



Threat vs. Safety

Threat vs. Safety

All living creatures survive by mobilizing resources in their bodies to avoid threat and replenishing them in the presence of safety. Both are necessary for life. However, sustained exposure to threat causes mental and physical disease.

Cytokines

Cytokines are small proteins that serve as messengers throughout the body, transmitting higher-level signals and coordinating activities at the cellular level. They are central to modulating the immune system and inflammatory response. There are two kinds of cytokines: pro-inflammatory (Pro-I) and anti-inflammatory (Anti-I). While Pro-I cytokines protect us by warding off acute perils, Anti-I cytokines keep us safe by allowing us to regenerate, thrive, and prepare us for battle with environmental enemies.

Both Pro-I and Anti-I cytokines are necessary for survival—one to defend against threat, the other for growth and regeneration. However, sustained elevations of Pro-I's can destroy parts of the body and give rise to chronic mental and physical disease. In acute situations, levels of Pro-I may spiral out of control and cause failure of multiple organs. This is the cause of ARDS (adult respiratory distress syndrome), the most common cause of death from corona virus, which impedes the lungs from providing oxygen to the blood, resulting in a high mortality rate.

Any threat will elevate Pro-I's. Pro-I's are elevated in almost every chronic disease state. For example,, researchers discovered that some types of depression are inflammatory responses of the central nervous system (Simmon). Anxiety, bipolar, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and schizophrenia are also inflammatory disorders.

So, one way to successfully address chronic mental or physical illness is by lowering the Pro-inflammatory cytokines and stimulating the protective anti-inflammatory ones. In other words, learn approaches and methods that promote safety. To pursue these strategies, it is first important to understand the nature of threat.

Threat

Any mental or physical threat, perceived or real, is going to be met with a defensive response from your body. Much of this is mediated through the vagus nerve, at the core of the autonomic nervous system. The response is the well-known flight, fight, or freeze reaction (Porges). We are all familiar with the physical manifestations of increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, elevated blood pressure, etc. But what you may not know is that the immune system also gets fired up and mobilizes many types of cells that fend off predators such as bacteria, viruses, and cancer cells. The result is inflammation where the “warrior cells” exit the blood stream through widened openings in the vessels to destroy the invaders (antigens). Cytokines are small proteins that are the “switches” that activate and deactivate this response.

Although threats come in many forms, they always activate pro-inflammatory (Pro-I) cytokines. Physical threats include allergens, parasites, bacteria, viruses, lions, tigers, bears, and people we perceive as dangerous. Less obvious but even more inflammatory are mental threats, because we can't physically escape them. They create a sustained inflammatory response that forms the basis for chronic mental and physical disease. Examples of mental threats are memories, negative thoughts, suppressions, repressions, insecurities (social, financial, health, etc.), cognitive distortions, and loss of life perspective and purpose.



Discovery and acknowledgement of all our threats—whether real, imagined, anticipated, or repressed—is the first step towards addressing them. The second is choosing an adaptive rather than a maladaptive escape to safety, whether the threat be physical or spiritual. We are better at physical escapes to safety than we are at spiritual ones (Fredheim). If you don't feel safe and peaceful, you are carrying elevated levels of inflammatory cytokines and your stress hormones are elevated.

Safety

On the other hand, the “anti-inflammatory” cytokines, safety cytokines, are the underpinnings of health and wellness. With the elevations of the “anti-inflammatory” cytokines we see the states of breed and feed and digest and rest. It is here where we are anabolic, restorative, connected, bonded, sexual, reproductive, cognitive and creative. We, also, have high immunity.

In addition to influencing our immune status and promoting inflammation in the body the “pro-inflammatory” cytokines also dictate our metabolism through very complex pathways. Suffice it to say that when we are in fight, flight, and fever we favor glucose for fuel in the battle. Prolonged elevation of “pro-inflammatory” cytokines leads to tissue and organ compromise. It also increases the speed of nerve conduction, which exacerbates pain.

The essence of healing

Mentally trying to control these massive survival vs. safety responses are impossible. It is a mismatch with the unconscious brain being much stronger. However, you can learn tools and approaches that promote safety,

which create a favorable chemical environment and you'll be able to thrive with much less interference from unpleasant physical and mental input.



It is also the reason that The DOC Journey is in the sequence that it is in. The anger from being trapped by pain is intense and unpleasant but also powerful and protective. The antithesis of anger is being vulnerable, which living creatures are not naturally programmed to allow. You have to proceed at your own pace and choice to learn to allow yourself to feel safe. So, you are the only one who connect to your own capacity to heal.

The most exciting and rewarding aspect of the DOC Journey is that once you cross over into a healing state, you will continue to develop more skills with the tools and keep moving forward. Many, if not most, experience life at a level that they never knew was possible.