



Coach Thyself: Get Symptom Savvy

IN COACHING HEALTH AND WELLNESS CLIENTS, I find that a few basic guidelines rank as really important. Ignoring them is usually risky. Following them spells success. One of these I put into words as “make friends with your body and the signals it sends.” Of course, in saying that to you readers of *Yoga Living*, perhaps I’m preaching to the choir.

You probably already know that listening to your body whisper—via small feelings, appetites, pleasures, and pains—means that it doesn’t have to resort to shouting at you with more intense symptoms. But what’s really interesting here is this. If your body is signaling you with discomfort or disease, there are two different ways of reading and responding to its messages. Each is best in its own situation. Here’s how to understand this.

Mainstream, “allopathic” medicine isolates a symptom as evidence of a very local dysfunction somewhere in your body. Your generator’s weak, so to speak, or your oil pump is leaking. This kind of healthcare provider, generally speaking, focuses in on this and removes, replaces, rebuilds, or just tries to patch-up this one part. For a broken arm, pneumonia, or a lacerated leg, this works great. It’s just the thing to do. These are more or less acute, localized issues. The mainstream approach also looks at a lot of statistics. And so it tries to figure out the typical sources of wear and tear on your machinery and warns you to keep each and every part “normal.” Is your

steering pulling to the left? Well better get that front end aligned now, it says, and be sure to balance the tires. Otherwise you risk a blowout and you know how bad that could be. This keeps you coming in for check up’s and tests, and often creates some real fear. If your “numbers” aren’t right, there are plenty of drugs that will push them towards the statistical average that is something like the holy grail of modern, high-tech medicine. Be careful with this, though, because the drug side-effects, and sometimes the fear and negative expectation of things going wrong—can outweigh the value of having “good numbers.”¹ Statistics are not your body speaking.

But this narrow-focus, “fix-it/prevent-it” approach is not the only scientifically grounded perspective. Looking at symptoms in isolation is actually a habit left over from a view of Nature we now know to be limited. Only in the simpler mechanical systems does it really work. But as a human organism, at the pinnacle of organized complexity—you don’t just have dumb, fixed parts. You have what are actually highly intelligent parts. They change what they do, in response to the behavior of other parts, in order to cooperate as a team and keep you well.

So if one part is acting “abnormally,” and sending you symptomatic messages, sometimes that’s because it’s busy helping other parts keep the whole of you going. Just giving it a drug or doing surgery to force it to “behave” properly doesn’t address the real lack of teamwork that’s behind it. Indeed, sometimes that just makes it harder for the inner team to do its job. When your symptoms are chronic, emotionally connected, and less localized—this whole-team perspective is often the better one.

The form of medicine called homeopathy thus takes an entirely different view of symptoms. And even though the roots of this approach go back 200 years, aspects of it are more in tune with the “intelligent teamwork” idea that characterizes modern understanding. Homeopathy sees symptoms as evidence of this deeper loss of cooperation among your parts. It doesn’t try to suppress an isolated malady, but rather support the whole body in becoming coherent once again.

In that process, it expects to see your symptoms shift in such a way that they move “outward” or “downward.” Moving “outward” means that the disturbance, the lack of cooperation between your intelligent parts, travels from more central, more crucial systems to less important, peripheral areas. So, for example, symptoms will shift from your primary organs or deeply emotional feelings to the muscles, skin, or milder upsets. Moving “downward” implies that a symptom higher in the body is replaced by a milder one located lower down in the body. So this means moving from your torso, for instance, to the legs or feet.

With so many of us enduring chronic conditions that don’t diagnose or resolve that easily, it can be very important to listen to your body in terms of this other, whole-organism approach to symptoms as well. Vibrant, happy health is a state of wholeness. Sometimes what you want to experience is this outward, or downward shift in your symptoms—because that means teamwork failure is on the way out. In these situations, just trying to push one symptom, or some test numbers, usually doesn’t work. ▲

¹ Welch, *Overdiagnosis*