

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Think Positive for Great Health
Use Your Mind to Promote Your Own Healing and Wellness

Dr. Jeff Brown

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Introduction

No one can afford to be sick, especially in the face of a lethargic economy and disgraceful healthcare costs. Conversation starters used to be about the weather, politics or religion. Now, outrageous healthcare costs are on the short list of what you'll find in common with people you hardly know.

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation statistic, employers were paying an average family insurance premium of \$15,073 in 2011. Heated battles between patients and their insurance companies over ruthless denials of coverage, disgruntled providers who are being stripped financially by collapsing reimbursement rates, and those individuals who simply don't seek treatment because of high deductibles make for a perfect storm that's not going to be over soon. Have you noticed how your health has taken on a financial tone? General quality of life, contentment, and happiness should always be front and center, but advocating for your health has now become a financial preoccupation for many people. Let me be clear. Good health is now a commodity and is something you have to haggle over, rather than enjoy.

This unhealthy problem facing everyone won't fade. If your strategy has been to "wait it out," then wait no longer and start taking charge of your health. The responsibility of great health is falling to individuals more than ever in history. Not just caring about your health, but being in the driver's seat of your health, is one of newest, most vital responsibilities you face today and in the future.

A key ingredient in facing this responsibility of managing your health is your brain. This is where the good news comes in! Advancing research continues to expand knowledge and furthers understanding of the brain and its capacity to change and influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You are positioned better than ever to utilize your brain to improve your life. By the way, you already own your brain. It won't cost you a thing.

You can tap into your brain to maintain or improve your healthcare. Yes, it takes some good old-fashioned work ethic to apply principles and strategies, but your health is worth the effort. If change is on your horizon, you'll have to be the one to put it there. So, don't wait any longer to start changing. Use your brain to develop optimism and positive emotions. Use your brain to visualize recovery or conquering new health challenges. Use your brain to develop healthy mindsets and reduce frustration and anxiety. Build your knowledge of psychological principles that will allow you to make better decisions and develop new habits that can give you a healthy overhaul.

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Think Positive for Great Health has been written specifically with your brain and you in mind. Even a little interest in living a healthy life speaks volumes about your motives, hopes, and self-respect. You and your health can be companions for life.

~Jeff Brown, Psy.D., ABPP, Psychologist~

Chapter 1
Your Mind and Your Body: Best Friends for Life

Give Me a Break

In the summer after our tenth grade year, Sue, Louise and I were the three musketeers, the triangle offense, and Neapolitan ice cream. Neapolitan ice cream, not because we were Italian, but because Sue was a brunette, Louise a platinum blonde and I a redhead. All three of us sported long hair, great looking bodies in our hip huggers and crop tops, and as we strolled along the streets we counted the number of horn honks we received like notches on our belts. It was hot that summer and so were we.

That was the last summer we hung out like that, for in our eleventh grade year we could drive. And drive we did. We cruised the boulevard, pushed the pedal to the metal, triple-dated with boyfriends, raced to the beach, and brought all our friends, in the trunks of our parents' cars, to the drive-in movies. That was also the summer Sue began working and saving for college.

Sue lived with her aunt and uncle along with their two children. She knew no one would pay her way through college, unlike Louise and me, who already knew that our college tuitions were covered.

Sue scrimped and saved her money the summer before our senior year. She slaved away at several jobs from the end of school in June to the first day of school in September. Louise and I attended summer school and weren't as happy-go-lucky as our first summer together. Grades and SATs were important now. Louise and I ended up settling for a state college but Sue enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles.

After high school graduation our lives rapidly changed. Louise and I learned that summer school was a nifty way of lightening our course load during the year as well as keeping up with our school credits. Sue still worked and economized from June until September. She lived in the dorms at UCLA. Even though she was only a fifteen-minute drive over the hill, we didn't see much of her. Occasionally we met in Westwood, near the university. It had to be close to Sue's dorm for she either worked, attended class or studied. Sue's college pattern: work-class-study.

