



NEW HEALING CONNECTION™

Course Lessons



CASSANDRA SCHAMBER, MD

You have more power than you can imagine—power to heal yourself and change your life—starting from the inside out.

Based on more than fifteen years of research into the mind-body connection, the *New Healing Connection™* is a transformational self-study course for individuals who are ready to make a powerful shift—and get at the root of issues that limit their healing.

Dr. Cassandra integrates healing concepts and deals with emotions in a groundbreaking new way.

Dr. Cassandra's approach will guide you to:

- Effectively manage (and even eliminate!) pain and discomfort
- Understand energy flow and change stubborn bad habits
- Fix the root cause of deeper issues that limit your healing

Experience relief and healing from chronic physical and emotional issues:

- Chronic pain, migraines, fibromyalgia
- Depression, anxiety, insomnia
- Shame, grief, persistent worrying

The work you can do to accomplish changes like all these starts from the same place—your inner self. When you work to bring balance to your inner life, your outer life changes too—everything from your physical and mental health to your relationships, career, and financial situation.

This book contains the transcripts of all fifty-two lessons in the *New Healing Connection™* course. Use it with the videos or as a stand-alone reference.

Practical exercises throughout the course will help you incorporate these methods into your life as soon as you begin. You have the power to change your life.

What Dr. Cassandra's students are saying—

"Dr. Cassandra has helped me attain a higher level of physical and mental fitness. Her knowledge of the mind-emotion-body connection has helped me understand that pain and discomfort can be effectively managed and even eliminated."

"Now I listen and respect the messages my body gives me while being true to what is actually happening. With this awareness I am healthier, I am true to myself, and I am still kind to others. Thank you Dr. Schamber!"



This book is part of the *New Healing Connection™* online course and related resources.

www.newhealingconnection.com



Cassandra Schamber, MD, is a pain specialist who focuses on mind-body medicine. She received her medical and undergraduate degrees from the University of Minnesota. In her solo practice in Duluth, Minnesota, she combines Western and complementary medicine as she helps patients get to the root of their pain and heal from within. She wrote the *New Healing Connection™* for people who want to change their perspective on health and healing. Her special interest is in the power of emotions to heal both physical and emotional illness.



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CASSANDRA SCHAMBER, MD

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MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

The contents of this book are for informational purposes only and are not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider with any questions you have regarding a medical condition, and before undertaking any diet, dietary supplement, exercise, or other health program.

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To Sharon, Chris, and Beth for all of your support



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Introduction

Do you have a problem in your life you can't find an answer for? Maybe it's a medical condition you haven't been able to heal. Maybe you're having a problem with a relationship or your job. Maybe you feel that something is missing, and you lack a sense of joy and inner peace.

If you've tried to change your life but have had trouble finding the answers, this *New Healing Connection*™ course can help you. And if you know that change is needed but you don't know where to start, this course can help with that too.

I, too, have experienced the feeling that something was missing in my life. By the time I finished my family medicine residency in the mid-1990s, I was exhausted and disillusioned about my career as a physician. I had spent so many years in medical training that I naturally assumed it would be satisfying. But at the end, I found that something was still missing.

I was disappointed that while Western medicine could accomplish amazing things, it obviously wasn't enough. There were many patients that physicians couldn't help, even with the most advanced medical techniques.

On a personal level, I was exhausted and lacked a sense of inner peace. I couldn't imagine living the rest of my life the way I was living it then. So for both my patients and myself, I started investigating several types of complementary and alternative medicine therapies. I wanted to find a different way to practice medicine, and I wanted to find fulfillment in my own life.

What I learned over the next few years changed my entire life. As I studied different healing traditions, I started to put together a group of concepts that are important in helping people get to the root of the issues that limit healing. This started with the information I learned about energy flow, or qi. I also worked with my own emotions and unhealthy thought patterns and realized how important this information is for health. At the same time, I integrated ideas about intuition and the value of working through issues like shame, painful traumas, and other life lessons.

In 2004 I pursued more medical training, and after I finished my pain fellowship I decided to focus on treating chronic pain. In addition to Western medicine, I used complementary therapies, and I taught patients the other





The *New Healing Connection* is a compilation of concepts that are vital to healing.

healing concepts I'd discovered. I started helping them get to the root of deeper mind-body issues that were limiting their healing.

As I worked on this new style of healing with my patients and in my own life, I realized that these concepts aren't just helpful for physical and emotional healing. You can use them if you want to change another aspect of your life, like a relationship or your career. Or you can use them if you just want to have more of a sense of joy and inner peace. You can accomplish so much with these ideas because everything in your life is connected. When you're feeling mentally, emotionally, and energetically healthy, your physical health improves, and it's easier to work on relationships and find answers to other life questions.

After teaching this information to my patients and working with it myself for many years, I've decided to make it available to more people through this course—the *New Healing Connection*. It is a compilation of the concepts I've found to be vital in helping people get to the root of the deeper issues that limit their healing.

The concepts you'll learn are actually very simple. There is no complicated medical jargon. You don't need any specialized training to start working the process. All you need is a desire to change your life and the motivation to transform yourself.

You don't need to stop seeing your physician or other healthcare providers in order to do the work in the course. You don't need to stop taking your medications or stop receiving other medical treatments. You can continue doing them along with other important things like eating a healthy diet and exercising. This information will make all those other things even more effective.

Although I present some ideas that have been discussed by other people, the way I integrate them is different from anything else you've heard before. And the way I deal with emotions is totally new and groundbreaking.

This course will guide you to work on areas of your inner self that need healing, and it will help you bring healthy balance to your energy flow, emotional flow, and thought patterns. You'll learn how to heal your inner conflicts regarding relationships and the painful lessons life has brought you. You'll also learn how to follow your intuition as it guides you to change your outer world and bring it into alignment with your new understanding of your inner self.

