



HOW TO HEAL: INHABIT YOUR BODY

Healing is about as real as journeys come. It is deep and slow. It has multiple parts. Like eating a balanced, anti-inflammatory, whole foods diet. Reaching out to community and friends. Cleaning up the environment. Tending to emotional traumas. But many of you are already doing so and still can't heal. Why?

You have to be in your body to fully heal.

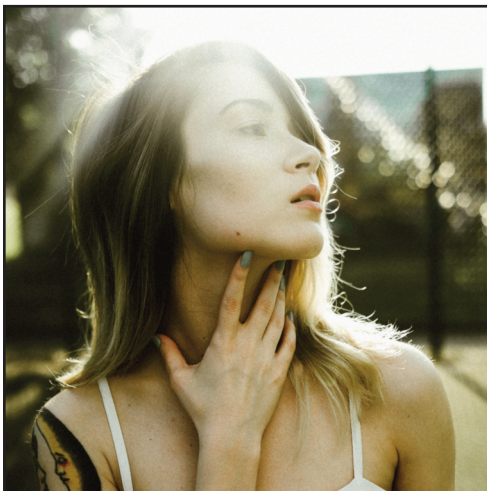
We live in a culture of detachment. Feel pain? Push through it. Feel tired? Drink some coffee. Feel inflamed? Take some ibuprofen. After years or decades of this, the mind and body can become disconnected, acting as separate, autonomous circuits. With such disconnectedness, even if the mind is relaxed, the body can remain in a state of alarm, perpetuating inflammation and chronic disease.

More than a set of actions, healing is a mindset, a belief system, an orientation of the mind, body, and spirit. In the following pages are five ways to reconnect the brain and the body. These recommendations are based in science as well as clinical experience. When you begin to re-inhabit your body, your symptoms may feel more intense in the beginning. Try not to fear the sensations. Resistance fuels them. Better yet, move towards them. They're merely your body's way of showing you the underlying deficiencies and imbalances. The shape of healing isn't a line, but a spiral. So these steps are best practiced often, and again.

Go deep, go slow.

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1. STIMULATE THE VAGUS.



This nerve is the godfather of the “rest and digest” state of the nervous system, which reduces inflammation and promotes healing. Like any other nerve, the more you activate it, the stronger the outcome, the greater the healing.

- a. **Get Throaty.** Gargle with water several times a day. This action uses muscles in the back of your throat, which stimulates the vagus. You must gargle long enough and deep enough to make it a little challenging. Imagine you are gargling from deep within your esophagus.
- b. **Belt It Out.** At home alone, in the shower, or in the car, sing as loudly as you can. This also uses muscles in the back of your throat.
- c. **Chew Your Food.** Remove distractions like phones and screens, and pay attention to your meal. By chewing thoroughly—until you fully mash the food in your mouth—you not only facilitate the digestive process, you also stimulate the vagus.
- d. **Gag Yourself.** Take a spoon with a rounded handle, or if you prefer, purchase a box of tongue blades from the pharmacy. Don't jab yourself in the back of the throat. Instead, open your mouth widely and push down on the back part of your tongue with the blade/spoon, activating the gag reflex. Repeat this several times.
- e. **Breathe.** Sit quietly, relax your shoulders, and do 20-30 deep, slow abdominal breaths. Abdominal breathing stems from your belly, not your chest, so start by placing your hand over your belly. Feel your belly push your hand out with each inhalation. After each inhalation, hold your breath gently for five to seven seconds, then exhale slowly, using your abdominal muscles to push out as much air as you can.
- f. **Finish your next shower cold.** Exposure to cold water can trigger the vagus nerve. Try 10 or 20 seconds of cold water. You're going for a shiver response.

2. CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS.



What you think can turn certain genes on and others off. What you think can also change the patterns in which your neurons connect. Here are some ideas and practices that can get your brain out of the vicious cycle of the “fight or flight” state, which generates inflammation, and into the “rest and digest” healing state.