Beginning our second year in college, I noticed another pattern in Sue's life. Since she had started working during the summers, back before our eleventh grade year, Sue had never taken a vacation. There were of course the weekends, but when college started, Sue labored those days as well. This was something we all knew, but didn't think about much. It just stuck in the back of our minds. When Louise and I considered a fun excursion, we knew Sue was toiling away at work.

The first time it happened, no one paid attention. Getting mononucleosis before school started our senior year in high school was no big deal. Everybody got mono back then -- the kissing disease. Sue sweated and slept in bed for a week at the end of the summer, as school began. Louise and I teased her by telling our friends she needed to recover from being over-kissed. The next year, before college began, she contracted some kind of virus or flu again and had another sleep-filled, sweaty week in bed. She couldn't go to Yosemite with us. When it happened the third time, the same way the next year, it made sense to me. Sue had not taken a vacation, so her body did it for her. Fun holiday? No, but it was a break. She subconsciously managed the perfect body breakdown, missing only one week of work, each year, preceding school registration.

I visited Sue that September before our second year in college. "How are you feeling?" I asked, as I put flowers in a vase by her bed.

“We must really stop meeting like this,” she moaned.

“Do you remember the first time you got sick?”

She thought for a second. “Yeah!” Her voice went up two octaves. “I felt embarrassed my first day back our senior year. You and Louise spread rumors about me being absent from school because I kissed dead people... or something like that.”

“We were just being silly.” I laughed. “I’ve been thinking about this. What has not happened in your life since that first summer of mono?” Putting her hand on her chin she thought. “Isn’t it interesting you get sick every year right before school starts?” Her eyes opened wide as this new notion made sense to her. “Your body forced you on a vacation... in bed, every year before school started.”

Her face lit up as she asked, “Wow! What do I do about it?”

“You take charge and decide when and where your next holiday is. Go on an exciting vacation!” I encouraged.

“Exciting and inexpensive,” Sue retorted.

“Okay, do anything, go anywhere, see anyone, just take a break!” I left her full of hope as she recuperated from her disease. Dis-ease because her body was not in its normal state of peace and health. Her mind, preoccupied with worry about her finances, caused this illness in her body.

Next June, the summer of our third year in college, we talked about her mind-body connection again. During the year, Sue paid more attention to her body. She noticed that thoughts about money made her body feel rigid and hot, the way she felt before getting sick. In the past, she never realized a connection between what her mind thought and what her body felt. This year was different. She decided to break her pattern and join her family for a week in August at the beach. We both felt excited about the possibilities. The summer came and went without a sign of illness.

In September, Sue telephoned. “Debi, I never realized the power my mind had over my body. It knew I needed a break all those years. But I obsessed over money and grades, leaving no room for balance in my life.”

A huge grin spread across my face as she shared her new insight. Sue yanked back control and smashed her cycle of work-class-study-flu, by taking a vacation! Her break from work and school helped Sue heal. She learned the importance her thoughts, either conscious or unconscious, and her self-talk had on the wellness of her body.

~Deborah Ellis~

Restoring Body and Soul

My divorce thirty years ago left me more than heartsick, it left me sick in spirit. The first years as a single parent were lonely and frightening, my self-esteem falling to an all-time low. It wasn't long before I noticed a sharp rise in my blood pressure and more frequent headaches. The constant stress settled into my body, especially in my neck and across my shoulders and upper back. I felt like I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. As my body aches increased, so did my feelings of despair and failure. When I signed up for life insurance and had a medical checkup my blood pressure was so dangerously high I was almost turned down. I was overwhelmed and my life reflected it.

One day I was visiting my parents and my dad told me how hard it was to see me so sad. "Your marriage was so unhappy, I was hoping that you would bounce back after your divorce. I think you've forgotten how to be happy. You have two terrific kids and a family that loves you. Why are you still so sad all the time?" my dad asked. I was surprised by the question, but more shocked because I had no answer. The question continued to haunt me as I drove home and later, after I put the children to bed, I made a cup of tea and began thinking about how to change my mental outlook.

