



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Mental Wellness

There is now substantial medical evidence that a person's state of mind can influence his or her state of health. For example, one recent study showed that people who tended to be more optimistic while in college had lower rates of illness through the age of 60 than people who were more pessimistic while in college. Another study showed that coronary bypass patients who tended to be more optimistic recovered more quickly and had fewer postoperative complications than similar patients who tended to be more pessimistic. In both these studies, researchers concluded that the manner in which a person viewed the world contributed to their overall state of health.

The two studies mentioned (and many like them) are part of an emerging scientific discipline that attempts to investigate the mind-body relationship. It is called psychoneuroimmunology. Specifically, this is the study of how your thoughts and feelings relate to how well your body defends against invading micro-organisms—or when your body does become diseased—how quickly you recover. Scientists have discovered that your brain creates substances that strengthen your immune system, combats infections, and kills pain. Apparently, we are learning that we have some degree of control over this process.

To stay healthy, therefore, you can do more than eat right, exercise, and avoid drugs and alcohol: You can become aware of your thoughts, emotions, and actions and try to steer them in the right direction.

Here are four suggestions that may contribute to your good health:

1.) Think positively.

Tell yourself that you will stay well or get better. Even if you have a serious illness, don't despair. Do what your health care professional recommends and create a mental picture of yourself as healthy and strong again.

2.) Stay connected to your family and friends.

Seek opportunities to spend time with them and enjoy special moments with them. Also, find ways to help others while being open to receive what they have to give you. Whether you're in good health or poor health, having close ties to others can improve the chances of your long-term good health.

3.) Seek spiritual guidance and use spiritual images to affirm your health.

4.) Find ways to release your laughter—perhaps by being with a funny friend or by

watching a video that makes you laugh. It helps to not always feel serious.

Of course, these tips for mental wellness are not foolproof. Sometimes they help; sometimes they don't. If they don't help you avoid or recover from illness, don't feel guilty or blame yourself. Some illnesses occur and persist for no apparent reason despite your best efforts at healthy living and maintaining a positive attitude. In any case, you should call your health care professional whenever you have serious symptoms that warrant attention and medical care.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION