

Emotions and Your Well-being

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Emotions are a fact of life for all human beings. Until recently, there seemed to be little we could do about our feelings other than express or hide them. Experts now tell us that feelings play a large role on how our body heals and stays healthy. Take a closer look at how your emotions both help and threaten your general level of health and well-being.

We all have them. Positive, uplifting soaring feelings. Bad dark gloomy moods. Surging fiery emotions. They're a fact of everyday life, something we often take for granted. They may seem very hard, if not impossible to control. Just natural reactions to what we think and experience. Non-negotiable. Or are they? Can we learn to work with our emotions - to shape our feelings?

Experts say we can. Not only that, but most recommend that we do. Cruising through the low feelings and bringing ourselves back up to a balanced emotional level can benefit both our mental outlook and physical well-being. Emotions are connected to the personal meaning that we give to events, things, situations, people and experiences. This personal meaning can be changed and transformed, if we choose to do so.

Causal Chain of Emotions



The Emotional-Body Connection

We all have basic emotional needs for bonding with other people and for healthy emotional expression. Medical researchers consider emotions to be a sort of biofeedback gauge for our bodies. Five particular emotions: pain, anger, fear, pleasure and love are thought to be directly related to our physical selves. The first three are seen as "danger" emotions that warn us of unmet needs or immediate threat, while the last two are "comfort" emotions. Love and pleasure give us signals that we can relax and enjoy, that our needs are satisfied.

People who tend to repress feeling the danger emotions often move into the emotion of hopelessness. This has been linked with cancer and other serious diseases. It is important to express old emotional pain, anger and fears that stop us from feeling love and pleasure. This may mean drilling through layers of repressed emotions and beliefs. Ones that we have carried around with us for years, even decades.

We feel many more emotions, yet most relate to the basic five mentioned above. To benefit from healthy positive emotions, we may need to work on developing emotional mastery. This doesn't mean feeling no emotions or being stoic. It means being able to transform our emotions by adopting empowering and health-sustaining beliefs about ourselves, our lives and the world around us. These changed healthy beliefs lead us to feel healthier emotions like courage, empathy and tolerance.

Scientists have discovered a direct link between the emotional centers in the brain and the immune system. Healthy emotions can help us resist infections, colds and flus. People diagnosed with serious illnesses often fare better or worse depending on their habitual emotions. In studies,

people diagnosed with diseases like leukemia, heart problems and cancer lived longer if their emotions were mostly positive and uplifting. Habitual feelings of fear, anger, hopelessness, sadness or pessimism coincided with faster declines in physical health and even death.

Emotional Habits

If we feel churning emotions like anger, fear, and pain on a habitual level, they take their toll. Overstimulated hormones race through our blood which taxes our heart, our immune and nervous systems and the way we digest our food. On the other hand, when we habitually feel contentment, pleasure, joy and love, relaxing hormones are at work, which help our bodies function as they are meant to. We sleep better, heal faster, interact more congenially and enjoy a brighter mental outlook.



The key to this shift is to work on our limiting beliefs and the emotional reactions that follow. Looking at life philosophically helps. Accepting people for what they are helps. Most importantly, accepting yourself gives you power to learn from your experiences and to try harder next time without getting depressed or angry with yourself.

Emotional Mastery

Ideally, emotional mastery or intelligence is shaped as we grow up. Sadly, this is not always the case. Sometimes habitual negative emotions surface when things happen, emotions that reinforce a negative self image or deep-set belief that we are not lovable or capable of succeeding in life. If you find yourself feeling this way on a regular basis, therapy or self-help study can help. It can feel very freeing to let go of embedded beliefs and buried emotions that color your self image and cripple your ambition. Not only that, but it can add vibrancy and vitality to your physical health.

Every day we all feel a variety of emotions, responses to our mind's interpretation of what we experience. If we habitually feel negative emotions, it can wear us down. It can affect our health. If we work through these and help ourselves feel positive and uplifting emotions, the opposite is true. Our minds and bodies can function in a healthier way with more endurance. Pay attention to your emotions and learn to work with them. The effort can help you stay healthy and strong. It can help you enjoy a happier and saner life. Well worth the time spent!

Resources

EQ.org - The Online Source for Emotional Intelligence offers articles related to emotions and their effect on health and well-being.