

Do Neurotransmitters respond to Meaning in our Healthcare?



Imagine the improvement: there is plenty of biology that shows the body can instigate significant changes, on its own, that ease our symptoms. Science is now showing that there are some neurotransmitters involved in the success of some placebo treatments. Since placebos should be doing nothing, what is getting the neurotransmitters involved? We know modern medicine has its focus on physical data and objective test measurement. Science loves that and funds that. What is harder to measure, and yet what we talk about all the time, is how we feel when we find a doctor who has the ability and the inclination to listen to us and spend time with us.

The effect of human interaction is striking. "Meaning" is "our psychological response to an inert substance," according to Ted Kaptchuk, a Harvard Medical School researcher. In his research of the placebo effect, he found that even when patients KNEW they were receiving the inert placebo, their symptoms eased and feelings of wellness increased! You may have seen the recent New York Times article about the American woman who had surgery in Germany and was refused anything stronger than ibuprofen for her recovery. She was aghast at first and frightened of the pain until she was reassured by multiple health care workers that she would be fine, feel fine, and the body would heal faster. In the end, that is just what she experienced—and with no narcotics.

Attaching meaning and an expectation or imagination that a treatment is going to make an improvement in our health might mean we begin by taking the time to talk to our pills and supplements. Creating a small ritual around taking our pills, for example, will serve to attach some significance to the treatment. The reason this may boost effectiveness is also biological. Showing care and empathy, even interest, activates the brain to respond as not being under threat. Your expectation of the treatment *will affect* the treatment. The same information is not available to the brain if we are absentmindedly throwing pills down the hatch or being coldly handed from doctor to nurse to check out. It comes down, as it often does, to fight or flight. While we are waiting for the medical world to catch on, treat yourself, your food, your supplements, and your health with attention and love. And imagine the improvement!

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PS Learn the 5 basic Body Talk techniques in February on the 18th & 25th.
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