Authenticity – The Key to Happy, Healthy Living

By Andrea Raischel, RN

What does it mean to live authentically? The concept is thrown around a lot these days. We are told to “live an authentic life” and “be authentic.” We are flooded with admonitions to “follow your dream,” “listen to your heart,” and “be true to you,” all meant to inspire us to seek our own authentic path. But how many of us actually do it? How can we find our authentic self when most of our lives we have been taught to conform to others’ expectations, people please, mold our behavior for approval and fit in with the crowd? From the moment we are born we begin the conformity process. Conformity is inevitable and part of being human, but is it always in our best interest?

Certainly, some conformity is necessary and beneficial. Driving on the correct side of the road, wearing clothes in public or being quiet during a lecture all contribute to a more harmonious flow. However our deep desire to conform, to fit in, to be a part of the group can also be detrimental to our ability to grow and develop authentically. Most of us arrive into adulthood not knowing who we really are because our authentic nature was not nurtured when we were children. Until we learn how to see and love all parts of ourselves, we will feel incomplete, lonely, and misunderstood. The greater the gap between who you have become and who you really want to be, the more discomfort you will experience.

When our thoughts and actions do not support our sense of well-being, our body is compromised causing it to stagnate, decline or rebel. These **patterns of disharmony eventually lead to disease.** Psychological maladies like [depression](https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/depression) and anxiety are seen as symptoms of this lack of congruence. Psychologists will tell you that authenticity is an important factor in the process of healing and one of the chief goals of therapy. As clients become more and more authentic, they become happier and their psychological well-being increases.

In her book “Dying to Be Me” Anita Moorjani sheds light on this truth as she shares about her struggle with cancer, a near death experience and all the profound things she learned about the connection between authenticity, illness, and living a truly happy life. She states “I now understand that the key is to always honor who you truly are and allow yourself to be in your own truth.”

Authentic living means coming from a real place within. It is when our actions and words are congruent with our beliefs and values. It is being ourselves, not an imitation of what we think we should be or have been told we should be. It promotes health on every level, as it nourishes your mind, body and soul.

Perhaps Carl Jung put it best when he said “The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.”

Embracing an authentic life requires courage, strength and support as we sort through beliefs to find out which are truly our own. Are they beliefs that come from a mature, healthy, grounded place within us, or are they remnants from our [childhood](http://blogs.psychcentral.com/happiness/2010/08/childhood-of-dreams-if-you-build-it/), coming from an insecure, fearful place?

Taking the time to reflect on what is truly our belief is a step we must all take to shed our conformed self and embrace our authentic one. Without doing this, we carry around baggage that is not our own -- baggage that keeps us from finding our authentic self. By exposing ourselves to new ideas and different ways of being, we can discover what resonates within us and let go of what no longer serves us.

Once you begin to discover the values and beliefs that are genuinely “yours,” you can then cultivate and nurture them. The more baggage you shed and the more truth you embrace, the more liberated you become. It is more than being real; it is finding what is true. What is true for me will be quite different than what is true for you. There is no value attached, it simply is what it is for each of us. If your career choice, political stance, sexual orientation, spiritual belief or chosen path is different than mine, we can both be okay with it. When we are each living authentically, our differences do not frighten or challenge us. There are no judgements. I honor the authentic you and you honor the authentic me.

Living authentically is not a destination we arrive at one day after engaging in some process. If we truly believe in living an authentic life, then we must continually be learning about ourselves, challenging old beliefs, and sorting through our baggage. It means learning to face fears and doubts, being willing to reach deeply within ourselves to find out what makes our hearts sing and spirits soar. It is finding where our authentic self feels the most alive, free and unburdened — and then having the courage to live from this place -- even in the face of disapproval.

Being authentic is not just a nice-sounding catch phrase. It might be simple, but it's also profound. It's an important part of personal growth that carries beneficial values and is the key to happy, healthy living.

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