

Don't Overlook the Importance of Exercise

You really can't expect to get better if you don't exercise. Even if only a small amount of exercise can be tolerated, it is better than nothing. Exercise is critically important to the recovery process for many reasons. It helps detoxification, keeps muscle tone, stimulates the production of hormones, and allows the body to renew itself. There's no substitute for exercise. Cardiovascular exercise should be undertaken with caution for those who are very sick. Resistance training provides many benefits and is often more tolerable, especially to those with adrenal issues.

Lyme Disease and Brain Healing

Lyme disease can have incredibly diverse effects on the brains of different people. Some people notice difficulty thinking, remembering things, and calling up vocabulary words. Other people experience extreme emotional volatility. And, of course, many people experience all of the above. It shouldn't surprise us that this kind of brain dysfunction occurs. After all, the brain is a physical organ, and when it is damaged, it can malfunction, just like all of our other organs. It is for this reason that it is so sad to see Lyme sufferers (and others with mental illness) persecuted as if their brain dysfunction was somehow related to their character. Psychosomatic issues are often no more voluntary than an upset stomach.

But you probably already know all of this. What you may know less about are the mechanisms behind the roller coaster ride you experience as your brain heals from Lyme disease. You don't just wake up one morning with a normal brain. As you get better, brain functions come back online in fits and starts, and the whole experience can be quite bizarre. I recall a time during the year 2004 when I started having crazy flashbacks to the time and place when I first got sick. I would wake up in the middle of the night and literally believe that I was living in the house I had lived in when I got Lyme disease. I could smell the old carpet, I could hear the sounds, I could sense the layout of the house. Only, I wasn't actually in

that old house, it was just a flashback. I believe my brain was associating the newfound health it was experiencing with the last time it had experienced that health when I lived in the previous home. Strange, indeed.

Something else that can happen as your brain recovers: the brain can end up in a kind of no-man's land. At some point, the brain may actually have the capacity to recover but it will not do so without help. This is why people who have experienced traumatic brain injury require therapy in order to regain the mental functions they have lost. The brain can recover, but it needs training. Learning new things, doing puzzles, reading books, and engaging in other mentally challenging activities can speed the process of recovery.

Interestingly, emotions may need to be retrained just like other mental functions. It can be important to remind yourself how you used to feel about life, certain activities, and even yourself. This is one of the reasons why I believe it is so difficult for people to recover from mental illnesses which they have had since birth, such as autism. These people don't have a past frame of reference from which to rebuild their sense of normal. They can't remind themselves of what normal felt like, and they can't choose to embrace normal feelings while rejecting unhealthy feelings. Those of us who got sick later in life have the advantage that we know what we are trying to return to; we know what it was like to feel normal. Accordingly, we can train our brains to go in the right direction.

An easy way to remind your brain of what normal feels like is to start participating in activities that you used to love before you got sick. Allow yourself to become immersed in these activities, and gently open the door for past emotions to come rushing back into your consciousness. I think this is one big reason why I enjoy mountain biking so much (that's me on the cover of the book!). Before I got sick with Lyme disease, mountain biking was an emotional lifeline for me; it cleared my mind and renewed my spirit. After having had Lyme disease, I found that mountain biking was actually more than just a fun hobby—it was like therapy, training my

brain to start to work like it had worked before the disease. Some of my mental and emotional healing came not from Lyme treatments, but from activities like this, which reminded my brain to start working again like it had worked before.

Practicing normal brain function may cause headaches and discomfort because you are forcing electrical signals through parts of your brain that have been damaged or dormant for years. If thinking was your weakness when you were sick, try to help your brain to think, but be prepared for some discomfort as your brain turns on areas which haven't been used in a long time. Likewise, if your feelings have been most affected, expect that certain healthy feelings might cause headaches as your brain is used in ways it hasn't been used in years.

The areas where your brain will need the most help will be unique and different from other Lyme sufferers. Your brain may have been hit hardest in a different area than the brain of the Lyme sufferer who sits across from you in your doctor's waiting room.

