

TRADITIONAL
CHINESE MEDICINE
HEALING CENTER

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Summer 2012

Shaping Your Biology Part 1: Genes, Belief, and Biology

By Florence Lim, L.Ac., DAOM

A month or so ago, I attended a ceremony for a small yet dedicated group of doctors who had just completed a senior clinical fellowship program in oncology at the John Wayne Cancer Institute at St. John's Health Center. I was amazed at all the new technology and therapies that are being investigated for detecting and removing cancers from the body. From special blood tests that can detect cancer-causing genetic mutations, such as the BRAF mutation responsible for melanomas or the BRCA1/BRCA2 mutations



linked to hereditary breast and ovarian cancers; to the targeted therapies aimed at countering the effects of these mutations; to research on the use of nanotechnology, which enables earlier and more sensitive detection of cancerous molecules and more targeted treatment of cancer cells as opposed to other therapies such as radiation, chemotherapy, or surgery, which often damage healthy tissues in the process – I was impressed and amazed at how far Western science has come in treating this disease. As I was listening to the doctors and graduates of the program expounding on the latest findings and research in the field of oncology, however, I became even more aware of the differing philosophies between Chinese and Western medicine. Whereas traditional Chinese medicine and many other complementary forms of medicine focus on *preventing* disease before it occurs, Western medicine focuses on treating disease once it has already happened. While it is important to embrace the accomplishments of Western medicine in treating a wide range of serious and acute illnesses, it is also important for us as practitioners of holistic medicine to provide our patients with the proper tools necessary to *prevent* disease and *restore* both physical and emotional/spiritual health whenever possible. In East-West integrative hospitals in China, patients undergoing radiation or chemotherapy regularly and diligently take their herbal teas, receive acupuncture treatment, and practice Qi Gong at the hospital or outside in the hospital gardens in order to counteract the negative side effects of the more invasive western treatment modalities and prevent cancers from recurring. These “alternative” healing methods, as well as diet, lifestyle, our mental and emotional health, and environmental factors, play just as vital roles as western medicine in influencing our overall well-being, whether we are affected by illness or not. More and more support for the holistic view of health has occurred over the years as scientists have begun to understand that our genes do not, in fact, predict our destiny, and that we have more control over our health, our genetic expression, and our biology than we may think. In Part I of *Shaping Your Biology*, we will begin to explore how some of the factors often overlooked by western medicine —namely, our mental, spiritual, and emotional health— can affect genetic expression, cellular activity, and ultimately, our physical health.

Epigenetics: The Undetermined Nature of Genetic Determinism

Recently, scientists have begun to delve into the realm of epigenetics — the study of how environmental factors such as lifestyle and diet affect the way our genes are expressed and how our cells function. These environmental factors can turn specific chemical signals on or off, thereby controlling our genetic expression and triggering or inhibiting different kinds of cellular activity. In a sense, one's “genome,” or the entirety of one's hereditary information, is like the hardware that

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Congratulations Expecting Mothers!

Louise B.
Mandy S.
Lucy H.
Julie L.
Julie F.
Jennie C.
Nadine H.
Suzanna R.
Marya S.
Susan H.
Kelly E.
Sonya W.
Tori P.
Yuco M.
Jennifer H.
Wynne W.
Daniela C.



Welcome to the World!

Grayson



Born to Melissa & Scott
On April 7, 2012
6 lbs. 13 oz., 20 inches

Maxwell



Born to Kairi & Sam
On June 10, 2012
6 lbs. 7 oz., 19.75 inches



Nicholas



Born to Jana & Thomas
On May 14, 2012
6 lbs. 9 oz., 21 inches

Cora



Born to Blair & Scott
On April 16, 2012
6 lbs. 11 oz., 19 inches

Madeline



Born to Brianna & Florent
On May 23, 2012
6 lbs., 7 oz., 18 inches

Clementine



Born to Rebekah & Anthony
On March 18, 2012
8 lbs. 6 oz., 22 inches



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comes with a computer, whereas one's "epigenome" is like the software which tells the computer when to work, how to work, and how much to work. This explains why a pair of identical twins born with the same pair of genes may not necessarily contract the same disease. As identical twins age, epigenetic differences accumulate so that by the time they are in their 60's, for instance, they become very different from one another due to the fact that their genes have been shaped by the varying environments in which they have lived. Check out the study by Dr. Dana Dolinoy, a post-doctoral research fellow at Duke University, for more information on the study of epigenetics, the epigenome, and how one's diet is inextricably linked to not only one's own health, but the health of his or her future generations at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/now/body/epigenetic-mice.html>.



