

# Well-Being and Awareness

Bringing awareness into the field of health is the next biggest step that needs to be taken. Such a step has been long in coming. Most people define health solely in physical terms, by how good they feel and what they see when they look in the mirror. Prevention focuses on risk factors that are also basically physical: exercise, diet, and stress, with stress being given more lip service than serious attention. Inertia poses a major problem here. Medicine relies on drugs and surgery, which reinforces our fixation on the physical. Even when holistic health programs are proposed, it's common for people simply to exchange pharmaceuticals for herbs, processed food for organic food, and jogging for yoga classes. The shift to a truly holistic approach must take awareness into account.

Awareness is an invisible factor that has powerful long-term effects on body and mind. Consider the following very basic questions:

Do you feel confident that you could break old habits such as lack of exercise, overeating, or subjecting yourself to high stress?

Is impulse control a struggle?

Do you feel unhappy about your weight and body image?

Do you promise yourself to exercise, but take any excuse not to?

In each of these questions there are two levels. The first has to do with a specific risk factor, such as maintaining your proper weight and getting enough exercise. One reason for such neglect of well-being is our disregard for the second level of well-being, which involves the mind: the inner world.

Decades of studies have shown the harmful effects of negative attitudes, stress, loneliness, and emotional repression. If you take a step back, what do all these factors have in common? Contracted awareness. We become more isolated and shut in by mental walls than by the rooms we live in.

Over the past few decades a revolution has occurred in how we perceive the body. What appears to be an object, a thing, is actually a process. Nothing in the body stands still, and life is sustained by something that sounds very abstract: information. Fifty trillion cells are constantly talking to each other, using receptor sites on the cell's outer membrane that capture information from molecules floating past in the bloodstream.

When awareness is contracted, the flow of information is hampered, first in the brain, because the brain physically represents the mind. At the most basic level, when you make bad lifestyle choices about diet, exercise, and stress, you are making a holistic decision. You cannot isolate your choices from your body, which bears the repercussions of every negative choice. You can, however, become more aware of/ accepting of your body. Stop judging against it. Make connections through sensation and feelings; bring to the surface of awareness what has been blocked or rejected.

We also choose to constrict ourselves and refuse to adapt. This happens through habits. A habit is a fixed process that doesn't change, even when you want it to and the environment demands it. An extreme case would be addictions. But addictions are habits, and they can block every recourse the body has to adapt, until the inevitable breakdown results. In a less extreme way, you are blocking your body through everyday habits like overeating and not exercising, but also through mental habits like worry and Type A control behavior.

Before acting on a habit, pause. Ask yourself how you feel. Propose to yourself that other choices exist. Can you take another choice? If not, what is stopping you? Habits are broken by stopping the automatic reflex and injecting new questions, from which new choices arise. This is what happens with neurofeedback training.

The cells in the body don't engage in one-way conversation. Their talk is cross-talk, constantly weaving and interconnecting as messages flow through the bloodstream and nervous system. "Feedback" means that no message goes unanswered, no cry for help unheard. Unlike society -- which gives plenty of negative feedback in the form of criticism, rejection, prejudice, and violence -- your body sends only positive feedback. Cells seek to survive, and they can do that only through mutual support.

Yet we have a powerful ability to create negative feedback. Everyone's body has suffered from the conflict and confusion, fear and depression, grief and guilt that run through the mind. The problem is that we lose control of negative feedback. Depression is uncontrolled sadness; anxiety is fear that persists without being checked. This is the most complex area of contracted awareness, because it can take an entire lifetime to disrupt the body's feedback loops, or it can take a minute. Stress can hit you instantaneously or grind away month after month. Yet there is always the same cause: awareness has drawn into a tight circle, contracting to defend itself from some kind of threat.

The solution is to increase the positive feedback. Look inward and learn to release negative energies like fear and anger. Your body wants to restore its weakened or blocked feedback loops. Feedback is information. Whatever brings more information to your mind and body is beneficial. Neurofeedback trains your brain to optimize its information processing.

'Imbalance' covers a host of things, but primarily it means that your body can no longer adapt. It has been forced to accept a state of discomfort, pain, diminished function, or shutdown, depending on how serious the problem is. Disease and distress need to be healed. Yet over a lifetime, the key to well-being is a person's coping skills. With poor coping skills, you become prey to every accident, setback, or disaster. With strong coping skills, you become resilient in the face of misfortune, and resilience has been shown repeatedly to be present in people who survive to great old age with a sense of fulfillment. Coping begins in the mind. Your state of awareness is the foundation for all your mental habits and attitudes. From there you develop the behavior of a lifetime. Contracted awareness severely limits your behavior -- ultimately that is why people indulge in activities that endanger their health. They can't see a way out because they are trapped inside a very limited vision of possibilities.

To learn more about getting your positive feedback loops in the habit of providing dynamic balance and integrity, visit our website: [www.loralonsberry.com](http://www.loralonsberry.com).