

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

A survey taken in a health clinic revealed that out of 500 patients admitted, 386 were afflicted with just one disease. And it wasn't caused by germs, bacteria or viruses, but the negative influence of the mind upon the body - psychosomatic illness. The cause of psychosomatic illness are life's cares. It makes no difference whether they are real or imaginary. At the bottom of the problem is a person's mental attitude - severe negative thinking. It takes six forms:

1. Anxiety. This arises usually from financial, social or marital problems. Anxiety breeds worry and fear. Heart specialists have identified fear as one of nine causes of coronary heart disease. The most prescribed drug in the USA is Valium.
2. Discontent. Studies of labour markets reveal that almost 50 per cent of workers feel trapped in their jobs.
3. Remorse. Remorse causes people to look back on their lives and sigh, If only things had been different. They often reflect on their one mistake, a tragic affair or a wrong choice, and can't forget it. The thought returns to overwhelm them.
4. Distrust. Distrust leads to suspicion and unnatural reserve, especially in relationships. But it is far safer to naively trust, even if you get burned every once in a while.
5. Guilt. Guilt derives from unconfessed wrongs. Confession is an unfailing antidote for guilt.
6. Grief. Although it is sometimes inescapable, such as at the death of a friend, prolonged grief - focusing on the past - makes one an emotional cripple and less able to cope. Physiologically it's a threat to the immune system, leaving the sufferer susceptible to disease.

An emotion is any state of the mind that manifests itself by a change in the body. Our emotions can determine whether we get sick, get well or, perhaps, even die. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he," the Bible says. Physiologically, emotions affect us in numerous ways. Muscle spasms brought on by tension can mimic gall bladder attacks or appendicitis. Due to nervous tension brought on by anxiety, blood vessels both inside and outside the skull can become constricted, producing severe headaches or migraine.

The antidote for these afflictions are, predictably, positive, pleasant emotions. They contain healing and convey medicinal power that cannot be overestimated. Positive emotions work to replace unpleasant ones and produce positive, healthful, biochemical effects within us. There are five of them.

1. Hope. When we lose it, we lose everything. Even a little hope is enough to work a miracle of recovery.
2. Joy. Don't indulge depressing thoughts; treat yourself to a smile of approval, of friendship, or of understanding.
3. Helpfulness. The natural world only works because each of its elements gives to another. Whenever we genuinely give our interest, time affection or means to another, we're fulfilling a great law of nature - the law of service. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," Christ said.
4. Awareness of right-doing. While guilt can destroy the body, doing right produces an inner satisfaction, personal confidence and peace of mind.
5. Gratitude. Dr Hans Selye, the authority in the field of human stress theory, said, "Among all the emotions there is one which, more than any other, accounts for the

absence or presence of stress in human relations; that is the feeling of gratitude." While it isn't easy to be thankful in the midst of life's worst problems, it is imperative to our health. Look for the valuable element in your pain; seek the good that lies beyond. "In everything give thanks," wrote Paul.

From the Judeo-Christian perspective, the value for human life and care for our bodies, demands a moral dimension that's directly equated with these positive emotions. That's because Christianity asks: "Do you not know that your body is a shrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is God's gift to you?" If you can believe that "you do not belong to yourselves; (but that) you were bought at a price," then you are thinking about the care of your body from moral or mind conviction. And these are usually long lasting.

Karl and Robert Menninger, founders of the Menninger Psychiatric Clinic, in their book *The Sins We Commit Against the Mind*, suggest that whenever people violate their own code of conduct, when they fracture the values they have been brought up with, then high levels of physical and mental stress follow. This guilt and anxiety ultimately produces physical ailment. On the other hand, according to Dr Selye, in *Stress Without Distress*, the person with a strongly developed code of moral behaviour - as found in the Bible, for example - is infinitely better equipped to handle life's stresses than the person who doesn't. The rules we choose to live by have a direct bearing on our state of health.