What environmental and lifestyle factors, then, cause the cells in our bodies to switch from the normal processes of birth, division, and cell death (apoptosis) to a state of uncontrolled, abnormal cell growth and division, inflammation, and disease? What are some things we can do in our everyday lives to improve our health, feel better, and minimize the risk of developing chronic types of illnesses? The first place to start is right in your head!

Challenge Your Beliefs: The Interaction Between Belief and Biology

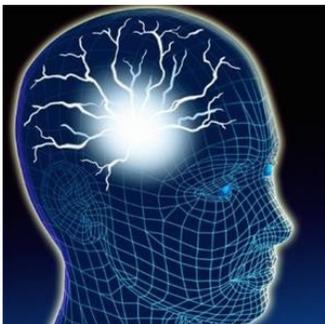
Live in love. Not surprisingly, one important way to stay healthy and combat disease is to have a positive frame of mind and to live a life focused on what we love rather than what we fear. Why are we always telling our patients to stay positive and not stress all the time? Why are treatment outcomes better when patients have an overall optimistic outlook on life and are encouraged to engage in activities that help them relax such as Yoga, meditation, Qi Gong, spending time with loved ones, or even just being in the outdoors and in touch with nature? Simply put, because our health is greatly affected by our thoughts and beliefs. In Traditional Chinese medicine theory, the "Shen" and the human physical body are completely inseparable. The Shen encompasses everything

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having to do with the mind and the spiritual and emotional aspects of ourselves. The physical body is the vessel which holds the Shen. In a way, the Shen and physical body are like a bowl filled with water. If the water (Shen) vibrates too strongly, it may cause the bowl to shake or even crack. If the bowl (Body) is poorly made or becomes cracked, the water may leak out of the bowl. Dr. Bruce H. Lipton, a stem cell biologist and author of *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter, and Miracles*, has been able to connect what we now know about epigenetics with the relationship between our thoughts and what goes on inside our bodies at a cellular level. He explains this through the science of quantum physics. As opposed to a Newtonian vision of a world made up of only physical matter, in which the atom is the smallest possible particle in the universe, quantum physicists have more recently found that matter can exist in both a solid, particle-based state as well as an immaterial, energy-based state. This seems to fall in line with the ancient Chinese belief that both the physical (Body) and non-physical, energetic aspects of the body (Shen) are inseparable and affect each other much like the way water in a glass bowl affects and is affected by the glass bowl which houses it. The “Qi,” or energy which flows through and gives life to our bodies, can be likened to the immaterial waves of energy which make up all physical matter in the universe – from the smallest insect, to humans, all the way up to the biggest mountain. This energy greatly affects and is affected by our emotional and spiritual states. Excessive sadness, anger, stress, worry, fear, and even happiness can all affect our bodies on both a physical and energetic level. It is a practically universal phenomenon to “tremble” with fear, get butterflies in your stomach from worry or excessive excitement, feel your heart “sink” and lose your appetite after having your heart broken, and get “hot” with anger, for instance. As you can see, our moods, as well as chronic emotional or psychological stress, affect the way our bodies behave at a physical level, which can deeply impact our health in the long-term.



The power of the placebo. Studies have shown that the “placebo effect,” which is when a patient gets better by unknowingly ingesting a sugar pill or receiving a “sham” treatment, often works equally as well as the actual medicine or treatment under observation. For example, in a randomized, placebo-controlled study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Moseley et al., 2002), 180 patients were divided into three groups. The first two groups received “real” knee surgery, which involved either shaving off the damaged cartilage of the knee or flushing out the knee joint; the third group received “fake” surgery, in which Moseley made three standard incisions and then talked and acted just as he would have during a real surgery. He even splashed salt water to simulate the sound of the knee-washing procedure. Surprisingly, after a 24-month follow-up, there were no significant differences in the amount of perceived pain or functional improvement between the 3 groups! Video footage of patients in the placebo group after the surgery showed them doing things they could not have done before the surgery, such as walking and playing basketball. The placebo effect has also been very powerful in the treatment of depression. Multiple clinical trials have shown that drugs did not outperform placebo, sugar pills in the treatment of depression (Kirsch et al., 2002). One study found that the brain scan of patients who took the placebo pill for depression revealed increased prefrontal brain activity after taking the pill (Leuchter et al., 2002). Psychiatrist Walter Brown of Brown University School of Medicine has even proposed using placebo pills as the first line of treatment for patients with mild or moderate depression. Oppositely, the “nocebo effect,” which refers to the negative effects caused by pessimistic, hopeless thinking, can play just as important a role in one’s health. Many a patient’s health has often deteriorated after his or her situation has been deemed hopeless and incurable by a doctor. The mind, therefore, is a powerful tool in changing your biology.



Encouraging Cellular Growth and Vitality Through Our Thoughts

The bodies of all multi-cellular organisms such as humans have two main mechanisms – growth or protection. Our cells cannot operate in both modes at the same time. If you live a life filled with love, your body will grow in that love and positivity. If you are constantly living in fear, your body’s cellular mechanisms of growth and rejuvenation will shut off in an

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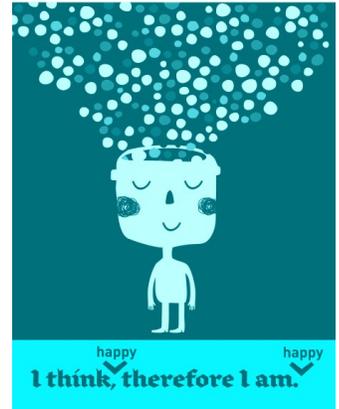
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effort to protect itself. Part of the mechanism by which this occurs is our Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal axis (HPA axis). When we are bombarded with everyday stress from our work, our personal lives, and our high-speed pace of life, this activates the hypothalamus and pituitary to secrete specific hormones into the blood, which then travel to the adrenal gland, which, in turn, secretes our “fight or flight” adrenal hormones. Instead of nourishing our life-giving organs of digestion and reproduction, the blood rushes to the extremities where it prepares the body to respond to its stressful environment. Chronic activation of the HPA axis, in time, represses the immune system, making people more susceptible to infections and illness. The great news, however, is that we CAN improve our health simply by changing the way we perceive the world around us and challenging any hard-wired beliefs or fears that may be preventing us from living as full a life as possible. Why is it that one person views a challenge as an opportunity for growth and eagerly runs towards it, while another person shrinks away, both physically and emotionally, from that same challenge due to fear of failure? Much of it comes down to the beliefs and perceptions of the world which we have acquired from those around us – our parents, teachers, friends – and which have become deeply ingrained in our subconscious ever since we came into this world. Most of the time, we go through life not being aware of these deeply embedded beliefs, yet they exert a powerful force in shaping our emotional and physical responses to events. Though it can be very difficult to shed away long-held beliefs which we have accumulated and “embodied” over the years, by becoming fully conscious of long-held ways of thinking that may be preventing our growth and vitality, and adjusting our behaviors in a more positive direction, we can encourage genetic and cellular activity that promotes healthy growth, vitality, and optimal cellular functioning. What a relief to know that we have some control over our genetic destinies!



Mung Bean Lotus Seed Soup: Delicious and Great for the Summer!
Available for Sale at our Clinic

The following delicious, mildly sweet soup consists of mung beans, lotus seeds, and job’s tears. It is a very popular, cooling summer dessert dish that has long been eaten in China to prevent heatstroke and relieve symptoms of thirst, dry skin, constipation, acne, and heat-induced headaches. The mung bean is sweet and cold in nature, and enters the lung, liver, and kidney channels to reduce water retention, clear the liver heat, brighten the eyes, and cool the lungs. In addition, the job’s tears helps to dry dampness and eliminate phlegm from the lungs. The lotus seed cools the heart and reduces tension. The soup is rich in nutrients and has been a popular antidote for eliminating toxins out of the body. It can be served warm or cold.

Ingredients

(All ingredients are for sale in individual packets at our clinic)

- 5 oz. Green mung beans (Lu Dou)
- 2 oz. White Lotus Seeds (White Lotus Seeds)
- 2 oz. Job’s Tears (Yi Yi Ren)
- 10 cups water
- 2 oz. Rock Sugar or Brown Sugar, or to taste (not included in our packets)

Directions:

1. Rinse the mung beans, lotus seeds, and job’s tears.
2. Soak all ingredients (except sugar) in 10 cups of cold water for 30 minutes.
3. Put the soaking water and herbs into a pot, and bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat, and simmer for about 60 minutes, until the beans have expanded out of their skins (you may cook longer or shorter, depending on how you want the consistency of your soup to be). They should be very soft and fluffy.
5. Add sugar to taste during the final 15 minutes of cooking. Serve warm or cold.

