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Text B & Translation

Unit 1

Optimism, Hope & Control: Attitudes & Health

Bruce Campbell

"Mind over matter" may not just be a commonly used phrase. The way you think about situations and experiences has a great effect on your overall well-being. A positive mindset through challenges and setbacks helps improve your physical health and contributes to healthier thinking patterns and behavior.

1 Can your attitude affect your health? If so, can a change in attitude help you to feel better? Over the last two decades, many studies have suggested that there is a connection between health and a positive attitude, as indicated by an optimistic and hopeful outlook. One famous research project found that optimism among Harvard undergraduate students predicted their health 35 years later. One of the questionnaires they completed while young measured their optimism. Researchers found that the optimistic students had better health in middle age than those who had been pessimistic as students.

2 A concept involved in this research is explanatory style, which means the way a person interprets negative events. We all experience disappointments, but two people may interpret the same negative event in very different ways and their different interpretations can affect their outlook and behavior.

3 To understand explanatory style, imagine that two people with fibromyalgia go for a walk and both return with higher symptoms. One says: "Another setback! I'll never get any better." This person has a pessimistic way of interpreting her experience. She sees specific events as examples of permanent, far-reaching negative forces. The second patient responds to her increase in symptoms by saying: "I walked too far today. Next time, I'll try walking less." She has a more optimistic way of seeing her experience. She sees an event as something specific, limited and temporary. She has a more hopeful explanatory style.

4 It suggests she can learn from experience that tomorrow need not be the same as today. Note that optimism does not mean denial. The second person does not ignore the fact that she felt worse after exercising. But she frames her experience in a way that motivates her to try something different rather than to give up.

5 Explanatory style is found to be linked to the physical health. Research at the University of Pennsylvania found that optimistic subjects had higher measures of immune system activity, which suggests their bodies were better able to ward off disease.

6 But can optimism be learned?

7 In fact, Martin Seligman, a psychologist, has written a book called *Learned Optimism* to explain how to change your thinking in a more positive direction. Seligman's ideas are part of a popular and widely-proven method for changing explanatory style called cognitive therapy. This approach is based on the idea that many people hold unrealistically pessimistic thoughts about themselves and that their ideas about themselves can be changed to be more accurate and hopeful.

8 Cognitive therapy is often taught through therapy lasting several months. The process is often divided into three steps. In the first step, you learn to recognize the things you tell yourself when you experience negative or upsetting events. For example, if you experience a setback, you might say something like "I'll never get any better. This is hopeless." This self-talk is called automatic thinking because it is a habitual way of responding to experience. Often we are more harsh and judgmental with ourselves in our inner dialogue than we would be with others.

9 Once you have identified negative thoughts, you examine them to see how realistic they are. In evaluating your thoughts, you ask yourself to what extent the thoughts are valid. The idea is to suspend temporarily your belief that the thoughts are true, and instead look for both evidence that supports and evidence that refutes the thoughts. Writing down the evidence you find helps you gain distance from your thoughts and makes them less self-evident.

10 Third, you train yourself to have more realistic thoughts about your experience. The new thought integrates all evidence both positive and negative in a realistic, balanced way. It should reduce your stress by helping you feel better, less anxious and sad.

11 If there is a well-established connection between attitude and health and there is evidence that attitude can be changed through approaches such as cognitive therapy, what explains the link between a positive outlook and health? What mechanisms could produce a positive health effect given an optimistic attitude?

12 Several factors have been identified. One is immune system activity. Studies with both animals and humans suggest that pessimism and a sense of helplessness may affect the functioning of the immune system. A possible linkage is stress, the hypothesis being that stress lowers the body's defenses and thus may lead to illness. Many studies have indicated that animals and people under stress have their "fight or flight" reaction stuck in the "on" position and that this may gradually wear down the immune system. However, stress management offers one way to break the negative link between stress and immune function.

13 Another factor that may contribute to the link between attitude and health is a sense of control. In one study of control among nursing home patients, researchers gave half of the residents some control over their lives by giving them plants to take care of and some choice over things like what movie to watch. The other residents were not offered these options. Researchers found that the residents who gained greater control were happier and, surprisingly, lived longer. After a year and a half, only 15 percent had died in comparison to 30 percent of the control group.

14 How can you increase your sense of control? Using self-help strategies such as pacing, problem solving and target setting can help. Pacing, knowing and honoring the limits of oneself, offers a way to replace the roller coaster of events with predictability. Problem solving and setting realistic short-term goals replace anxiety with a sense of accomplishment.

15 Probably the best documented link between attitude and improved health is through behavior. People who are upbeat and hopeful are more likely to engage in effective actions that will help. This is sometimes referred to as the "grandmother factor": doing more of the things that your grandmother would advise, like eating well, getting adequate rest and staying connected with family and friends.

16 The last potential link is support. People with long-term illness are often isolated. The relationship between isolation and death is as strong as the relationships between smoking and death, and cholesterol and death. Quality as well as quantity of relationships is important.

17 While I have tried to show that there is a connection between attitude and health, I don't

mean to suggest that people should feel responsible for making themselves sick. Rather, I intend to suggest that you can make the link between attitude and health work in your favor from here forward, if you are mindful of your explanatory style and if you utilize strategies such as pacing, stress management and problem solving that promote better health.

Culture Notes

1. About the author

Bruce Campbell is a recovered ME/CFS (肌痛性脑脊髓炎) patient and the creator of an ME/CFS self-help program. For years, he writes about and gives talks on self-help for ME/CFS patients.

2. fibromyalgia (Para. 3)

Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes pain all over the body, sleep problems, tiredness, depression, and anxiety. The cause of it is unknown yet.

3. Martin Seligman (Para. 7)

Martin Seligman is an American psychologist, educator, and author of self-help books. Seligman is a strong promoter within the scientific community of his theories of positive psychology and of well-being. He is a leading authority in the fields of Positive Psychology, resilience, learned helplessness (习得性无助), depression, optimism and pessimism. He is also a recognized authority on interventions (干预措施) that prevent depression, and build strengths and well-being.

4. Learned Optimism (Para. 7)

Learned Optimism is one of the representative works by Martin Seligman and was published in 1990. In the book, Martin Seligman proposed the idea of "learned optimism," which means that a talent for joy, like any other, can be cultivated. In contrast with learned helplessness, optimism is learned by consciously challenging any negative self-talk.

5. cognitive therapy (Para. 7)

Cognitive therapy is a relatively short-term form of psychotherapy based on the concept that the way we think about things affects how we feel emotionally. Cognitive therapy focuses on present thinking, behavior, and communication rather than on past experiences and is aimed at problem solving.

6. "fight or flight" reaction (Para. 12)

"Fight or flight" reaction is an automatic physiological (生理的) reaction to an event that is perceived as stressful or frightening. The perception of threat activates the sympathetic nervous system (交感神经系统) and triggers an acute stress response that prepares the body to fight or flee.

Translation of the text

乐观，希望，控制——论人生态度与身体健康

布鲁斯·坎贝尔

“心胜于物”可能不仅仅是一句常用语。你对所处境遇和经历的看法会极大地影响你的健康。在遭遇挑战和挫折的时候保持积极的心态对你的生理健康有好处，也有利于形成更为健康的思维模式和行为。

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