There were certainly difficulties to overcome, but many things in my life were wonderful and I wasn't making time to enjoy them. I began to take walks with my sister, taking time to notice the simple beauty of a field of buttercups or the sight of Mount Rainier on a clear summer day. Beauty was all around me, but I was so self-absorbed I no longer noticed. I began to spend more time laughing with my children and seeking activities we could enjoy together within our limited budget. My headaches became less frequent and my blood pressure slowly improved.

At a meeting with the pastor of my church, I told him how I had gotten into such a terrible depression and mentioned to him that I felt it would be good for me to do some kind of volunteer work. "I think it will help me to get outside of myself and look at the bigger picture," I told him. He thought it was a good idea and encouraged me to do some volunteer work with the church's youth. It was fun to work with the teenagers, helping them to put on plays for special events. Their sense of humor and high spirits lifted my mood.

As my outlook became more positive I became more interested in exercise and healthy eating. I took a beginning yoga class, trying to get back the flexibility I had when I was younger. I had always wanted to learn to tap dance, so at the age of forty I signed up for a beginning tap class for adults. Each new adventure brought more people into my life and I found new confidence. It wasn't an immediate transformation for me, but a steady improvement. For the first time in years I was having fun.

My health continued to improve, my blood pressure returned to normal, and my headaches became infrequent and less intense. I began hiking and camping with my children, an activity we had enjoyed before the divorce, which took us out into the fresh air and helped us bond as a family. The hiking increased my stamina, leaving me feeling strong and empowered. My tense body eased and I began to feel like the person I once was, only new and improved.

My health has continued to be strong, although a traumatic car accident did set me back a bit several years ago. I battled through that difficult time, learning anew the power of accepting what I cannot change and appreciating the good things that make up the

majority of my life. One of the nicest things about changing my life was the number of people who were inspired to do the same thing. It is my experience that when you begin to live in a more positive frame of mind, that positive outlook spreads to others. Not only has my health benefited from thinking positively, my life growing richer and more fulfilling, but others around me have found greater joy as well. Believing in the power of positive can heal your body and restore your spirit.

~Beth Arvin~

Serving Two Masters

For years I dreamed of becoming a healthcare executive. I finally got my coveted promotion to Vice President at age thirty-nine. My previous education and training were focused on this goal. The greater challenge came when, having married for the first time in my late thirties, I had our only child just a month shy of my forty-second birthday. Thus began my late-in-life, corporate mom boomerang from happy and prosperous to unhappy and unhealthy... and back to hope and healing.

Life stirred in our newly built suburban home by dawn each day. Meredith still needed help with dressing and meals. A last minute check of her book bag confirmed all forms were signed and lunch was safely tucked inside. Breakfast might be served in my stockings before I grabbed my heels and blazer.

On good days we had time to walk to school, Meredith's preference, while late starts required a drive. Her father or grandmother met her after classes and oversaw evening activities such as bathing and homework. Corporate expectations meant late nights and out-of-town travel for me. I had worked hard to attain my professional status and enjoyed the thrill of success, but it came with board meetings and business deals, which came with high priced, high calorie business dinners.

Being a full-time mom and full-time executive stressed my body, mind, and spirit more than I realized. Within a few years I found myself bloated, perpetually tired, and frequently depressed. The migraine headaches from two decades before returned. The familiar rash around my neck defied cortisone, leaving me splotchy and itchy. The joy of conquering new business horizons started to seem lower priority when Meredith was waiting up at night just to see her mom. Someone else fed her, gave her a bath, and read her nighttime stories, not me. Most days my mind and body ached from mixed loyalties.

Though I spoke at local seminars on how to be a superwoman/supermom, inside I knew my health and state of mind were far from super. I needed to decide what I really wanted in my life and go for it. "No one can serve two masters" was what the scripture told me (Matthew 6:24). Although I did not want to believe this, my body and spirit knew it. Something had to change. What brought me the most joy and peace was not my job.