Course Modules

There are seven modules with a total of fifty-two lessons. Each module includes exercises to help you apply what you learn in a hands-on way.

The *Energy Module* presents a practical way to view energy flow and how to be aware of it in your body. You'll learn to identify where you spend your energy and how to recognize when your energy expenditures are unhealthy for you. I'll help you use your new understanding of energy to explain why it's hard to change habits and how chronic disease can develop.

The *Emotions Module* discusses an important new way to view your emotions. It focuses on the four key emotions—anger, sadness, fear, and joy. You'll learn how to feel them in a healthy way without hurting yourself or others. You'll learn to have a different attitude toward uncomfortable emotions. I'll teach you how to recognize and release emotional abscesses and how to clean out your emotional basement. You'll learn how to approach situations like depression, anxiety, and your emotions around trauma in a new way. I'll also discuss how drugs affect emotional flow.

The *Thoughts Module* explains the difference between thoughts and emotions and how to have a healthy balance between the two. I'll help you see the mind-body connection in a new way. You'll learn how your tribes and their messages affect you. You'll also learn how to recognize when you get caught on the thought treadmill in unhealthy thought patterns, including excessive planning, worrying, regretting, and judging. I'll share techniques to calm your hyperactive intellect and let go of these unhealthy thought patterns.

The *Shame Module* teaches how to recognize this emotion and how to heal it. I'll also help you work with situations where you feel guilt or shame over having hurt other people.

The *Intuition Module* explains how to recognize your intuition and how to differentiate between your intuition, thoughts, and emotions. I'll teach you how to work with these three parts of you as you change your life.

The *Dramas Module* discusses a new way to work with your dramas and conflicts. You'll learn to use them as tools to understand yourself better. Instead of being annoying situations you dread, dramas will become important mirrors to show you areas of your life that are out of balance. You'll use them to guide you to know what changes you need to make as you're healing yourself and changing your life.

The *Life Lessons Module* addresses the important issue of the painful life lessons we all experience. I'll help you identify different areas in your life where these lessons occur, including with your archetypes, or life roles. I'll discuss a number of specific archetypes including the mother, the macho man, the patient, the victim, and the addict. I'll help you look at your life lessons from a new viewpoint, and you'll use the information you've learned from the other modules to change the way you work to come to peace with them.

You can approach the information in the course in a few different ways. If you want a brief overview to see what it's all about, you may decide to sit down and quickly ingest a lot of the information at one time. But you'll get the most out of the course if you either go back and work through it slowly or take your time with it the first time around. It will be important for you to give yourself time to apply the concepts to your everyday life.

You can skip around and study the parts you find especially interesting. But because the concepts build on each other throughout the course, you'll get the most benefit by going back and studying the sections you've missed.



There are seven modules and fifty-two lessons with many exercises you can apply in a hands-on way.

The lessons in this *New Healing Connection Course Lessons* book are transcripts of the online video lessons. The *New Healing Connection: Use Your Power to Change Your Life* book gives a concise summary of the information in the course. There's also the *New Healing Connection Course Companion Workbook* that you can use as a journal as you work through the exercises.

Visit NewHealingConnection.com to discover other opportunities to access group counseling and informational sessions as well as to subscribe to any email notifications or blog posts.



Remember, you have more power than you can imagine—power to heal yourself and change your life—starting from the inside out.



Energy



In this module I'll guide you as you start the journey of finding your inner power. I'll also talk about the concept of energy and how you can work with it on a practical level as you're changing your life.

1

Start Your Journey Within

In this first lesson I'll help you shift your focus away from the outer world and onto your inner self.

According to an old Hindu legend, a long time ago humans were as powerful as gods. They had the ability to create whatever they wished. They could heal themselves and change the world in any way they wanted.

Unfortunately humans abused their power. They hurt so many people and created so much chaos that Brahma, the chief god, decided their power needed to be taken away and hidden where they'd never find it.

The question was where to hide their power. Brahma called the council of the gods to help him. The gods had all kinds of ideas about where to put it. They could bury it deep in the earth, put it on top of the tallest mountain, or sink it at the bottom of the deepest ocean. But Brahma didn't think any of those places would be right. He knew that with time humans would explore every corner of the earth, and none of those spots would be safe enough.

Brahma thought about the problem for a long time. Eventually he thought of the perfect answer! He decided to hide it deep inside of humans' own selves because he knew this would be the last place they'd ever look for it. All the gods agreed that this was the perfect hiding place, and the deed was done. The gods hid humans' power deep inside of themselves.

As Brahma predicted, thousands of years later humans have conquered almost every corner of the earth. We have even made it to the moon. Yet with everything we've accomplished, many of us are still missing something vital in our lives. There's a frenetic agitation in the world. It's as though everything is speeding up, and we're running faster and faster to find the missing element to make us complete. But that element always seems to elude us. Whether it's to heal ourselves, heal a relationship, or find more peace and fulfillment, we're still having trouble finding our power.

There are signs of hope. Even with all the distraction and chaos, many people are starting to discover what Brahma and the gods didn't want us to know. We're beginning to realize that the answer can't be found by running faster, climbing higher, or discovering some other new thing outside of ourselves. Instead, we realize we need more than what the external world can give us. By shifting our perspective inward, we can find the answers that were there all along.



With everything we've accomplished, many of us are still missing something vital in our lives.



The *New Healing Connection* helps you find *your* inner power.

The *New Healing Connection* is a course that helps you find *your* inner power. It helps you change your life whether you want to heal your body or change your life in another way. Sometimes the changes will seem like the magic of the gods. Your life may shift in a moment just because you find a new perspective.

