

Can PRAYER and POSITIVE THOUGHTS

help us HEAL?

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Advocates of alternative medicine have for a long time held the idea that our thinking can help our body heal, whilst some sceptics have considered this idea as nothing more than wishful thinking. This caused former editor for *New Scientist* magazine and award-winning science journalist Jo Marchant to go through several studies where she found research that backed up the idea that the mind and body are connected, such as the discovery that placebo painkillers can trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural pain-relieving chemicals. She says in a recent interview in *Scientific American*, 'None of these biological effects were caused by the placebo itself, as it is by definition inert, but instead they were triggered by the physiological response to the placebo.'

David Hamilton, PhD, has a passion for researching the mind-body connection. In his book *How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body* he writes, 'Research now shows that when we believe that we are taking a drug but it's really a placebo, the brain lights up as if we really were taking the drug and produces its own natural chemicals. This has recently been shown with Parkinson's disease. The symptoms of Parkinson's disease arise from impaired production of a substance called dopamine in part of the brain. This affects movement. Research has shown that Parkinson's patients given a placebo anti-Parkinson's drug are able to move better. Brain scans have shown that the brain is activated in the area that controls movement and dopamine is actually produced. The improved movement is not just a "psychological" thing. It is a physical response of dopamine in the brain.'

David also reports on a study that was published in the *British Medical Journal* which followed 200 patients that had been given either a positive or negative consultation by their doctor. In the group of patients that were told what was wrong with them and that they would get better in just a few days, 64% of them got better over the next few weeks, whilst in the group of patients that were told the doctor was not sure what was wrong with them and asked to come back if they did not get better, only 39% got better. The only consistent difference between those two groups was in how the doctor acted.

So it seems that when we believe we will get better, then the mind and body can work together better to achieve the desired result.

THE HEALING EFFECT OF PRAYER

Dr Harold G. Koenig from Duke University reports, 'Studies have shown prayer can prevent people from getting sick – and when they do get sick, prayer can help them get better faster.' In an attempt to understand why depression so often accompanied hospitalisation, researchers at Duke University assessed 1000 hospital patients and found that those who had a religious practice, including prayer, could cope better than those who didn't.

A study from Dartmouth College in Hanover, that followed the progress of 250 people after they had had open-heart surgery, concluded that those who had religious connections and social support were 12 times less likely to die than those who did not.

PRAYING FOR SOMEONE ELSE

A study done by cardiologist Randolph Byrd at San Francisco Hospital, involved 393 patients admitted to the coronary care unit. Some patients had been prayed for by home-prayer groups, and others had not. All of the patients received medical care, and in this double-blind study neither the doctors and nurses nor the patients knew who had been prayed for. The results surprised many, as it showed that those who had been prayed for needed fewer drugs, were less likely to require antibiotics, less likely to develop pulmonary oedema, and spent less time on ventilators. They were also less likely to die.

THE POSITIVE EFFECT OF HEALING

Recipients of complementary therapies have received a boost in confidence about their efficacy, following latest scientific research ruling out the placebo effect.

Research by Professor Chris A. Roe, Dr Elizabeth Roxburgh and Ms Charmaine Sonnex at the University of Northampton tested non-contact healing in a series of separate trials on plants, cells, seeds, small animals and humans. The results uncovered a fascinating phenomenon: When 'healing intent' was given to each of these groups, they produced an independent positive result. The evidence shows that healing intention can improve human wellbeing, and change the behaviour of animals, plants, seeds, and cells in culture, to an extent that was statistically shown to be very unlikely due to chance. 🌱

