

Emotional release to prevent physical disease



When babies cry, they put everything they've got into it. They wail and moan, they shed huge alligator tears and it doesn't matter what the situational context might be. They don't care who hears them. They don't care what they sound like or what their crying face

looks like. When things aren't right, they cry and hold nothing back.

The same thing is true when they laugh. We all know those contagious deep belly laughs babies are capable of. Babies never lower their heads when they laugh, or move to cover their mouths. They laugh with gusto, often squealing with delight.

What is it that occurs during the normal course of growing up, that so many of us start to hold back? As adults, it's often rare to see each other sob with grief, unless it's with a few close friends after a catastrophic event. I'm sure most of us have experienced embarrassment, not to mention tightening of our throats, when our efforts to stifle tears failed. We are more likely to laugh with each other than to cry, but again, where is the completely unabashed squeal of delight and deep guttural laughter? There are those of us who restrain ourselves in public places for fear of offending the ears of our one-eyebrow-raised disapproving neighbor. So many of us are self-conscious about expressing these very human emotions. This is unfortunate, because weeping and laughing offer important emotional releases that as adults, we must continue to experience if we want to experience optimal physical

health.

Our emotions are an important link between our psychological selves and our physical selves. The paradigm for understanding physical illness is changing, and we now know that our emotional health (of which a big part is emotional expression) is closely linked to the physical illnesses we may tend towards. Gone are the days when you were doomed to get a disease because it was “in your genes”. Now, more than our genetic susceptibility to disease, understanding our emotional susceptibility to disease may provide the most life-changing information.

What does emotional susceptibility to disease mean? This means that when unhealthy emotional patterns are continually reinforced as we age, we began to effect physical alterations in the actual tissues of our bodies. These changes accumulate if we do not address the emotional cause, until a critical threshold is reached and a “disease” can develop. Emotions are well known to create physical change in the body, such as a the rise in heartbeat before speaking before a group of people, or the relaxation of our muscles when we are held by a loved one. There is no question that each one of us has felt the physical manifestations of our emotions; indeed, it is often how we identify the emotion being felt. What has been less well understood, is how chronic emotional patterns affect tissues over time, especially when those patterns become dysfunctional.

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for the mind and the body like guided imagery and hypnotherapy can help manage stress that comes with lupus.

It is not a far stretch to suggest that different emotions can be felt in different parts of the body. We can feel anxiety in the gut, love or heartache in the chest, and rage in our head and neck. The more we feel certain emotions, the more our nervous system efficiently communicates to our cells how to behave. This process is all normal and part of the intimate interaction between our tissues and our feelings. The problem arises when we reinforce dysfunctional pathways between our emotions and our cells. For instance, if someone has been mistreated by another in the past, and felt anger at that mistreatment, the body will have actively changed to accommodate the anger. There will have been a tensing of muscles, a spike in heart rate, maybe even dilation of the pupils. If this emotion is not dealt with when it occurs, then each time this memory even flirts with the conscious mind, the body will react in the same way. And the more the body becomes used to reacting to certain emotions, the more "muscle memory" is developed, making it easier to react in similar ways in the future. It therefore becomes absolutely necessary to the health of the physical body (as well as the mental, spiritual and emotional body) to process the anger, learn whatever lesson there may be to learn in the broader context of life, and then move on. This will prevent a dysfunctional pattern from settling in.

Strong negative emotions are likely the ones that may be the hardest to release, but the most necessary to do so. Becoming comfortable with emotional expression requires a state of mind free from judgement, so that a full release is possible in whatever way feels natural. Releasing negative emotions is not the same as ignoring their existence; rather, it is a full respect and acknowledgement of them, allowing the emotion to take its course. These emotions need to be felt when they arise. Negative emotions themselves are not dysfunctional; it is the reinforcing of them at later times that creates the

dysfunctional pattern. If they can be fully felt, processed and then released, there is less of a chance that the intensity of that emotion will continue to play out in the tissues.

As for positive emotions, in general, their effects are favorable on tissues so the idea here would be to feel them as much as possible. This doesn't necessarily imply that their frequency should increase, although many of us would benefit from more positive emotional experiences. But we must be in a state of mindfulness to extract the richness from the moment to get the full benefit. In an era where multi-tasking and information overload has led to an ADD culture, this can be difficult. If we can stay present and open our hearts fully to the experience, we can know a far greater degree of satisfaction than we have known up till now. Imagine that everything that gives you joy right now could be magnified ten-fold, just by paying closer attention. It is certainly worth it to put down our camera phones when we encounter something exciting we want to remember, and to fully immerse ourselves in that experience, as this is the only way we can absorb it fully.

Even though I use the words "negative" and "positive" to describe emotions, truly no emotion itself is negative or positive. It merely is. It is a movement of energy through us, enriching our lives and allowing our soul to communicate to us in a conscious manner. So the next time you feel the urge to cry, go ahead and open your throat, open your heart, and cry. Give it everything you have, and wail like you have never wailed before. And when you want to laugh at something silly, laugh your hardest, all the way down into your toes. Grab your belly, slap your knee, and laugh until cry. Allowing yourself to feel and express your emotions physically gives others permission to do so as well. And we could all benefit from a little more emotional freedom.