"I know we need the money, but Meredith also needs a mom -- a healthy one who can help her grow up," I told my husband.

"Then quit your job," he said.

"We have lived on two incomes for so many years."

"How about this?" he said. "Let's plan toward you coming home a year from now. Take some time to think this through, and I'll try to pick up some extra work. Set the resignation date now."

With a definite plan and a projected stop date at work, energy flowed through my veins. Walking around the block and shopping for fresh fruits and veggies became pleasurable treats, not drudgery. The journey to frugality boosted my self-esteem as I knew I had hope for a future. I found myself more productive at work and at home. I had one year to implement our plan. With the same vigor with which I had written business plans for the company, I charted our family's year-to-freedom strategy. Sacrifices were made to pay off debt while increasing our savings. We would downsize our lifestyle to reach our aspirations.

Older women offered their wisdom on how to manage a family on a shoestring.

Mom taught me to plan menus from the grocery's weekly sale ads while maximizing nutrition. I studied how to serve home cooked meals that rivaled the best local restaurants for a fraction of the cost. Meredith learned to cook alongside her mom and grandmother for a dad who appreciated it all.

Shopping at yard sales and thrift stores became a regular Saturday morning game. A mother of five invited us along to teach me the rules and art of negotiation. I found it similar to bargaining for limited resources among departments at work. In fact, many of my executive training skills were transferable to home management. It seemed that corporate lessons played well on the home front.

During that year-to-freedom, my schedule was as busy as ever, with the added pressure of achieving our family goal. Yet we remained optimistic, hopeful, and positive. Creativity reigned as we discovered ways to orient our lives toward our purpose. I had more energy, slept better, ditched the migraines, and experienced less anxiety. Everyone relaxed as we embraced a planned future together.

For me, the myth of health and happiness as a full-time executive and full-time mom was like serving two masters. Both wanted all my attention. I fell in love with home and became frustrated with my corporate career. Ten years later, I combine part-time work and home into a satisfying combo. However, at that stressful time in my life, the decision to choose one master took me off the rocky road to illness and put me on the highway of hope and health.

~Marylane Wade Koch~

Mind Over Matter

“I’m forty-eight,” I whined to my friend Ilene, “but I feel like I’m eighty-four.”

“But you look great,” my friend responded. “I can’t see a single wrinkle on your face.”

Thanks to some heavy-duty moisturizer and well-placed make-up, that statement may have been true. However, what appeared at skin level was much different than what I felt taking hold beneath the surface -- arthritis. The aches and pains first came upon me slowly in my early forties. In the years that followed, I never let my stiff fingers, creaky knees, or sore shoulders slow me down. Yet when the malady settled in my lower back, further aggravating on old injury, I had no choice but to take notice.

The constant ache in my back followed me everywhere I went like an unwelcome companion. Walking, sitting, bending, even lying in bed was, at best, uncomfortable most of the time. I dreaded getting in and out of my car thanks to the stabbing pains that radiated through my hips each time I shifted my weight. After seeing a movie, I needed to take a few bobbling steps before my regular gait returned and I could safely exit the theater. Even lifting myself from the sofa after watching just a few minutes of television required an equal amount of stretching before I was limber enough to walk into the kitchen for a snack.

Once fiercely self-reliant and above-average active, I found myself suddenly avoiding the most mundane of movements, using “my back” as an excuse. Replace that burned-out light bulb? Well, I would... but my back. Weed the garden? Not since my back started aching. Lift and carry those supermarket bags? You guessed it. No can do, thanks to my back.

One day, I bent over as I towel-dried my hair -- and got stuck. What felt like an electric shock ran through my left hip, down the back of my leg, into the arch of my foot and stayed with me for a full ten minutes. Tears came to my eyes. The pain was so powerful that I couldn’t even open my mouth to call out to my husband for help. The next morning, in a slightly reduced state of agony, I visited my doctor.

