



Holistic medicine

Alice Greene
outlines her
“whole person”
approach to
healing

As a young doctor working in an inner city slum, I realised that prescribing social problems were often reduced to the services of a prescription pad. I was always worried about prescribing drugs and began to see that there could be no true healing without engaging heart and mind. Homeopathy recognises the interplay of mind and matter and preserves a unified view of the whole person. Learning to work in this way helped me appreciate the paradigm of holistic medicine and homeopathy’s place within it.

Holistic medicine encourages a cooperative relationship between patient and practitioner, to attain the best physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of health. Understanding the “whole” person includes looking at our physical, nutritional, environmental, emotional, social, spiritual and lifestyle values, and, if we fall ill, using all varieties of diagnosis and treatment, including drugs and surgery, if no safe alternative exists. Holistic medicine therefore focuses on stimulating a healing response as well as educating ourselves to make responsible efforts to achieve and maintain balance and well-being.

Sometimes, we may have limited success if we focus on only one aspect of treatment, but ignore other important areas, eg changing our diet, but ignoring other crucial aspects like exercise or job satisfaction that need to be addressed. Others may focus on psychological healing, yet continue damaging their health with a poor diet, or unhealthy lifestyle. Holistic medicine involves addressing all aspects of our lives in order to promote healing and transformation – not necessarily all at once – but not getting stuck in one aspect of treatment only.

This means that for many illnesses, properly chosen non-invasive and non-drug healing techniques, plus changing our bad habits, can be offered to treat both acute and chronic illnesses safely. Conventional medicine is needed in emergencies, or when the safer, non-invasive methods fail and, for some, drugs and surgery will of necessity be a major part of their holistic treatment.

The most successful treatment usually involves addressing a combination of the key areas. It is obvious that the human body is capable of repairing itself. Indeed, it heals itself all the time of bruises and



Photo: iStockphoto.com

clearing of symptoms. Changes in diet can become the treatment or remedy, but it is essential that the diet be carefully tailored to suit your individual needs.

It has been said that, whereas physical food turns itself into us, spiritual food turns us into itself. So feeding ourselves spiritually, mentally and physically on the best “food” we can find is vital to well being. Mental food can be study or reading that uplifts and expands the mind with large ideas. Emotional food is the changing impressions received through our senses. Surrounding ourselves with beauty, immersing ourselves in nature has an immediately harmonising effect. Great art and music have this power to uplift and cleanse and being in the presence of great art can melt our hearts and bring experiences of unity – a true stimulus affecting the whole.

Dealing with stress accumulation

Occasional challenges, both physical and psychological, are a healthy and normal part of life, which can actually make us stronger. But undue stress is an important aggravating and even causative factor in many illnesses such as irritable bowel syndrome, stomach ulcers, headaches, mildly raised blood pressure and even some cancers. Learning stress-releasing and stress-proofing techniques provides an important holistic stimulus which can greatly improve, and sometimes cure, these illnesses.

Taking steps to relax both body and mind (in addition to getting adequate sleep) tremendously boosts healing, and helps prevent future illness so it is important to introduce changes into our daily life gradually which will allow this deep letting go – so that the healing and vitality from regular relaxation becomes an increasing part of balancing our life. Taking a class or practising in a group can be really supportive.

Another aspect of stress reduction is having sufficient rest. Stopping, when we need to stop, is called measure. Walking in nature is one of the best antidotes to world-weariness and emotional exhaustion. Be gentle with yourself. Some people find themselves falling back into excessively stressful habits from time to time. Simply notice that change in a non-judgmental way and move back to the stress reduction practices you find most helpful for you.

Healing and energy transformation

Many illnesses are strongly related to our state of mind. So, if our mind is capable of making our body ill, then it is also able

to make it better. Our primary care system is still very oriented towards prescribing drugs but the benefits of holistic medicine – stimulating the body to heal itself, being less invasive with few side effects – greatly expands our therapeutic tools and a number of therapies may be used at the same time to complement each other. Someone with migraine headaches for example may be prescribed a homeopathic remedy, encouraged to learn a deep relaxation technique and to eat a healthier diet, all at the same time. As they feel better and the headaches improve, less medication is needed and can often be stopped altogether.

In homeopathy, the principle is to prescribe a remedy that not only suits the symptoms of our illness but also our general physical and mental characteristics. Prescribing on such subtle information about how the whole body is functioning, is a true holistic stimulus which can help us feel better in our self as well as improving our condition.

The use of acupuncture is another type of holistic stimulus to increase general health, as well as improve specific illness. Abnormalities in the flow of Chi energy (which, in health, circulates freely round the body through invisible channels called meridians) can lead to sickness. Fine acupuncture needles inserted at carefully selected points on the skin re-harmonise the flow of Chi, allowing the body to heal itself.

Therapeutic massage can have a powerfully positive effect on the whole person, which bring an improvement in illness. Osteopathy and chiropractic, in helping to create a healthier spine and joints, may also benefit the whole individual. There are many other examples of this type of holistic stimulus.

Avoiding exposure to toxins

Ill health can be caused or exacerbated by toxic exposure – sometimes a low-level, long-term exposure where we may not recognise that slow poisoning and damage is occurring. We live in an increasingly “chemicalised” society but, by becoming more aware of potential hazards (like chemicals, fumes, food additives, radiation, crop spraying, contaminated water, food and air) and reducing our exposure to them, we can significantly improve our long-term health prospects.

