

+PERCEIVING YOUR WAY TO HEALTH

By Mark Hyman, MD

The following comes from [The UltraMind Solution](#).

Many of our attitudes and perceptions are powerful factors that determine our health and well-being. Fortunately, they are learned behaviors that can be unlearned. Studies show that it is not lifestyle or even socioeconomic status, but the perception of our place in the world that influences health.

One would think that disease risk factors commonly associated with poverty or low socioeconomic status such as smoking, consumption of alcohol, junk food, obesity, and lack of exercise explains the higher rates of disease and death in poverty stricken communities. But a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that even after considering those behaviors and risk factors, higher rates of disease and death could not be just explained by these factors alone.

The key, according to the study, was not behavior but perception of one's place in the world. The key findings that could account for the higher risk of disease and death were:

1. Lack of social relationships and social supports
2. Personality dispositions (thinking the glass is half empty) including a lost sense of mastery, optimism, control, and self-esteem, or heightened levels of anger and hostility
3. Chronic and acute stress in life and work including the stress of racism, classism, and other factors related to the inequitable distribution of power and resources

It is more than stress alone that contributes to or creates the majority of modern chronic diseases—from the epidemic of mental disorders including depression and anxiety, to heart disease, and more.

Disease is a disconnection from our sense of place in the world, a loss of control and meaning as we drift from television channel to channel looking for a program to satisfy us; consume food disconnected from its origins, processed and unidentifiable from its natural state; as our families separate, disconnect, and communicate through text messaging and e-mail. Poverty alone does not increase the prevalence of illness, morbidity, and mortality. A lost sense of culture, control, and meaning is a major factor.

How do you take a pill to fix that?

Ultimately our perceptions mediate or influence our biology in a direct and measurable way. The science of "PNEI" or psycho-neuro-endocrine-immunology has mapped out these connections clearly and powerfully.

All our self-talk and perceptions—good or bad—work through a coordinated network or system. This system is called the HPATGG axis (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal-thyroid-gonadal-gut axis or network).

A big mouthful, yes, but it is simply the system that governs the bi-directional connection between your thoughts and feelings, your hormones, your immune system, and your gut (which contains all three—hormones, immune system, and nervous system).

Everything talks to everything all the time.

Happy talk = a happy human and longer life.

Negative talk = depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, and dementia.

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We will talk more about how to eliminate negative thinking later in the program. For now, I'd like to encourage you to get active in your small groups. The research shows that a lack of social support contributes to chronic illness. Connecting with social groups and working through health programs, like The Daniel Plan, in small groups has been shown to be tremendously effective in helping people overcome obesity, type II diabetes, and other chronic illnesses. Even if you aren't sick and just need to lose a few pounds or want to get healthy, connecting in small groups will go a long way to facilitate these health goals. We are social creatures. Connecting with others is essential for lifelong vitality. It's good for the mind, body, and spirit.

To learn more about the connections between your brain, your body, your community, and your environment see [The UltraMind Solution](#).