“Sciatica,” he told me, “brought on by complications of injury, arthritis, and general weakness of the back muscles.” He sent me off with the name of an over-the-counter pain reliever, a pamphlet outlining some helpful back exercises, and the recommendation to walk at least one mile each day. I followed his advice and the sciatica did subside. Yet that original nagging discomfort in my back stayed with me.

Back pain soon became my number one topic of conversation and I quickly found several other sufferers all too willing to commiserate over our poor fortune. As the old saying goes, misery loves company, and several of us would meet regularly to discuss our diagnoses and failed treatments. We were a beat-up, broken-down bunch of gals to be sure, grimacing at each step we took, a collective moan resounding as we took our seats. One woman wore a neck brace. Another regularly used a walker. Yet another arrived wheelchair bound.

When I returned home after one such meeting, I took a good look at my own reflection: hunched and limping. There, in front of that mirror, I laid it on the line. “God willing, you’ve got between thirty and forty years left on this earth,” I said. “If you don’t pull yourself together this situation will only get worse. Do you really want to give up? Already?”

“No!” I answered, stomping my foot for emphasis. “I might have pain, but I will not let pain have me.”

From that day forward, I made every effort to stand straight, to walk strong, to stop wincing at each twist or turn, and especially to stop using “my back” as an excuse to not live my life as I should. In short, I no longer gave myself permission to baby my body. Even though the ache was still with me, it felt good to be back on my own two feet, so to speak. I became more active, and the more active I became, the happier I felt. And the happier I felt, the less I noticed the pain. In fact, by the time my next support group meeting arrived, I realized that I was pain-free and had been for several weeks. That afternoon, when it was my turn to speak, I announced that after many years I found myself feeling well. The next time I attended the meeting, still pain-free, I admitted shyly that I believed I had experienced a miracle.

Now, a full year after my “miracle,” I have resumed all my normal activities. I walk, bicycle, and swim. And when I go to the movies, I get up out of my seat swiftly, shake off any stiffness and exit without fanfare. I have shoveled snow in the winter, pulled weeds in the summer, danced at a wedding in the spring, and raked leaves in the fall. Of course, I continue with my doctor’s prescribed regimen of exercise and do remain cautious about certain movements he does not recommend. Yet, I attribute my newfound feeling of wellness to my change in attitude. Now, when a pinch or pull threatens to settle in my body, I no longer give in. Instead, I think back to the conversation that took place in front of my mirror, stamp my foot, and simply say, “No!”

~Monica A. Andermann~

Your Mind and Your Body: Best Friends for Life

Introduction

Best friends are tight. They have common interests. They share similar goals. They spend a lot of time together. They usually know where the other is. If their relationship hits rough waters, best friends batten down the hatches and weather the storm. They identify what the relationship needs and work toward finding their groove again. For great health, your mind and body need to be best friends. It's up to you to make sure the relationship is a strong one you can both count on.

Mention of the classic mind and body connection problem is a good place to start a discussion about how thoughts and feelings are linked to your physical health. Just how are the mind and body connected? How do they communicate? They are connected somehow, right? Never has such a special relationship between two things been so logical, yet so mysterious. Philosophers, scientists, and theologians have hammered on this mind-numbing question for centuries, only to agree that there's so much more to understand.

Throughout the following pages, I'll be sharing information from contemporary research, my clinical experiences with courageous patients, and my thoughts gleaned from my own firsthand experiences with thinking and health. Experience is truly one of the best teachers. It certainly has been in my case.

Your Body Is a Tattletale

Several years ago, a physician friend asked me to join his efforts on a trip to work with homeless street kids in La Paz, Bolivia. For years he had developed relationships and found ways of connecting with parentless children who were facing some of life's grimmest circumstances. He thought the timing was right to bring a psychologist into the fold to help train the service workers in the area. I journeyed with a group to Bolivia, where we worked in the city as well as traveled to remote areas, visiting orphanages and churches, which commonly became the homes of children abandoned by their parents.

