



The Mind~Body Prescription

By John Sarno, MD
Book Summary

Dr John Sarno is a rehabilitation specialist based at the Rusk Rehabilitation Institute in New York and a leader in mind~body medicine. Dr Sarno has developed a theory based on Freud's model of unconscious and conscious experience to explain low back syndrome, commonly ascribed by other rehabilitation physicians as arthritis, spinal stenosis, etc.

Dr Sarno's model of treatment is based on the premise that rage, both unconsciously repressed, and consciously suppressed is perceived as dangerous; symptomatology becomes a necessary emotional distraction. Accordingly, he feels that pain resolution requires recognition and ownership of emotional experience, in contrast to physical therapy and other traditional remedies. In his books, *The Mind~Body Prescription* and *Healing Back Pain*, he has extended this theory, applying it to such diverse conditions as headaches, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and irritable bowel syndrome.



HOW INTERNAL CONFLICTS, UNCONSCIOUS EMOTIONS AND CERTAIN PERSONALITY TRAITS CAN LEAD TO PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS.

- Everyone is under pressure or stress of some kind and we all have internal reactions to these pressures and then the physical symptoms manifest in response to these feelings.
- A realm of feelings exists in the unconscious and because we are not aware of them, and therefore cannot control them, the brain automatically induces physical symptoms to prevent the unconscious feeling from becoming overt. This in turn leads to MIND~BODY SYMPTOMS.

TENSION MYOSITIS SYNDROME

Dr Sarno has classified many psychosomatic pain disorders as part of a syndrome called TENSION MYOSITIS SYNDROME. TMS is a painful but harmless change of state in muscles, where the blood flow to the involved tissues is reduced by the autonomic nervous system. The initiating phenomenon leading to this is stress.

- The Tension Myositis Syndrome (TMS) includes and of the following:
 - Most low back and leg pain
 - Most neck, shoulder, and arm pain



- Fibromyalgia
- Tension Myalgia
- Myofascial Pain Syndrome
- TMJ
- Most Tendonitis
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Repetitive Stress injury
- Most Chronic Pain
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Equivalents of TMS
 - Gastrointestinal disorders
 - Skin Disorders
 - Immune System disorders (i.e. arthritis, diabetes)
 - Disorders of the Circulatory System

THE ROLE OF UNCONSCIOUS EMOTIONS AND PERSONALITY TRAITS IN MIND~BODY DISORDERS

Role of Repression in Physical Symptoms

- Physical symptoms are a “defense mechanism” of the brain. The brain is diverting attention to the body in order to avoid the awareness of or confrontation with certain unconscious or repressed frightening or threatening feelings – specifically rage.
- Once patients accept this explanation and become aware of the brain’s strategy to divert attention away from emotions and into the body, their physical symptoms usually disappear.

The Role of Rage and Pressure in the Unconscious

- The residue of anger and rage from infancy and childhood which has never dissipated
 - Examples – Sexual, physical, or emotional abuse; parental problems including alcoholism, depression, anxiety, drug addiction, or psychosis; unrealistic parental expectations form the child; social pressures.
- That which results from self-imposed pressure – as in driven, perfectionist, or goodist people (i.e. internal conflict)
- Stresses, strains, and pressures of everyday life.

PERSONALITY TRAITS OF PEOPLE WITH TMS

- Low Self-Esteem – most people harbor feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.



- Perfectionism – including “neatniks”, highly responsible, conscientious people, and “worry-warts”. Ambitious, hard-driving, and self-critical people who set high standards for themselves. An inner sense of inadequacy fuels perfectionism.
- Goodism – the need to be good. People who are driven to be helpful, often sacrificing their own needs for others. This creates internal, usually unconscious anger at the self.
- Hostility/Aggression – Type A personalities. Also an outward manifestation of repressed rage and suppressed anger.
- Guilt
- Dependency – The desire to be taken care of extends into adulthood but most people deny this need or repress it.

TREATMENT OF MIND~BODY DISORDERS

Acknowledge the psychological basis for the pain. Accept the psychological reasons behind the disorder.

- Consciously think about repressed rage and the reasons for it whenever the pain comes. This contradicts the brain’s strategy to try to distract attention to the physical.
- Talk to your brain. Use your conscious mind to address the unconscious part of your brain – that you know the pain is harmless and is a distraction from repressed rage and you no longer intend to be diverted. You can also focus on trying to increase blood flow to the involved tissues. The brain can communicate with the rest of the body – it’s the principle behind biofeedback!
- Make a written list. List all of the pressures in your life. By identifying and dealing with the sources of pressure consciously, you reduce their potential negative effect in the unconscious.
- Take time daily for a daily reflection or meditation period. It is essential to take time to think about what may be enraging you or worrying you and to focus on how to get better.

Knowledge is the cure. For some people, simply shifting attention from the physical to the psychological is enough. Others need more information or guidance, and still others will require psychotherapy.

Physical Activity. Resume physical activity without the fear – however long and slow you need to take it. Focus on the psychological aspects for a few weeks at first, and then try some physical activity slowly. The pain will be diminished and confidence will be strengthened.

