. Genetics do play a role that cannot be ignored but whatever health hand we have been dealt, there are opportunities for us to build wellness. We can begin where we are today..

4. I don't know where to start (so I simply don't start...).

Many people are well intentioned for a while (such as when the new year rolls in or when they come back from their holidays), but their motivation doesn't last. It can be a question of unrealistic goals within an impossible timeframe or it can be a lack of clear and measurable goals. A personal health plan needs to be broken down in achievable goals. The following is an example of a well-intentioned goal lacking precision - "My goal is to be healthy". Such a goal needs to be broken down in order to focus attention and action where it is needed. For example: My goal is to be healthy and I will achieve this by following steps such as...

- I will walk 30 minutes 3 times a week.
- I will take the larger meal of the day at noon instead of at night in order to have more time to burn calories.
- I will consult a nutritional practitioner to help me select foods and supplements to build optimal health and better deal with my body's symptoms.
- I will stop eating fried foods.
- I will drink 6-8 glasses of water every day.
- I will eat at least one vegetarian meal each week.
- I will limit my deserts to two per week and will choose healthier deserts.
- I will eat two fruits every single day.

Healthy results come from a plan of action that has measurable and attainable results within a reasonable timeframe. Each small step brings success. Clear and measurable goals help us stay focused and facilitate our health planning and decision-making on a daily basis. We can be proud of each healthy decision we make day by day.

5. I'm too busy!

Most people realize that their car will not run properly unless it is given the proper nourishment and care. They know that if they ignore their car's needs, they will eventually run into problems. Yet, people don't make that same connection when it comes to their own bodies which may be feeling run down or sick due to lack of basic care (not enough nutrient-rich foods, non-restorative sleep, irregular physical activity, insufficient relaxation time). Many people believe they are too rushed to cook a healthy breakfast, and then choose a calorie-rich pastry when they feel the need for a quick "pick-me-up" at mid-morning. Others skip lunch, because they have too much work to do, and then wonder why they feel so terrible around 4 o'clock in the afternoon. They are running on empty!

Healthy results come from taking the time to examine our life, updating our beliefs about health and taking action. If we are talking about our health problems more than we are about the balance and energy in our life, this might be a cue for change. We can begin by taking 30 minutes out of our schedule each week to plan a healthy lifestyle. Our body and health is our responsibility. If we're too busy for health, it may be time to review our life priorities. Being healthy requires some effort and planning but the rewards of healthy living far outweigh the perils of illness. Hum, food for thought...