Though I provided much needed education and psychological intervention to Bolivian counselors, laypeople and pastors, the toughest job was being on the streets with the kids. We offered them support, understanding, and, at bare minimum, a human connection with someone who genuinely cared about them. The children were living in horrific squalor in alleys, in sewage drains, in cardboard shanties. They were seen as social nuisances, the equivalent of human rats. Many of them had physical injuries sustained from living on the streets. Gashes caused by glass and garbage covered their bare feet. Cuts and bruises sustained from fighting one another for food defiled the kids' bodies, while infection was common because antiseptics and antibiotics were not available to them.

The throbbing psychological and physical pain these kids endured was conveniently soothed by huffing inhalants from small wads of cloth. The inhalant

high would give them warmth at night, and cool both their emotions and hunger pangs during the day.

My physician friend filled a healthcare void with an extraordinarily challenging medical specialty: helping street kids whose diet consisted of leftovers salvaged from garbage cans, food offered in exchange for prostitution, and the occasional special treat of a fried chicken head on a stick from a rare benevolent cart vendor. I left Bolivia with these images burned in my mind, wondering how effective I'd really been in making a dent in such a pervasive, hardly comprehensible problem.

I had been back in the United States about a month when I started developing some unpleasant gastrointestinal symptoms. I tried managing them with over-the-counter remedies, but eventually met with my primary care physician. Having traveled to a third world country, there was some concern that I had an atypical bacterial infection. If I did, it was turning out to be tougher than any run-of-the-mill stomach bug swimming in unsanitary water. After a series of tests, including my inaugural colonoscopy that turned up nothing, the specialist started me on a series of potent medications. When one didn't work, he'd try another.

One day, after several months of a disrupted lifestyle and a hovering diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome, my pharmacist told me I was out of prescription benefits for the year and would now have to pay over four hundred dollars a month for my medications. That expense, remember, was for medication that wasn't working. I was enraged. It was at that very moment, a moment I still remember vividly years later, that I told the pharmacist I wasn't going to pay for the medicine and to put it back on her shelf. In fact, I brazenly told her I didn't even need the medicine anymore. As I spoke those words, I began to engage my brain in my own healing process. My mind and my body were starting to regroup for the first time since I'd been to Bolivia.

You see, I had been chasing a medical problem that should have been addressed psychologically. The way my body and brain connected was a lot like Deborah Ellis's friend Sue whose body became rigid and hot at the mere thought of money. Once I started talking more about my negative emotions, my physical symptoms started to subside, and my body began to heal. I had suppressed my feelings of hopelessness and anger about the injustices I had witnessed in Bolivia, wrapped it up in a nice package and put it away. I thought I was done with the third-world experience, but my body told me otherwise. That trip to the pharmacy allowed me to access my anger -- an anger I had stifled since witnessing the horrifying lives of the street kids of La Paz. Who was I kidding? Psychologists' lives are stressful already. Add to that a firsthand experience of seeing those who can't protect themselves living in such inhumane conditions. No doubt, I suppressed the anger -- shelved it you might say -- and hadn't done anything about it. As a result, my body tattled on my mind.

Through that experience I learned to talk about stress in a different way. I'd thought psychologists were supposed to keep their emotions and coping strategies in order. Well, I've come a long way since then, and as result of solid research and

personal experience I'll be sharing the handy theory of cognitive behavioral psychology with you. Cognitive behavioral psychology is the key to my understanding of how the mind and body connect. It can be a key for you, too.

Brainpower Can Fuel Healing

Throughout my career, I've been surrounded by gifted physicians and healthcare professionals who have gone beyond the call of duty to tackle maladies with great success. I believe most of those miracle workers, however, would agree that brainpower is an indispensable part of maintaining great health. Brainpower can fuel healing. How you think can directly affect how you feel. Please don't misunderstand. I'm not trying to convince you that every ailment you have is in your head. Many diagnoses are far from that, in fact. If you have any medical concerns, you should always see your healthcare provider. Whether you are trying to maintain good health or trying to restore it, you need to include your brain in the process.