Often it won't be that simple. The changes may take time and hard work. To begin we need to look inside of ourselves and understand our inner power. Then we can use that information and apply it to our outer lives.

Let's start the journey within. The first step is to shift our perspective onto our inner selves. This may take some effort because we've gotten into the habit of focusing so much of our attention onto the world outside of us. That makes sense. The physical world demands a lot from us. There's much work to do to take care of our bodies and the people around us. We're constantly interacting with our environment, and we can't ignore it.

There's another thing that makes it hard to shift our focus within. We can have trouble imagining that our inner lives could have as much power as the physical world. The physical world seems like a different, more concrete part of reality. Things like thoughts and emotions can seem less powerful because they're less tangible.

For example, I live in Minnesota where we get a lot of snow in the winter. When I'm walking through thigh-high snow to get to my mailbox after a snowstorm, I know I've got to get the snow cleared. This is a physical problem that needs a physical solution. Doing my inner work won't help. No meditation or affirmation has ever been able to move the snow for me. In the moment when I'm standing in the snow, the physical world seems incredibly powerful, and there doesn't seem to be any way that ethereal thoughts or emotions could be as powerful as that physical world.

It can also be hard to imagine how aspects of our inner selves, like thoughts and emotions, could heal our physical bodies. As a pain specialist, I often see patients with chronic pain caused by arthritis. When they bring me their X-rays showing bone spurs and narrowed joints, it can be hard to imagine how work on their inner selves could have the power to change something so strong and unyielding as their bones. How can working with the nonphysical make the arthritis less painful? It can seem impossible.

And then there are those situations where we have conflicts with other people. Maybe it's a problem with a supervisor. Lately I've had many patients complain to me about how they're being pushed to do more and more work with no extra time to do it. They're feeling squeezed all the time with no way out. They could talk to their supervisors, but they realize they'll lose their jobs if they complain too much. They can't quit because they don't know what other jobs they'd do, and they need the money. When you're in this kind of situation, you can feel trapped and victimized.

Maybe you have conflicts with your spouse or kids. After a long day of work you may be exhausted, but you come home and put in the effort to make dinner for your family. When you ask them to help clean up the kitchen after dinner,

they find excuses to leave you with the mess. You may talk to them, asking for help, and they always say they'll do better next time, but things never change. Changing other people is even harder than changing yourself. So how is working on your inner power going to change the people around you? It can seem impossible.

These are the kinds of situations I'll address in this course. They may seem impossible, but they're not. You might not be able to move the snow with your thoughts, but by changing your perspective you'll find a new way around the problem of how to access a snowblower. You may not be able to melt arthritis with your emotions, but decreasing pain by working on your inner self is not only possible, it's a lot easier than you might imagine. And creatively resolving conflicts with other people is also doable when you have a new approach. There's so much healing that can be done by focusing on your inner self. The secret is to figure out how to access your inner power and use it effectively.



The first step is to shift our perspective onto our inner selves.

EXERCISE

Start your journey within by paying attention to areas in your life that you'd like to change. They may seem impossible to change, and you can't imagine how you'd be able to improve them. They could be big or small, major issues or rather inconsequential. You may want to heal a physical or psychological condition. Maybe there's a relationship you're not satisfied with. Maybe you'd like to change your career or find a way to have more joy and inner peace. Maybe you just want to find a way to get the snow cleared from your driveway. Make a list so you can refer to it throughout the course.

Remember, you have more power than you can imagine—power to heal yourself and change your life—starting from the inside out.

2

Slow Down and Pay Attention

In this lesson I'll share techniques you can use as you start to slow down and focus on your inner self.



Everyone can benefit from slowing down and paying closer attention to themselves.

When I got out of medical training, I was really stressed out. Pushing myself for so many years, physically and mentally, put me in a state of high alert. I had trouble relaxing. All the nights on call messed up my sleep cycle, and I had insomnia. Because of all the information I needed to know, I had become very analytical and judgmental, and I was always planning or worrying. I had trouble letting go and living in the moment.

I knew I needed to relax, so I started trying different techniques. I did yoga and meditation. When I learned how to do hypnosis on patients, I also started doing self-hypnosis to relax. I tried a lot of different things. The process of working to relax myself was part of the bigger picture of helping me approach the health of my patients in a different way.

Through the years I've realized that just about everyone can benefit from doing some type of practice that helps them slow down and pay closer attention to themselves. If you live your life on the proverbial treadmill, always running and going nonstop, you won't have the time—or the energy—to be aware of your inner self. Only when you slow down and find some breathing space will you be able to recognize what you need to change and how to change it.

Fortunately, many people have already started this journey within. They've developed different techniques that can help you. Here's an overview of some of the more common ones. Try the ones that resonate with you.

Let's start with some relaxation techniques. Breathwork, where you focus on slowing down your breathing to relax, is something I frequently teach patients with chronic pain. And it is something I practice all the time. Whenever I'm feeling stress and recognize that I'm tightening my muscles, I try to remember to take some deep, slow breaths to help me relax.

There are other techniques that start with breathwork and add to it. You can do progressive muscle relaxation, where you focus on relaxing all your muscles sequentially from head to toe. You can do guided imagery or visualization, where you close your eyes and imagine relaxing scenes like resting on a beach or in a meadow.

Another technique to help you slow down is meditation. The goal of meditation is to slow down all the unnecessary, chattering thoughts running through your head. There are many ways to meditate. Some meditation practices focus on letting go of all thoughts and being in a place of quiet in your mind. Other meditation practices focus all your attention on one specific word, or *mantra*.

A meditation that's currently very popular is mindfulness. With mindfulness the goal is to observe yourself as thoroughly as possible, without judgment, and be aware of your thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and actions. This type of meditation was originally introduced by the scientist Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn in the 1970s. He'd been studying Buddhism and yoga, and he combined ideas from both in a program to help people relax. His mindfulness program, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), has become very popular as more people have realized how helpful it is.

