

Pain Pathways are Permanent

I have had many symptoms of the Mind Body Syndrome (MBS) that I no longer have to deal with very often. However I am reminded intermittently that these circuits never disappear.

Triggered

Last winter I became upset with a friend of mine but I was not aware of the depth of my frustration. I just “let it go” but my body did not let me get away with it. The problem was that she had not met some of my expectations. (I was not completely clear in what they were) For reasons that are still unclear to me I quit my own personal practice of writing and throwing away negative thoughts. I also quit using most of my other tools.

MBS returns

My sleep became irregular. I developed some regular low-grade tension headaches. My knees were stiff. As my anxiety slowly increased my reactivity increased. I still remained my victim mode although I did not acknowledge it at the time. I was just “feeling sorry for myself.” Since I had a “good reason” in my head it did not seem like that big of a deal. Finally my wife began to ask me if I was still doing my writing. We both are fairly diligent in honoring this basic tool. I mumbled something but did not really reply. I thought my mood was fine. She did not.

Skin rashes

I was able to rationalize the above symptoms, as I was “just under a little more stress than usual.” (Could have I been creating some of it?) One of my historic MBS symptoms was that small and large skin rashes would pop up all over my body. They would last about 15-30 minutes and disappear. An intense burning for a few minutes always preceded them. This was a symptom that I could not ignore. I was still not writing. I finally came to grips with the fact that I could not outrun these pathways and I really was deeply in a victim mode.

Re-engagement

I began to write with a vengeance for the next few weeks and within a week the symptoms were gone. I also used a lot of “active meditation” throughout the day.

I have learned (multiple times) to simply use my body as a feedback loop. I still don't like to deal with many of my stresses or feel any frustration around them. So I don't. I just suppress, which I am highly skilled at. I cannot get away with it. At least one or two symptoms will quickly re-appear. They always quickly resolve as I re-engage with my somatic tools.

The most common approach to deal with stress is to try to resolve the problem. Guess what? That does not work over time. There is always another problem and many situations are not solvable. The energy you need to deal with and face a given issue is now being burned up by your nervous system. Stress is not the problem. It is your reaction to it and you do have a choice how to react.

Reversing the flow

You cannot control your mind with your mind. If your mind is racing your body will respond in kind with muscle tension and chemical reactions. However you can flip the process almost immediately by using tools to relax your body. You have now reversed the flow of the neurological input. As your brain is

flooded with relaxing sensations from your body, your mind will calm down. You can do it within seconds throughout the day with active mediation and/or writing. There are also many other strategies.

Pathways are permanent

Pathways in the brain are permanent. That is why post-traumatic stress disorder is challenging to treat. You cannot unlearn how to ride a bicycle. As pain impulses come into the brain so rapidly these circuits are learned quickly and are very specific. Your only choice (fortunately effective) is to stimulate the formation of alternate, more functional pathways. Re-connecting with “play” pathways is another way of moving out of the pain circuits.

I am working on being more diligent in doing my writing on a regular basis before symptoms appear. The mistake I have made (and continue to do so) is that when things are going well I just don't feel like I need to write. I dive back into the abyss and am deeply into it before I wake up.

Why not just stay out of it?

—Dr. David Hanscom