

Be Open Minded...

Written by Cherie Snyder
Monday, 15 February 2010 17:32 -



“Be open minded, but not so open minded that your brains fall out.”

Groucho Marx certainly got it right with that quote! Especially when it comes to nutrition and health and all the different diets, supplements, and unusual approaches to healing our bodies. We need to always challenge our assumptions and be willing to examine new perspectives, yet base our decisions on good science coupled with common sense.

Not an easy task when we have instant access to so much information and ideas via the Internet!

But let me share with you a perspective I feel is worthy of an open mind. I learned about this at the June 2009 Food as Medicine training sponsored by the Center for Mind-Body Medicine in Washington, DC. The approach is called “functional medicine” and it is changing the way I look at health and healing and nutrition.

According to physician Mark Hyman in *The UltraMind Solution* (Scribner, 2009), “We need to get out of the name it, blame it, and tame it game – the myth of diagnosis – and start thinking about how the body works, how to personalize our approach, and how not to suppress symptoms but restore normal function.”

Dr. Hyman is part of a growing area of medical practice called “functional medicine”. It is based on “systems biology” - the impressive body of research which provides evidence that everything in our body and brain is interconnected and interdependent.

During most of the twentieth century, medicine has been carved into specialties which view the

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body as a collection of many organ systems. Although this focus on medical specialization has resulted in many scientific breakthroughs, Dr. Mark Hyman states the problem with this approach: "Specialists zoomed into their corner of the body, but who was minding the whole picture?"

Functional medicine challenges this view of the body as a collection of parts. It takes the "systems biology" research of the past 25 years and applies it clinically to patient care. Instead of treating symptoms or diseases, it focuses on root causes. Functional medicine recognizes that our thoughts, experiences, beliefs, nutrition, and traumas, as well as environment and genetics are interacting as a single, dynamic system. Unlike conventional medicine, functional medicine tailors treatment to each patient's unique needs, his/her biochemical individuality, and the interaction between the body and the environment.

The goal is to support and heal the underlying core imbalances that explain nearly every disease - to insure that our body is playing as a "single sophisticated symphony" as Dr. Hyman puts it. By identifying systems problems early, functional medicine can catch health issues before they emerge as serious or chronic problems.

At the Food as Medicine training, I learned about the seven "core imbalances" that can manifest themselves in a variety of illnesses and health problems. They are:

- oxidative stress;
- inflammation;
- digestion/absorption;
- impaired detoxification;
- nutrient imbalances;
- insulin resistance; and,
- stress and sleep deprivation.

If even one of these seven core systems is out of balance, illness can manifest itself. For some people this may be heart disease, for others it may be depression. A physician practicing from the functional medicine perspective focuses more on the underlying imbalances than on naming and classifying the disease or the symptoms of the imbalance.

So according to functional medicine, a very few problems explain nearly every disease and

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these underlying problems are all interconnected. As Dr. Hyman states in *The UltraMind Solution*, this “new road map reveals one of the most radical concepts that emerges from this new medical approach: the name of the disease bears little relationship to the cause of the disease.” One disease can have many causes and all have the same symptoms. On the other hand, there can be one factor in an individual’s lifestyle, genetic makeup, diet, or environment that triggers many different diseases.

According to many researchers, nutritionists, and physicians who presented at the Food as Medicine training, the most powerful tool we have to rebalance our health is literally at our fingertip. It is our fork. Food, according to Dr. Hyman, is “the fastest acting and most powerful medicine you can take to change your life.”

In upcoming articles I will explore this idea of “food as medicine” and share ways you can help to rebalance your health simply by changing what you eat.

Meanwhile, learn more about functional medicine at www.functionalmedicine.org. I’d also like to suggest you add Dr. Hyman’s book, *The UltraMind Solution*, to your Christmas wish list.

And most of all, have a wonderful holiday season!

This article was originally published in the December issue of the Cumberland Times-News Health Journal. Cherie Snyder is the Director of the Human Service Program and the Integrative Health Program at ACM. She received her certification in mind/body skills from Dr. Gordon’s Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM) in Washington, DC in 2001 and serves on their faculty. She can be reached at (301) 784-5556 or by email at csnyder@allegany.edu

*Editor’s note: This month Dr. Hyman’s *The UltraMind Solution* is featured on Maryland Public Television (MPT) during its pledge drive. MPT currently lists these 2 upcoming broadcasts:*

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- *Wednesday, February 17th from midnight - 2 AM; and*
- *Sunday, February 28 from 6:30 AM - 8:30 AM.*