You can do a quick trial of mindfulness, right now, just by closing your eyes and paying attention to all your senses. Take a few seconds to be mindful. Feel your body as it's touching the surface you're sitting on. Feel the sensations of your skin against that surface. Feel your hands and your fingers as they contact that surface. Take some deep breaths and feel the sensations in your body. Feel any muscle tightness or pain or any other discomfort. On your next deep breath, focus on your sense of smell and smell the air. Then focus your attention on what you hear. Now open your eyes. You just practiced mindfulness. It's actually sort of fun, isn't it? It doesn't seem like a very big deal, but this type of simple practice is important in starting on the path to opening the door into yourself.

If you're interested in any of these relaxation techniques I've mentioned, there are many different resources for guidance. Books have been written about all these techniques, and you can find information on the Internet that will either give you an overview of what they're about or scripts to guide you in practicing them.

You can also look for counselors and therapists who have experience in tailoring these techniques to your particular situation. I refer almost all my patients with chronic pain to psychologists who specialize in chronic pain management. These psychologists have special experience using relaxation techniques to help manage chronic pain. One of my patients recently told me of a visualization technique her pain psychologist taught her. The simple visualization of imagining herself in a safe place, with a safe person, is comforting for her and improves her pain. When her pain flares, she brings up the image of baking Christmas cookies with her grandmother in her grandmother's kitchen, and it relaxes her and helps her pain.

For some people, mental health counseling starts the journey within. Counseling techniques, like cognitive behavioral therapy, can help you recognize unhealthy thought patterns that can be harmful for you. If you've ever been in a relationship that's unhealthy or abusive, or if you know someone who has, you know what I mean. It can be hard to break that cycle of being either the victim or



The goal of meditation is to slow down all the unnecessary, chattering thoughts running through your head.



If you have a physical limitation, ask your teacher to tailor the program to your needs.

the victimizer. You can know that there's a problem and want to change, but it can be very hard because the thought patterns can be so deeply entrenched. Thoughts like: *I know my abuser doesn't really want to hurt me but just gets out of control* or *I don't deserve to be treated better than this* can hold you trapped. Counseling can help you recognize and change those unhealthy thought patterns as you start your journey of understanding yourself.

Some people find that working with their bodies is the way they prefer to slow down and go within. There are a number of different approaches you can take. There are passive therapies, like massage therapy, where you have someone work on your body to loosen your muscles and relax you. As you relax you access your inner self. I've seen patients make major breakthroughs in understanding themselves as a result of bodywork. Sometimes when you've learned to suppress emotions or painful memories by tightening your body, the active work of deep tissue massage or myofascial release can help you access the information that has lain dormant. As you access that information, your body can relax in a way it couldn't before. Then you can work with that information on a conscious level and heal in a more complete way.

There are so many active bodywork therapies that I can't begin to list them all. These include things like yoga and Tai Chi. With these therapies, slow gentle movements help calm your hyperactive mind while you stretch and strengthen your body.

As you're investigating these therapies, you may wonder how to choose between them. Depending on what's offered in your area, there can be many options. For example, there are many different types of yoga. I recommend that if you have some type of physical limitation, like a back condition or chronic pain, check with your teacher and make sure he or she can tailor your yoga program to your specific needs. Otherwise, which specific type of yoga to choose is really a matter of individual preference.

I have trouble with structured activities, so instead I use hobbies to help me slow down and go within. These are hobbies that give my body a gentle workout and also use my mind. But they aren't intense, so they let me relax. When I'm in my garden, my body is working and my mind is focusing on the care of my plants. Sometimes I can do some intense physical labor, but in general, I move slowly. My mind might be thinking about the plants, but the thoughts are never too complex. This puts me in a Zen place of calm, where I can forget about everything else and relax. By the end of my time in the garden, I have slowed down and let go of the outside world.

One important goal with all these activities should be that you enjoy them; otherwise you can't really relax. If you're doing an aggressive work-out regimen because you're trying to lose twenty pounds, but you hate the process of the actual workout, you're going to have a problem. You may dread your workout all day until you get to the gym, and you'll hate it while you're doing it. The only relaxing moments may come when you're done with your workout for the day.

This workout can be hard to keep doing long term because it's not fun. As soon as you've gotten the results you want, and the weight is off, you'll be tempted to quit. There's a lot of stress associated with this type of workout.

The activities I'm talking about, to help you go within, should be things you want to do. You should look forward to them and enjoy the process while you're doing them. They might not always be easy, but overall they should be something you like and something that can help you relax so you can focus on yourself more fully.

There are many other examples of activities that can slow you down and shift your focus within. I know several people who find that journaling is helpful. When you write down your thoughts and feelings, you can focus more clearly and understand yourself better. Something about putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard helps you see situations in a new light. Journaling focuses your attention and helps you process your thoughts.

A lot of people find that doing artwork or craft projects can take their minds away from the outside world. I have a patient who healed her chronic pain when she rediscovered her love of painting. She had low back pain that kept getting worse. She had a job that kept her very busy and didn't allow for any creativity. She also had two young children, and even though they were getting older and more independent, she focused so much energy on them that she was neglecting herself. When we talked, she realized how much she was missing her creative outlet of painting. By finding time for her artwork, she was able to relax and heal herself.

You can do gentle physical exercises like walking and swimming, that are not only enjoyable, but that also give you a workout at the same time. Spending quiet time with children or animals, as long as you're not doing too much work to take care of them, can be relaxing and enable you to access your inner child. And speaking of your inner child, anything you enjoyed doing when you were a kid might be something you might like to do now to relax. Things like doing jigsaw puzzles and coloring in coloring books can be relaxing and fun.

