



Understanding Physical vs. Mental Pain

While many people may consider physical health as the foundation of a productive life, if you examine the chemical and inflammatory effects of the mind on the body, it is clear that mental health has a direct effect on your physical health. Consider the following.

Thoughts are the mental link to the environment that allows you to assess your situation, second by second, in order to make choices that allow you to survive and thrive. If our thoughts are pleasant, our bodies will secrete chemicals such as oxytocin, growth hormone, and dopamine that create a sense of relaxation and well-being.



Conversely, if you feel stressed, then your thoughts will create a chemical environment consisting of adrenaline, cortisol, and other hormones that create a sense of insecurity and dread. They also fire up the inflammatory response of your immune system. You will be motivated to control the situation to alleviate these deep and dreadful feelings of anxiety to survive. These sensations are intended to be unpleasant.

Since you cannot escape or solve unpleasant thoughts—rational or irrational, then your body will be chronically exposed to higher levels of these chemicals and inflammatory cells than needed. It is like driving your car 70 mph down the freeway in second or third gear – it will break down much sooner than if you were in 5th gear and cruising.

I am aware that life is not easy. Few people can live their lives on “cruise.” Additionally, avoiding stress becomes its own stress. You cannot run from many of your stressors and certainly not your thoughts. The key is to will learn strategies to separate from this chemical reaction, dampen it, and then you can thrive.

Effects of Untreated NPD and Anxiety

There are several ways of modifying this neurophysiological response (NPR) to threat. When this NPR is in a hypervigilant mode it can directly cause over 33 different physical and mental symptoms. Modern medicine is focused on treating symptoms instead of the root cause of a fired-up nervous system. Many of these conditions will begin in childhood, such as migraine headaches, insomnia, anxiety, eating disorders, stomach pain, etc.

Additionally, anxiety drives anger. One common cause of anger is loss of control. When you lose your ability to control your anxiety, your body secretes even more survival hormones in an effort to regain control. Losing

control of your pain (mental or physical) creates and indescribable depth of frustration. Dr. John Sarno described it as, “rage.” (1)

When you are angry, it is only about you. This survival response causes you to lose awareness of the needs of those around you. Lack of awareness is the essence of abuse, including self-abuse. Families of patients in chronic pain often become the targets of this deep anger.

When you neglect your health, as well as the health of your family, that anxiety and anger creates profound physical effects on your body.

Your Unconscious Brain

No one intellectually wants to be sick or unhealthy. Your conscious brain, which is usually referenced to as “good intentions” or “will power,” has no chance of solving anxiety and anger, or any of the physical symptoms you are experiencing.

Although your greatest wish is to feel safe, your unconscious brain will resist this process because its role is to keep you safe. It is always on alert and scanning the environment for danger. So, the actual outcome is some level of baseline anxiety. If you were raised in a chaotic household, more things in the present will seem dangerous because when you were a child, many situations didn’t feel or weren’t safe. When trying to heal from any type of trauma – whether physical or emotional – your mental health should be your highest priority.

When your body’s chemistry is optimized by utilizing aspects of your conscious thinking to shift your unconscious responses, you will be able to drop your guard and enjoy your life with your family and friends. Your capacity and motivation to care for your health will be much higher. Letting go of the need for control will lower the levels the stress chemicals (anxiety) and allows you to move forward into a fulfilling life, freed from the grip of chronic pain.

1. Sarno, John. *Mind Over Back Pain*. Harper Collins, New York, NY, 1982.
2. Schubiner, Howard. *Unlearn Your Pain, 3rd edition*. Mind Body Publishing. Pleasant Ridge, MI, 2016.