As I mentioned before, one of the trickiest brainteasers of all time remains: How do the brain and body really connect? We are each uniquely biologically and neurologically wired. Ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes knew some connection must exist, but couldn't put a fine bead on it. Even with advancing biomedical sciences and technology, we still know little about how the mind-body connection exactly works, but that's not to say we don't have a few strong leads.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has allowed researchers to scan the human brain (along with many other parts of the human anatomy) to actually see how it's being used by its owner. Think of an fMRI as a colorful three-dimensional X-ray of your brain on a computer screen that shows when, where, and how your brain changes during different types of activities. Thanks to fMRI studies, doctors and researchers can estimate more accurately how the brain works under a variety of conditions. But we need to put a twist on the ancient mind-body conundrum. Rather than wondering about how it exists, we must embrace the mystery of the connection and start engaging our brains to better take charge of our health. Don't worry if you're not a biology person. You don't have to be. Don't be concerned if you never took a chemistry class or don't know what the periodic table is. You don't need to know. You've stepped onto an airplane without understanding the physics of flight. You've marveled at a skyscraper without studying architecture. Just by being curious, you've positioned yourself to start learning about your brain and how it can positively affect your health.

One thing is for sure: you are an expert on yourself, including how you think, feel, behave, make decisions, and connect with others. And because you're an expert on yourself, you are poised to become the foremost authority on how your brain influences your personal health. In order to do this though, you need to understand what cognitive behavioral psychology is and how to start integrating it into your life.

Cognitive Behavioral Psychology: Build a Toolbox for Great Health

Cognitive behavioral psychology is the most examined psychological approach in the research literature and it can lead to permanent, positive change in the brain. In cognitive behavioral psychology's most simplistic terms, the "cognitive" part focuses on thinking and thought while the "behavioral" piece has to do with actions, new or old behaviors, habits, and sometimes, social interactions. The beauty of taking a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) approach comes from the connection between thought and behavior. CBT allows you to access the brain and start changing it. You can actually activate your own thoughts, use them in instructive and corrective ways, and change your behavior for the better. When you begin thinking in a healthy way, you'll probably start noticing changes in emotions and behaviors. As you read through the next few chapters, you will understand more about how your thinking affects behavior, particularly as it relates to improving or maintaining health.

An easy way to understand cognitive behavioral psychology is to use an ABC model. "A" represents what is referred to as the Activating event, such as a situation you are in or a set of circumstances facing you. The "B" represents Beliefs, which are the thoughts that you have in the moment of the activating event. For example, a patient I'll call Allison. Her activating event occurs when she walks into a large room full of people at an after-hours networking mixer. Her belief is that everyone in the room is staring at her and thinking negatively about her. Now, for the "C" in the model: It stands for Consequences, which are usually undesirable or uncomfortable emotions or behaviors that become a problem. As a result of Allison's belief that people are judging her harshly when she walks into the room, she experiences a high level of anxiety and quickly leaves the room.

In cognitive behavioral therapy, we take aim at the belief (the "B") so we can affect the consequence (the "C"). Take a look at the box below so you can see how I have mapped out the ABC model for Allison.

ABC Model for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	
A (Activating event)	Walks into a large room with many people.
B (Belief)	"These people are negatively judging me."
C (Consequence)	Feels strong anxiety and leaves the room.

For Allison, it may be tough in the moment to understand how her beliefs are creating her anxiety. But as you look at the situation on paper, it's clear that the views she holds about herself and the situation are inaccurate. To help Allison identify her inaccuracies so she can change them, I'd point out that not everyone in the room is looking at her. Nor are all of the people in the room thinking the exact

same thing about her. That would be humanly impossible. Inaccurate thoughts and beliefs are often described as irrational or distorted. I like to use the word “inaccurate” about “wrong” thinking because that means we can improve our accuracy about how we perceive ourselves and the world around us.

Whether you’ve heard of cognitive behavioral therapy before, or if this is a brand new idea for you, I’m glad you’re interested in learning about how to use the connection between the mind and body to employ your brain to positively affect your health. You’ll catch on quickly.