Spending time in nature can be energizing and relaxing at the same time. There's nothing like spending a few hours outside, getting fresh air, and feeling the sun on your skin while appreciating the beauty of the plants and animals around you.

Listening to music can relax you and can also trigger emotions. I'll talk more about using music as an exercise to trigger emotions in the *Emotions Module*. For this lesson, I'm recommending that you use music more for relaxation and enjoyment.

And some days, nothing feels as good as spending the afternoon resting on the couch and watching television or reading a book. Or maybe you like to go to the movie theater and be immersed in the experience of watching a movie on the big screen.

One last point: you're going to need to devote time to this exercise of focusing on your inner self. If you haven't done so already, you need to figure



Relaxing hobbies give your mind and body a gentle workout while they help you slow down and go within.



The work you're doing
to change your life is
your field of mastery.

out where to get that time. It may be in little snatches throughout the day or in longer periods less often. I find that I need long periods of time, on a regular basis, to be alone and focus on my inner self. This is time I use to take care of myself and work on my creativity. A lot of people think of time alone, without any goals, as wasted time. I talk to a lot of people who feel guilty if they aren't busy all the hours they're awake. But downtime is extremely valuable, and as far as I'm concerned, it's essential for living a healthy, balanced life.

Here's a new perspective if you have trouble with guilt over downtime. In his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell says that it takes roughly ten thousand hours of practice to achieve mastery in any field. Maybe it doesn't take that much, but the point is that it takes a lot of time to develop expertise. Gifted pianists may be born with the gift, but they still need to practice many hours to hone their skill.

Think about the work you're doing to change your life as your field of mastery. Yes, some people will accomplish miracles overnight. But most of us will need many hours of focus so we can understand ourselves and make the changes needed. In my experience, the more work you do and the deeper you go with the work in this course, the more you'll accomplish and the more amazing the results will be. So don't shortchange yourself. Give yourself as much time as you can find to become the master of your healing.

EXERCISE

Start slowing down both your body and your mind. You may already be doing activities that help you do this. If so, keep doing them. If you haven't started yet, try different activities and find what works best for you. Look for things you enjoy, so you can continue to do them long term.

Remember, you have more power than you can imagine—power to heal yourself and change your life—starting from the inside out.

3

Empower Yourself with Integrative Medicine

When you're a patient, you can feel like you don't have much control over your healing. In this lesson I'm going to share how using integrative medicine can be empowering for patients. I'm also going to give you a brief overview of the different types of complementary and alternative medicine therapies.



Recently I saw a patient who complained to me about one of his other doctors. The previous year he had been diagnosed with cancer, and one of his treatments caused a severe rash. The rash was terribly itchy, and he'd scratch until he bled. He was referred to a dermatologist who tried one medication after another, but nothing worked. He was at his wits' end. Then his wife suggested he try a well-known, over-the-counter moisture cream. As far as I know, there's nothing special about this cream, and it seems to have the same ingredients as a number of other similar creams. But for some reason, the minute he applied this particular cream, his itching improved. He's been using it for a year, and it continues to help.

When he told his dermatologist he was using this over-the-counter cream, she chastised him for using something other than what she had recommended. He could tell she was unhappy with him but couldn't figure out why, and he didn't feel comfortable asking her about it. He still follows up with her, but he dreads the visits because he feels she's critical of him. A year later, he's still talking about his conflict with her, and it's still bothering him.

I've had many patients tell me the same sort of thing about their physicians over the years. For whatever reason, they didn't follow their doctors' recommendations, and when their doctors found out, the patients felt like little kids getting in trouble with their parents for being naughty.

This brings up an important point. In Western medicine, physicians tend to be paternalistic and believe they always know what's best. We're trained to have that attitude. We're supposed to be confident and always know the answer. Patients expect this, and we learn to expect this of ourselves. This puts a lot of pressure on us. Maybe this is part of the reason we can get defensive when we feel our patients are questioning us.



To have the most successful outcomes, patients need to be actively involved in their healing process.

The problem with letting your physician make all the decisions is that health and healing are complicated. Physicians don't always have the best answer, even if it seems on the surface like it's a no-brainer. Every human is unique, and we all have different needs and wants. What looks good from my perspective, as a physician, may be totally wrong for an individual patient.

Here's an example. I saw a new patient, a lawyer with chronic pain. She had seen many other doctors, and I was her last hope. She was hoping for a pill or procedure that would give her a quick fix. I knew from the beginning that this would be a problem. As I took her history, it became clear that her life was chaotic and out of control. Her schedule was crazy, and she had an excessive amount of stress. After talking to her for just a few minutes, I sensed how intense and driven she was.

I see a lot of patients with chronic pain who have busy schedules and too little time for themselves. That, in and of itself, is a problem. But I also knew her intensity was going to be a major hurdle in her healing. I knew she had a lot of work to do, on many levels, in order to heal her pain.

I reviewed the other treatments she had received, and I knew there wasn't much else to offer in the quick-fix department. I explained this to her and recommended that we work on getting to the root of the problem and change her life on that deeper level.

She wasn't interested in my ideas, and I never saw her again. This is an example of how my approach to healing didn't work for her. It can be hard for a physician to accept, but even when I'm trying to be a proponent for my patient's health, I need to remember that I'm only a consultant and the patient has the final word.

Another aspect of Western medicine that makes it difficult for patients to take control of their healing involves the way we view disease. We tend to view the physical body as detached from the nonphysical world. Even mental illness is approached this way. We give lip service to how lifestyle issues, like unhealthy relationships and stress, affect our bodies. But we don't deal with those problems well on a practical level.

Western medicine treatments also can be complicated and hard for patients to understand. Because of the complexity, it's hard for patients to be active participants in the process.

