

When Your Thoughts Can Cause You Physical Problems

As a man thinks in his heart, so he is. Do you believe this?

How much influence do you believe your thoughts have on how you experience life and on your health? James Allen, author of *As a Man Thinketh*, once said, "You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you." I'm absolutely convinced that we can make significant changes in our life, and in many cases, to our health, by changing the way we think.

What the Research and Science Say

Our thoughts and emotions are represented in the body as electrochemical reactions. These chemicals are constantly floating around in our bodies and are stored in different places. The research is clear that negative thoughts, and the associated harmful chemicals, have detrimental effects on our health. Dwelling on an unpleasant experience increases the release of chemicals that can weaken the immune system over time.

This may hamper someone's ability to fight illness, says psychologist Nicholas Christenfeld of the University of California-San Diego. He also says increases in the stress hormone cortisol after rumination, or dwelling, on the negative also can hinder the immune system and contribute to cardiovascular disease. Other studies suggest that those who ruminate a lot on the negative may have higher blood pressure and heart rates, less effective immune systems, surges of stress hormones that strain the heart, more depression and perhaps even shorter life spans.

As Dr. Caroline Leaf writes in *Who Switched Off My Brain?*, "Fear triggers more than 1,400 known physical and chemical

responses and activates more than 30 different hormones and neurotransmitters.” In *Deadly Emotions*, Don Colbert, M.D., writes, “I’ve worked with countless people who have discovered that once they made a sincere effort to tackle their dysfunctional thought patterns, they had fewer bouts of depression, anxiety, anger, grief, shame, jealousy and all other toxic emotions. It isn’t difficult to replace lies with God’s truth. It just takes intentional and consistent effort. ... It takes the time and energy to find statements of God’s truth and apply them to life’s lies.”

What the Bible Says

- *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).*
- *“Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth” (Col. 3:2).*
- *“To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6).*
- *“Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8).*
- *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).*

What You Can Do

You can control the degree to which harmful chemicals float around in your body by adjusting your thinking patterns. Start by making a deliberate decision to change how you think. Commit to putting a concerted effort into this for a week and see if it doesn’t make a difference in your attitude, emotions and resulting behavior.

Begin to monitor your thinking patterns and identify when you're thinking or meditating on negative thoughts or thoughts that cause you to be anxious or are connected with some other harmful emotion. Let those thoughts go and replace them with positive thoughts.

Read the Bible and meditate on Scriptures. Believe what you read to be true and tuck these truths into your mind and your heart. Identify Scriptures that are meaningful to you and create personal affirmations and speak them out loud. Here's an example using Psalm 63:5, *"You satisfy me more than the richest of foods."* When reading and meditating on Scripture becomes part of your daily "diet," you'll likely see a change in your thinking patterns.

Consider the impact of what you read, watch and listen to. Your mind is a filter for what comes into your body through the five senses. The less "junk" information you are exposed to, the less frequently your mind will have to make a decision whether to continue to think about that "junk" information.

If there is an ongoing struggle with a certain memory that brings you emotional pain, sorrow or anger, prayerfully and humbly ask God to help you forgive yourself or the other person. Consider seeking help from a professional to work through the issue. After you've dealt with the strong harmful emotions, deliberately replace thinking about that situation with positive thoughts.

Ephesians 6:12 makes it clear that there is an evil force we are at war with and the primary battlefield is in our minds. The enemy wants to keep us dwelling on the negative and to steal our joy and health. God desires us to be filled with peace, joy and love. The more effort we intentionally put into fighting this battle in our minds, the more likely we'll enjoy healthier lives.

Like training the muscles of your body to be more physically

fit, you can train yourself to feed your mind with healthy thoughts. And as Paul indicates in Romans 12:2, you can be transformed by changing the way you think. I have experienced this in my life. My prayers are that you might experience a similar transformation. Part of the resulting transformation may include improved emotional and physical health. {eoa}

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