Many Lyme sufferers notice that getting back in touch with their souls is the last thing they achieve in recovery, and this is why Lyme disease is so hard—the most important healing step doesn't come until the end, which means you have to fight, and live, for years, with your innermost self missing. One of the reasons that this deep sense of self, or soul, may have the hardest time returning is simply that it requires the most fine-tuning and normal functioning inside the brain. Although I am personally a believer in the spiritual side of life, I can still acknowledge that our brains are our window through which we experience our lives and through which we experience the planet around us. If you cut off my leg, I'm still me. If you take away my hands, I'm still me. But if you take away my brain, I'm no longer me. Of course, this kind of conversation can take us down philosophical roads which I will reserve for people who are much smarter than me. The point is that the brain is very important when it comes to how we feel, and the feelings of peace and calm which used to

define us before illness won't return until the brain hasn't just healed a small amount, but has healed almost completely. So, patience is required during the final phases of recovery. It takes time for the brain to return to this normal state.

Lastly, top Lyme experts have contended that unresolved emotional conflict can prevent complete brain healing. Although I was skeptical of such a seemingly outlandish claim for a long time, I am now a believer in this concept. The kinds of unresolved conflict you may be holding onto include diverse and broad areas, such as past romantic relationships, perfectionism, guilt, co-dependency, regret, fear, worry, insecurity, and many others. For some reason, these unhealthy feelings and memories become co-mingled with the chronic dysfunction that occurs in the physical brains of Lyme sufferers, and complete healing only occurs when the physical is healed in tandem with the emotional. This is, for sure, one of the most mysterious and fascinating aspects of Lyme disease recovery. However, again, it shouldn't really surprise us, because we know that the brain is a complex and delicate organ that controls how we experience the world around us.

This discussion of brain healing only scratches the surface. It is not intended to be a complete discussion, but I hope that it has provided you with some new perspective on how your brain heals, as well as some tools for a speedier recovery.

Why We Can't Find Simple Solutions to the Problem of Lyme Disease

This is a topic which we've addressed various times throughout the book, but I want to make some final comments on the problem of Lyme disease, and why it is so difficult to cure.

Many minor ailments can easily be healed with simple solutions. For example, blurry vision can be taken care of with prescription glasses, so the person with blurry vision never seeks deeper healing and correction of lifestyle issues or other problems. While obesity can be a stubborn problem, diet and exercise work in many cases of obesity, so the problem of obesity can be treated without a deep understanding of why the interventions are working. A bruised knee is another example of a problem we know how to deal with, and which has a straightforward solution.

Lyme disease is much different. To really recover you have to heal deeply, and this requires a huge paradigm shift that impacts all parts of your life including your work, diet, recreation, finances, emotional outlook, priorities, and more. OK, so you've heard me say these things already, but why are they true and important?

One of the reasons that Lyme disease requires such deep healing is that this disease takes advantage of deep weaknesses in your physical being and your mental state. Each of us have different weaknesses due to our genetics, experiences, and environment. Tick-borne infections take up residence in the parts of our bodies that are the weakest. Therefore, we won't get completely well until we address these weaknesses. Yet, these weaknesses can be the most difficult health challenges we have, because they have been in the making for decades of our lives. It has taken a lifetime for the weaknesses to manifest, so it can take a lifetime, or at least a long time, for them to be healed.

And, before we can even begin to address these weaknesses, we have to stop them from progressing further. We have to halt whatever conditions were present to cause them to happen. And since these conditions can infiltrate our entire lives, they can be very difficult to reverse. We aren't talking about what brand of pants we wear, we are talking about deep factors which include how we think, how we live, what we eat, where we live, which activities we pursue, which toxins we are exposed to, and which genetic issues we've been given by our ancestors. We are even talk-

ing about our emotional, spiritual, and mental challenges and how those have affected our health over the years.