To have the most successful outcomes, patients need to be actively involved in their healing process. You need to understand as much as possible so you can make informed decisions. You might not understand all the details, but you need to be able to see the big picture and feel empowered so that you can steer the ship. You need to be able to be honest with your physicians and not feel like a child getting in trouble when you disagree.

Physicians and other practitioners need to focus on all aspects of patients' lives, not just the anatomical and biochemical. I used to give my patients with chronic pain a handout describing how pain mechanisms work. I thought that if they understood how their bodies changed when they had chronic pain, they'd

become more actively engaged in their healing. I don't think it worked. Maybe it gave them more of a sense of validation, because so many of them felt that their doctors and families didn't believe in their chronic pain, and understanding the pathophysiology of pain made it real. But learning that information was just an intellectual exercise, and it didn't change their lives. The thing that helped my patients most was the hope they got when they had goals they could accomplish and when they experienced changes, even small ones.

As a patient, the work outside of conventional medicine is where much of your power lies. An ideal world combines conventional Western medicine with a holistic approach that acknowledges the patient's power in his or her healing. *Integrative medicine* is the term used to describe this holistic approach, where the patient is an active partner in the process.

Integrative medicine emphasizes the importance of using natural, less invasive treatments as much as possible. These tend to have less severe side effects and complications.

The term *complementary and alternative medicine*, also referred to by its acronym CAM, is used in reference to the therapies used in integrative medicine. CAM therapies include a number of different treatments. Basically any treatment that isn't commonly used in conventional Western medicine is a CAM therapy. Physical therapy used to be a CAM therapy. Then physicians started to recommend it frequently, and it became a common part of mainstream Western medicine. It is no longer considered a CAM therapy.

There are some major differences between conventional Western medicine and CAM therapies. Western medicine, or allopathic medicine as it's also called, tends to use very aggressive treatments like strong medications and surgical procedures. This is very helpful when people have aggressive diseases. Western medicine saves many lives, and I wouldn't want to live without it.

But Western medicine tends to have complications and side effects that can be very traumatic and difficult to manage. I think of it as a risk/benefit issue. Whenever you use more aggressive treatments with more potentially life-saving benefits, you're bound to have more severe risks and side effects.

CAM therapies, on the other hand, tend to be gentler. I'm not saying they have no risks, but in general they're less severe than with the medications and procedures used in allopathic medicine. Because CAM therapies tend to have lower risk profiles, patients can use them more independently without always needing a physician or other healthcare provider to provide guidance.

Using these therapies empowers patients to take an active role in their healing. I recommend CAM therapies for most of my patients, not only because they're empowering, but also because they work.

When I was a pain fellow, I helped revise a chapter about CAM therapies in a pain textbook (*Evaluation of Complementary and Alternative Therapies, Textbook of Clinical Pain Management, 2nd Edition*. Belgrade MJ: Schamber CD. Hodder Arnold. 2008). I'm going to give you an overview of how we categorized the different therapies. This overview can make sense of the ever-increasing number



An ideal world combines conventional Western medicine with a holistic approach.



Mindful therapies use our mind and thoughts to change our physical and mental state.

of alternative therapies available. It can help you make decisions about what might be helpful for you.

We separated the CAM therapies into seven categories. They include: mindful therapies, spiritual healing, nutraceuticals, movement-based therapies, mechanical therapies, stimulation-based therapies, and energy therapies. I'm going to give you a brief overview of each category.

The first is *mindful therapies*, which I mentioned in the first lesson of the *Energy Module*, "Start the Journey Within." Mindful therapies include relaxation techniques, meditation (including mindfulness), and hypnosis, to name a few. Mindful therapies use our mind and thoughts to change our physical and mental state. They've been proven in many studies to be effective. They've been found to do everything from improving pain and anxiety to decreasing heart rate and blood pressure.

Another CAM therapy category is *spiritual healing*. This includes things like prayer. Mentioning prayer brings up an important point about CAM therapies. They can be hard to evaluate as far as their effectiveness, especially when comparing them to conventional Western medicine with research studies. Many CAM therapies work on a level that can't be easily measured. How can you measure the process of praying and the outcomes of a prayer? How can you compare it to the effects of a medication? It really makes no sense. And the studies bear that out. Every time I see a study supporting the effectiveness of one of these therapies, I see another study disproving it.

I'll tell you how I deal with this. I've come to the point where I don't worry too much about the studies. I review them, but I take them with a grain of salt. It's very easy to skew the data to make the numbers fit the way you want them to. This is done all the time in research studies. I'm not saying I think researchers are deliberately falsifying or manipulating data. But I think they can get caught up in the statistics and have trouble seeing the forest for the trees.

I tend to look at the research studies about CAM therapies, and conventional Western medicine for that matter, with varying levels of interest. A safe, cheap therapy like prayer is different from a therapy with more potential harm and financial cost. I don't care what any study says about prayer. People can all do it any place and any time, and it's free. I don't see a downside to prayer. So why waste research dollars to prove or disprove its efficacy. I'll pay more close attention to studies that evaluate the treatments that have more potential harm and financial cost.

Another CAM therapy category is *nutraceuticals*. This includes things you ingest or apply topically, like herbs, supplements, and homeopathic remedies. Use of nutraceuticals has exploded in the United States in recent years. Back when I was a medical student, about the only commonly used nutraceutical was the multivitamin. I could never have guessed how things would change in such a short time.

When I started to investigate different types of nutraceuticals, I realized that the purpose for them is different depending on the type you use. Herbs and

supplements work differently than homeopathic remedies. When you take herbs and supplements, the goal, as with Western medicine, is to reverse the symptom or effects of the disease you're treating.