Aerobic/strength exercise

Physical exercise makes us fitter, look better and feel more vibrant in ourselves. Many minor health symptoms disappear. Regular exercise has been shown in many studies to decrease depression, anxiety and major

broken skin or fractured bones, colds and flu, headaches, ulcers and numerous other conditions.

So in a body capable of healing itself, which for some reason is not doing so, it makes sense to use a “holistic stimulus” to persuade, or “jump start”, the body to heal itself. Here are some of the ways in which we can apply such a stimulus.

Eating to live – not living to eat

Physical food is best eaten fresh, with plenty of fruit, salads and vegetables, to complement the necessary protein in our diet; use sugar substitutes like honey or dried fruit and be sparing in dairy products, refined carbohydrates and animal fats. Become more selective and inquisitive. Drink more water and avoid eating late, or if pressured or upset. A good rule is to consciously taste what we eat and then, eat what we truly like. Well-developed taste buds are a wonderful cue to what to select from the diversity and variety of foods available to us. And the more we chew our food, the better our digestion and more energy we derive from it.

A change in our eating habits can act as a powerful, holistic stimulus to health. This is because the food we eat is not only fuel for the body, but also the raw material out of which the body must regenerate itself. So a healthier diet, or even a three-day fast on fruit and vegetable juices, with plenty of spring water, can result in major changes in health and



Photo: Creatas

them and allow healing. If we sometimes feel like a “victim”, the creative mind can usually find the resourcefulness behind the problem to deal with it. This leads naturally to self-acceptance, forgiveness and compassion. Creativity releases us from the smallness of “feeling trapped” inside our self to the abundance of our being.

Expressing ourselves creatively reduces stress and can also help us find hobbies that may even become a new career. Learning new skills feeds the mind and brings rest. Developing different areas of specialist interest is a useful antidote to over-identification with work and balances our inner mental world-view. Finding our own unique creative expression is tremendously life affirming, and one of the fastest ways to raise our self-esteem.

Spiritual connection and healing

All religions and philosophies point consistently to simple “presence” as a key spiritual factor in opening and transforming our awareness to a larger world beyond the senses and mind. Since health can be defined as harmony between our soul (self), mind and senses, spiritual healing attempts to realign bodily structures and normalise functioning around a more deeply felt sense of self. We can learn to access this profound level in ourselves consciously through times of prayer, contemplation or meditation.

There are many different techniques of meditation which focus on deepening awareness by allowing the mind and emotions to fall still. This has profoundly positive, well-researched effects on our physical and psychological wellbeing. Key benefits include deep inner peace and a more harmonious life; raised self-esteem, self-control, and orderliness; better sleep; increased creativity; improved physical and psychological health/healing, less need for doctor appointments and prescription drugs; and lastly, a slowing of the aging process.

In summary, it may be helpful to go through these areas in your life to discover your own balance needs. This can provide a cue for personal development, health maintenance, illness prevention and lead to greater satisfaction, with increased health and vitality in your daily life.

psychoses, and is at least as effective as psychotherapy or minor tranquillisers. Mental clarity and concentration improve and we need less sleep because sleep quality improves. The brain “appetats” regulating appetite are reset, so we tend to eat food in more natural measure. Acid secretion decreases in the stomach. Bowel activity increases, preventing constipation. The pain threshold is increased and stress hormone production falls.

Exercise that uses the whole body is less likely to wear out any part and avoid strain. Yoga and tai chi are both energising and relaxing. However, any sport or exercise – even simply walking for 15 minutes every morning – stimulates the whole body and mind, positively impacting on health. Try to do 30 minutes of intensive whole-body exercise at least three times a week.

Harmonious and loving relationships

Trust and respect, both aspects of love, lie at the heart of every relationship whether acknowledged or not. Cultivating healthy relationships is really important to avoid being burdened with cynicism and pessimism from exposure to too much stress or suffering. Staying in regular touch with friends and family is vital. When over-stressed or too work-oriented, people tend to withdraw from supportive intimate relationships – just when they need them most. Fostering

love, warmth and human contact engenders fun, humour, laughter and play, and encourages sharing what we have with others leading to greater happiness.

True friendship is a source of never-ending richness and can see us through good and bad times. We shed the burden of our isolation when we communicate intimately with someone who can mirror our inner state of mind and heart in an accepting, non-judgmental way. Feeling acknowledged, understood, loved and included releases positive energy for everybody involved, whereas troubled relationships can hold a lot of negative self-defeating energy, which can make us ill. Understanding, tolerance, forgiveness and moving on may allow a whole new quality and depth of life to open up for us.

Creative expression

One measure of our health is the level of our creative activity. Problems blocking our creativity are serious and here, homeopathy can be very helpful to unblock

Alice Greene MRCGP DCH DObst FFHom MB BCH left general practice to study homeopathy at the RLHH in 1981 and for the last 14 years has taught with the Homeopathic Professionals Teaching Group. She is also a fellow of the British Autogenic Society, as well as being a UKCP registered psychotherapist. Alice has an established, multi-disciplinary holistic medical practice in Harley Street, London, [www.dralicegreene.com].