Consider this example. Imagine an out-of-control car speeding down a hill. It is your job to safely bring that car to a stop, and then get it back up the hill where it came from. You will have many tasks to do in order to get it slowed down and going back up the hill, including the following steps:

1. You have to stop it from continuing to accelerate. Your body or environment or both, for whatever reason, predispose you to getting worse, not better, in terms of infections and toxicities. You have to arrest this trend of worsening. This stops our out-of-control car from accelerating further.
2. Once you have arrested the worsening, you actually have to start doing things that get you better. This starts slowing the car down. The car won't actually stop until you are doing as much to get better as you are to get worse.
3. Once you have gotten the car to a complete stop, you have to start using treatments, lifestyle changes, and healing approaches which outweigh the negative physical, mental and genetic influences in your life. If you can accomplish this, the car will start reversing its course and moving back up the hill. And things now become even harder since these changes must become permanent; if they are temporary, the car can start to backslide. Hence, you have to make lasting and deep changes to almost every aspect of your life.
4. As you push the car back up the hill, the challenges change as you encounter different layers of the onion, and if you don't adapt, the car can easily slip and start sliding down again.

Yes, I can acknowledge that our healing journeys aren't perfectly represented in this car analogy. The car example is just intended to illustrate that the recovery process is challenging and requires sustained discipline and effort. It also requires deep understanding, and a willingness to explore mental and spiritual issues. It is much more involved than healing a bruise, correcting poor vision, or dieting and exercising. And this is why there are no simple solutions to the problem of Lyme disease.

Also, in order to get well you have to use the right treatments at the right times and avoid the wrong treatments. The right treatments are often obscure, not commonplace, not known to most health care practitioners (and remember, you don't usually have health care practitioners on your side anyway, which is why it is so important to have a good Lyme doctor!). The victim of a broken leg (a relatively simple health problem) being treated at a local hospital has access to the best medical resources commanded by the best doctors and facilities, all targeted at helping him or her. In contrast, the victim of Lyme disease (a complex and deeply rooted health problem) often has very few, overworked medical professionals helping him or her, and often requires little-understood, complex treatment modalities administered in the proper chronological order and with accurate monitoring. Here you see another reason why simple answers to the problem of Lyme disease are elusive.

Lastly, another difference between Lyme disease and many other common health problems is that acute illness and trauma screams loudly, "Here I am, I need to be fixed now." These acute problems are easily found on tests, and their consequences are clear and defined. So, the best and brightest minds in medicine are waiting for you to arrive at the hospital or doctor's office as you seek help for something like a broken leg, pneumonia, or a heart attack.

Chronic illness on the other hand whispers softly, "I'm confusing, I'm not easy to test for, I'm not easy to fix, no two cases of me are alike, my existence may be due in part to socially acceptable activities like over-

consumption of sugar or living near electromagnetic radiation, my cure isn't commonly found in Western Medicine, I may require a couple dozen interventions to be healed, and improvement in my symptoms may take weeks, months, or years to see." Lyme disease further whispers, "My cause is elusive bacteria which are hard to test for and diagnose and which may survive antibiotic therapy, rendering me a stealthy, poorly understood problem that most doctors will overlook or even deny exists."

See the difference? The odds are stacked against Lyme disease patients in almost every possible way.

Please note that I am not continuing to talk about the difficulty in healing from Lyme disease to discourage my readers. Instead, I talk about this so that Lyme disease might gain the attention and alarm that it deserves, and so that those who suffer from it can be given the compassion and help that they deserve. It is quite possible that throughout all of medical history, there's never been another disease which has been subject to this level of disparity between the seriousness of the disease and the seriousness of the medical response. On a scale from 1 to 10, Lyme disease is a 10 in terms of the devastation it is inflicting on society. Yet, to date, the urgency put forth by the medical community to find a solution to Lyme disease has been a 1 on a scale from 1 to 10. It's time to educate the world about Lyme disease, and change this disparity. Lyme disease demands the best that medicine has to offer. It is do or die. Those suffering from this disease need the truth to be known.

Feeling Good Can be a Delicate Condition

Early in the recovery process, you are so sick that your body can rarely, or never, maintain equilibrium, and therefore, you feel bad most or all of the time. It may even seem like doing the right things doesn't matter: you can eat gluten-free and sugar-free, get enough rest, and do all the right things, and you always feel bad. So why bother? During this phase of