Interestingly, homeopathy does the exact opposite. The goal of homeopathy is to use a substance that causes the same symptom, or change in the body, as the disease the patient has. In other words, like treats like.

In homeopathy the substance being used for treatment is diluted millions of times, so eventually there's no more of the original substance left. Instead, it's only the energy imprint of the substance that remains. It's the energy of the homeopathic substance that heals the patient. This may not make sense from a Western medicine standpoint. But many people find it to be effective for a broad variety of conditions.

In my opinion, nutraceuticals can be effective and are for the most part safe, with mostly minor side effects or interactions. I think it's unfortunate they aren't regulated by the FDA, because it's hard to study them in a controlled way and compare them to conventional Western pharmaceuticals. I suspect that if they could be compared, they'd be found to be more helpful than most physicians currently appreciate.

Another problem with the lack of regulation is that it can be hard to know for sure if the ingredients purported to be in them are really present. If you take the recommended supplement and it doesn't work, you can't be sure if it was truly ineffective or if there just wasn't enough of the actual supplement present to treat your condition. Another problem is contamination with unwanted and sometimes dangerous adulterants.

If you're using these therapies, I recommend that you ask your healthcare provider for guidance in finding reputable manufacturers. There are other factors you can look for, like certification by a third-party quality review organization and evidence of testing by an independent lab to prove two things: that there really is the amount of product they claim to be present and that the product is free of adulterants.

There are healthcare providers called naturopaths, or doctors of naturopathy (also known by the acronym ND), who are trained in taking a natural approach to healing using a wide variety of treatments, including nutraceuticals. They study the same types of basic anatomy and pathophysiology courses that medical doctors do, and in many states they have the ability to prescribe medications. But their focus is on prevention and taking a more natural, holistic approach to healing.

There are so many nutraceuticals available that it's impossible to address all the important aspects of using them in this lesson. If you're interested in using them, search for a reputable physician, naturopath, or other healthcare provider who is experienced in using nutraceuticals to help you figure out which ones would be best for you.

One last aspect of nutraceuticals is to think of the medicinal properties of the food you eat. We tend to think a lot about how good food tastes and we can let



If you're interested in nutraceuticals, search for a reputable healthcare provider for help.



Warm-pool aquatic therapy is an excellent movement-based therapy.

taste override the importance of the quality of the food. Whether you want to prevent disease or heal yourself, working to eat a healthier diet is important. You can consider it a form of medicine.

Another category of CAM therapies is the *movement-based therapies*. This includes things like exercise, dance, and yoga. Obviously, movement is healthy for the body. Different people have different types of movement that are the most comfortable and enjoyable for them. Our individual preferences depend on things like our body types, levels of endurance, whether we like to be inside or outside when we exercise, and the activities we enjoy. We all need to move on a regular basis. Even if you have a disability, continuing to move is vital.

In addition to the exercise you do for enjoyment, you can also choose movement-based therapies that will help you heal. Two examples are the Feldenkrais and Alexander techniques. These exercise techniques focus on gentle movement and posture work. They're good because they're gentle and easy for people of all ability levels to do.

One movement-based therapy I love for patients with chronic pain is warm-pool aquatic therapy. The pool is about 10 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the average swimming pool, and it's not too deep, averaging up to four and one-half feet. Patients can do their exercises in the pool, and the water makes movement easier because it removes the effect of gravity. Since the water is warmer than average, it's comfortable if you can't move very fast. This is great if you're overweight or have other physical disabilities that make it hard for you to tolerate land therapy.

One of my patients recently had a wonderful outcome because of aquatic therapy. She had had chronic back pain for more than a decade. It had limited every aspect of her life, from her work to her social life. When I started to see her, she was on chronic opioids and got a steroid injection in her back every few months. Even with those treatments, she couldn't work and spent most of her time at home resting. She was frustrated and depressed. We tapered her opioids, which was hard. But she got through the taper because of the warm pool. And within two months of stopping opioids, she was 90 percent better, all because of the warm pool. Not all my patients do this well, but this isn't the first patient of mine whose life was changed by aquatic therapy. This case is a good example of the power of CAM therapies.

A commonly used group of CAM therapies is *mechanical therapies*, including chiropractic, osteopathic, and massage therapy. These are passive therapies, where patients receive treatments that do things like loosen muscles and adjust the spine. My patients tend to appreciate these passive healing techniques, especially when their pain is flared and they're having trouble moving. I think part of the reason why these therapies help isn't just because of the mechanical aspect of the therapies, but also because of the human connection and human touch from the healers performing the treatments.

You probably know what massage therapy is. But a lot of people don't know the difference between chiropractic and osteopathic therapy.

Osteopaths, or doctors of osteopathy (who are also known by the acronym DO), get essentially the same education as allopaths, or medical doctors (who are also known by the acronym MD). They practice conventional Western medicine just like MDs.

The difference is that osteopaths also learn a mechanical therapy technique that's similar to chiropractic therapy. Osteopathic adjustments differ from chiropractic therapy in that they use a gentle, long-lever approach, utilizing the patient's arms and legs to adjust the spine. Chiropractors, on the other hand, use more localized, high-velocity, short-lever manipulations directly on the spine. Not all osteopaths choose to do mechanical therapy. In fact, currently where I live in northern Minnesota, there are many osteopaths practicing medicine. But none of them do mechanical therapy.

Stimulation-based therapies are things like music therapy, aromatherapy, and magnet therapy. These therapies all stimulate your body in some way to create a healing effect. Think about how sometimes you can be stressed out and when you listen to relaxing music you can feel your body loosening up. Through the stimulation of your auditory system, you affect your mind and your body.