- a. **Mix things up.** Rearrange furniture and decor, eat with your non-dominant hand, sleep on the other side of the bed, walk or drive a new route.
- b. **Learn or revisit a musical instrument.** This doesn't have to be as involved as it sounds. Borrow a ukulele or buy one for \$20 and learn a few songs via YouTube.
- c. **Listen to music** from a time in your past that was positive and life-affirming.
- d. **Identify harmful thought patterns.** When they arise, note them, tell them to stop, and redirect your thoughts to something positive. Some harmful patterns: obsessing about your health all the time, trying to predict how you'll feel in certain places or events, feeling helpless or worthless, engaging in negative self-talk, self-blame, addictive behaviors, or justifying negative beliefs.
- e. **When you catch yourself in these negative patterns,** infuse your mind instead with a positive experience—this must be visualized and embodied.
 - ✓ Think of a positive memory. Experiences in water (swimming, jumping into a lake) are especially effective for this exercise.
 - ✓ Describe this memory aloud in present tense and imagine it with all your senses (What does it feel like on my skin? What does it smell like? Look like? What sounds do I hear?).
 - ✓ You're going for evoked sensations, like goosebumps, a shiver, or a warm sensation in your body. Only then have you triggered the vagus nerve. Anchor this experience with a positive mantra (ex: I am strong!, I am healthy!, I am living my life!).
 - ✓ Practice this daily. Twice a day if possible. Repetition is the key to rewiring your brain. And eliciting the visceral experiences is key to healing your body.

3. START YOUR DAY WITH A SHOT OF QI.



- a. **Do a 10-minute qigong practice**, which integrates mind, body, and spirit. Many free practices are available on YouTube. See Resources below.
- b. **Tap your organs**—chest for lungs, under the rib cage for the liver and spleen, the small of your back for the kidneys and reproductive system, the belly for the digestive system.
- c. **Sound healing**—see Resources below for chanting practices to strengthen internal organs.

4. DO YOUR STRETCHES, & NOT JUST BEFORE OR AFTER EXERCISE.



Keeping your muscles flexible and strong, especially in the core (abdomen and back), are an often overlooked practice for health and healing. When tightened and shortened, muscles are at risk for strain and inflammation. Here are some additional benefits of stretching. (See Resources below.)

- a. **Improved circulation.** Stretching increases blood flow to your muscles. This means more nutrients and less waste buildup.
- b. **Improved movement in the lymphatic channels**, which further aids in removing waste from the muscles.
- c. **Improved coordination.** Stretches are best done if held for 30 seconds or longer. Better coordination helps with balance and mobility, which are important in chronic inflammatory conditions and in aging.

5. WALK OUTSIDE, BAREFOOT.



The soles of the feet have over 100,000 sensory nerves that send signals to the brain. When we always wear shoes, our brain loses out on these connections with the body. A walk on the beach, among the different textures of sand and water, is an ideal place. Your backyard works, too.

- a. If getting outside is logistically hard or impossible for you, ask friends or family to bring in houseplants or fresh flowers. Any bit of nature can stimulate the “rest and digest” phase.
- b. If your system is sensitive to plants and flowers, consider photos or posters of calming nature scenes.
- c. If you’re bed- or house-bound, if public places make you anxious, or if you simply have the habit of holing up in your house, do so in a light-filled room. Make sure you get out onto your deck or into your yard for part of the day. If you work in a dark office, take your lunch outside, or take a walk during lunch.

MY FAVORITE RESOURCES:

- ✓ The Chi Center, www.chicenter.com, has subscriptions for videotaped and livestream qigong practices for all levels, which includes sound healing as well as lectures. There are also free videos by Master Gu on YouTube.
- ✓ The Dynamic Neural Retraining System, www.retrainingthebrain.com, has information and DVD sets for purchase to get you rewiring your brain for health.
- ✓ EliteHRV is a free app to gauge and train your heart rate variability index, which improves resilience and brings relaxation down into your body.
- ✓ InsightTimer is a free app that has over 10,000 guided meditations. The body scans and abdominal breathing practices help bring awareness into your body.
- ✓ Fightmaster Yoga via YouTube has free yoga practices for beginners.
- ✓ Jessica Smith TV via YouTube has easy twenty- and thirty-minute stretching practices.