Emotions – Your barometer to better health

**By Andrea Raischel, RN**

Emotions, we all experience them on a regular basis. Love, fear, grief, joy, anger, frustration, peace, and delight are just some of the things every human being feels at one time or another. While it’s normal to focus on our physical health this time of year, our emotional health shouldn’t be overlooked. The emotions we experience can make us sicker than any virus going around or healthy, resilient and strong.

In her book, Molecules of Emotion, Dr. Candace Pert writes: “We can no longer think of the emotions as having less validity than physical, material substance, but instead must see them as cellular signals that are involved in the process of translating information into physical reality, literally transforming mind into matter.”

In simpler terms, Dr. Pert is saying our emotions serve as a barometer which, when understood, can let us know where our health is heading. “When you’re not conscious of your emotions, you’re at their mercy, and they can dictate your behavior,” says Robin Stern, associate director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

Following an intense or challenging situation, many of us stuff emotions somewhere inside our bodies. In some cases, this is okay because we may be unable to deal with the emotions when they arise. However, the problem occurs when we forget these emotions are stuffed there, and they start to fester. Emotions are meant to keep moving. It’s even in the word itself – e-motion or energy in motion. When emotions get stuck within us they usually create physical problems like insomnia, digestive problems, irritable bowel syndrome, heart palpitations, depression, anxiety, and so much more.

“The fascinating thing about emotions is how significantly they affect you and yet they do so outside your conscious awareness. Self -awareness has meaningful consequences that can impact your relationships, your day-to-day well-being and your overall health” says Stern.

According to Time Magazine’s special edition *The Science of Emotion*, brain studies show that when you’re angry, the amygdala, a small structure in the primitive, impulsive limbic center, hijacks your conduct by triggering the release of the stress hormone cortisol, which then surges through your system. Recognizing your true state can make you calmer and save you from saying something regrettable by shifting activity from the limbic system to the prefrontal cortex, the rational part of the brain that helps you think through how best to handle the situation. As neuroscientists like to say, naming an emotion helps you tame it.

Becoming aware of our emotions, and what they are communicating, takes some practice. When we are able to recognize the emotions we are experiencing and ask questions about why they are occurring, we are then empowered to make conscious choices that produce better outcomes.

Life Coach Renee Brown in “Emotional GPS: How emotions guide your life” gives us seven steps to harness the power of our emotions by using them like an inner GPS:

**Step 1:** Something happens outside of you and it triggers within you a negative emotion.

**Step 2:** You feel the negative emotion, but instead of trying to repress it or pretend it isn’t happening, you actually stop and breathe and allow it to be.  Accept it … temporarily.

**Step 3:** You turn within to your inner GPS and program Point A as your current emotional state. Acknowledge honestly how you are feeling.

**Step 4:** You then program into your inner GPS the desired emotion, (the one you would rather be feeling) – which is your destination or Point B.

**Step 5:** You surrender to the feeling and allow yourself to stop focusing on the outside event as well as the inside emotional turmoil that was triggered.  Just BE for a few seconds – as little as 17 seconds.

**Step 6:** You then choose an emotional state that feels better than your current **Point A**, and allow that feeling to become your current focus for the next 17 seconds.

**Step 7:** You continue on to better feeling states in a step by step process, selecting the next higher emotional state you desire and focusing on it for 17 seconds.  Keep going until you are feeling whatever level of positive emotion you choose … you have now arrived at your destination – **Point B** – you are feeling positive and life is better than it was!

Never forget your emotions matter! Especially this time of year when emotions run the gamut from exceptionally joyous and festive to lonely and depressed, pay attention to your own and be sensitive to others, too.

Make feeling good a top priority and watch the effect it has on you and those around you. And remember emotions, like a virus, are highly contagious. If you are going to spread them around, make sure you are spreading the good ones.

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