And think about a scent that's very calming and comforting for you. Maybe it's the smell of apple pie or some other smell you associate with good memories. I have a friend who likes the smell of skunks. It reminds her of a happy memory of riding in the back seat of her family's car on the way home from a party one night when she was a kid. She felt safe and happy, and as they drove, they passed a dead skunk. The smell of the skunk filled the car, and she associated it with her feelings of security. Now she likes that smell. She could use skunk oil as aromatherapy to help her relax!

Another common type of stimulation-based therapy is the TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) unit. TENS units are small battery-operated devices that produce electrical current with the goal of stimulating nerves in a way that decreases pain. They have thin wire leads and reusable adhesive pads that are applied to the area of the body that is in pain. When you turn them on, the theory is that they confuse the pain nerves so the pain impulses don't make it to the brain.

The last group of CAM therapies is the *energy therapies*. Energy therapies are focused on optimizing energy flow. I'm going to talk more about the idea of energy flow in the next few lessons. Now, I'm just going to give you a brief overview of some of the more common energy-healing therapies. Some of these therapies are active, where you do exercises to bring your energy flow into balance. Others are passive, where other people do energy work to heal you.

A few of the CAM therapies I've already mentioned in other categories could be considered energy therapies. As with everything in life, categorizing all these therapies isn't as cut-and-dried as it may seem. Homeopathy may be considered a nutraceutical, but homeopathic remedies are also effective because they contain an energy imprint of the original substance that was used to create them. So homeopathy could also be considered an energy therapy.



Energy therapies are focused on optimizing energy flow.



Instead of worrying about definitions, use the energy therapies that are interesting and helpful.

Music therapy may be considered an energy therapy because the different vibrational frequencies in music have an affect our energy systems. There are composers who create music specifically with the intention of finding healing vibrational frequencies.

There are a lot of movement-based therapies that are also energy therapies. Many people do yoga for the stretching and strengthening aspect of it. But another goal with yoga is to bring your energy flow into healthy balance. The same goes for Tai Chi, which is a gentle form of exercise that also brings your energy flow into balance.

Another energy therapy, Qigong, has many variations. There are some types where you do active movements to bring your own energy flow into balance like you do with Tai Chi. And there are variations where you don't do active movements, but instead you receive healing treatment from someone else.

There are many other energy therapies, like the passive treatment form of Qigong, where you receive energy healing from someone else. Reiki, Healing Touch, and Therapeutic Touch are some common examples. With all these therapies, you aren't just limited to receiving passive healing. You can also learn how to do the energy work on yourself. I'll talk more about the theory and practice of these types of therapies in the next two lessons, "Energy 101" and "Auras and Chakras."

If you're interested in trying one of the many energy-healing therapies, and you've seen different programs offering variations, you might wonder what's the difference between them. Welcome to the club. I've talked to a number of practitioners of many of these types of energy therapies, and I've tried some myself. I've come to the conclusion that there are so many variations of all of them, including therapies that combine them, that you could make it a life study to find the answer.

Energy is energy. I think the difference between these therapies really comes down to the rituals you use to work with it. I recommend that instead of worrying about definitions, you try the ones that seem interesting to you and keep using the ones that you find helpful. As I mentioned with yoga, let your teacher know about any conditions you have that could require some adjustments in the program. The beauty of these therapies is that, in general, unless you're doing something like hot yoga, they're safe and gentle.

Another energy-healing therapy that's being used more frequently in the West is acupuncture. With acupuncture, practitioners insert needles through the skin in various parts of the body to bring your energy flow into balance. In Chinese medicine, practitioners have found a number of energy lines called *meridians* that flow through the body. There are specific points on these energy lines that have been found to be especially powerful for healing. When a needle is inserted into those points, energy flow comes into balance and patients feel better.

Acupressure and the Emotional Freedom Technique (also called tapping) are techniques you can do yourself by pressing on, massaging, or tapping on acupuncture points on your own body to bring your energy flow into healthy balance. They are used to treat a variety of problems, and many people feel they're helpful.

Like some of the other CAM therapies, acupuncture doesn't make much sense when you think about it from a conventional Western medicine standpoint. A lot of research has been done to try to explain how acupuncture works and whether it's effective. But whether Western science supports the use of acupuncture or not, it's a therapy that many people find helpful. It's been used for thousands of years. And people will continue to use it for a long time to come.

One aspect of CAM therapies that gets discussed frequently is the placebo effect. My opinion about all these therapies is that I don't care if the placebo effect is part of why they work. Even complicated surgeries, like neurosurgery, offer a placebo effect. I'll take my placebo effect from a noninvasive CAM therapy over neurosurgery any day.

Finally, I recommend CAM therapies that don't require too much dependence on the practitioner. It's one thing to go for a series of lessons or treatments. But if you have to go for regular appointments for months or years on end, it can get expensive. And you can end up feeling dependent on your CAM practitioner in the same way you can feel dependent on your physician. There are times when this is appropriate. In general I think it's always best for the patient to be as independent and empowered as possible.



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EXERCISE

Consider the CAM therapies. If any of the things I mentioned are interesting, investigate them further. If you have questions about the safety or effectiveness of a certain therapy or a practitioner in your area, ask your physician or other healthcare provider for advice. They may not understand the therapy or believe in it, but they should at least be able to investigate enough to tell you whether it's safe or refer you to someone who can give you more help.

Some states have licensure requirements for certain CAM practitioners, like acupuncturists. You can check the requirements in your state. Another thing to investigate is how much experience the practitioner has, to make sure he or she didn't just take a short, online course before putting up a shingle. Word of mouth is also a good way to get the scoop on whether a certain practitioner or therapy available in your area is helpful.

As you're considering CAM therapies and your conventional Western medical care, pay attention to the experiences that empower you. These will be the ones you'll want to focus your energy on.

Remember, you have more power than you can imagine—power to heal yourself and change your life—starting from the inside out.