

Nature's medicine - How Growing Your Own Veg Treats Mind, Body and Spirit

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My job as a psychotherapist is to work on your mind. What they didn't teach me at Psychotherapy/Hypnotherapy school however was the integrated nature of the mind and the body and how important is the fuel we use, our food, to sustain life. As a mad vegetable grower and foody it stands to reason then that I have become increasingly aware over recent years of the movement for Psycho-nutrition. This strand of investigation, as the term suggests, looks at nutrition as a profound factor in our psychological wellbeing.

So I'd like to separate and then integrate 3 very significant aspects of our health and wellbeing starting with the mind body and spirit triad and explore how inherently linked they are.

The mind

The mind is our most powerful tool to manifest or destroy something in our life. It is our conscious mind that applies logic and rationale to our problems and seeks solutions. In contrast, our unconscious mind, which by definition, most people are unaware of, is like the elevator music to our life, quietly programming us in the background. Our unconscious mind is made up of a lifetime's experience which has formed deeply held beliefs about who we are in our own hearts and minds and in society. If I was treated badly as a child, I grow up deeply believing I am bad. If I was shouted at repeatedly as a child, I grow up either avoiding conflict, or attracting it to me and looking for it everywhere I go. These impulses run on autopilot until you corral the conscious mind into witnessing what you are doing to yourself. It is at this point that we can change our reality.

The law of cause and effect is popularly believed to be an instrument of the conscious mind. However, the law of cause and effect is governed by feelings, not thoughts. Thoughts are flimsy. They're just things we can say to ourselves, which, if our deeper unconscious minds are not in alignment with, are simply thoughts. We all know how

it feels to say something quite definitively, but to deeply know that you cannot carry out the conviction of your words. This creates a lack of congruence between how you feel and what you say. And it creates difficulty in interpersonal relationships no matter how earnest you are as an individual. People unconsciously sense the 'at-odds-ness' in you and you will either attract those with the same issues to you, or repel those who are more in alignment with themselves than you. It is something I am shining a light on all of the time in my sessions with people who say one thing, but who are deeply programmed to believe and indeed feel another. It is a cause of great suffering to be so at odds with yourself.

The Body

However, our ability to think clearly and apply our humanity to finding our solutions, depends on having a well nourished body. The essential fatty acids, minerals and vitamins needed to 'run' our bodies are evident and plentiful in nature all around us. They are in our woodlands and forests, in our streets and even gutters - there is goodness in wild food everywhere you turn that are rich in minerals and vitamins. For example, the essential mineral, magnesium, present in many leafy vegetables helps relax the body by enabling efficient electrical exchange in the synapses which keeps our body operating fluidly. However, magnesium is one of the most unstable minerals in nature, and whilst readily available in greens and vegetables straight from the ground, is easily destroyed by processing. Other 'foods' such as the wheat that a lot of supermarket bread is made from, has been stripped of nutrients, genetically modified, doused in round-up weedkiller, re-combined with added nutrients, artificial flavours and colours, and then to top it all, processed in such a way that the gluten in bread for example, is overworked, under proved and transformed into a substance that is indigestible to many. This can lead to a diagnosis of wheat intolerance when really this is the body correctly discerning that this food is toxic because of how it's been produced and manipulated, one assumes, to gain maximum profitability for large food corporations.

We have been sold low fat, low sugar, manufactured and manipulated products as though what nature provides in abundance, and free, is somehow deficient. And as we've removed ourselves ever more away from nature, our foods have become increasingly tampered with, genetically modified, deficient in minerals, filled with water, fillers, additives and over-processed and packaged to create 'added value' to the

consumer and more profits for the corporations that create them. Our mental health is at an all time low. Our body size has increased phenomenally so that huge numbers of people are struggling with their weight. And physical disease, and in particular, cancer, is still growing at an alarming rate.

The quality of our food is a serious issue as is where our food comes from. If we no longer know how our food is grown, where, with which soil amendments, which processes, which additives and colourings, we are literally walking blindfolded into the lions den. Attracted by shiny advertising we are lambs to the slaughter. And even the 5-a-day campaign of fresh fruit and vegetables, which in itself is woefully insufficient, does not tell us how our veg has been grown, how much pollution our 'healthy' veg has created by covering hundreds of road or air miles, and whether it is genetically modified, grown in nutrient rich soil or whether it is just another one of the food industry's Frankenfoods. Large food outlets have disenfranchised us from our land, and then sold what can be grown for free back to us, adulterated and processed to within an inch of its life. And this because we have been wooed into believing that working for other people to earn lots of money will buy us a lifestyle that in reality leaves us mentally, physically and spiritually starved of goodness on every level. Add to that the fact that the 'big 4' supermarkets in the UK currently hold 73.2 percent share of the food market and you can see that we may have a problem on our hands. AND what's even more shocking, is that at any one time, there are only 3 days supply of food in the store. What would happen if the supply chain broke down? Economic disarray, war, natural disasters. Seem improbable? Maybe not so much in today's world as it might once have been.

The Spirit

How do we energise the mind, develop our bodies, and nurture our spirit? You can probably discern already that to split the human condition into 3 distinct realms - mind, body and spirit, is itself artificial because each one feeds and overlaps with the other. What's good for one is inevitably good for the other two and what's not health giving will impact on the other realms. It would seem our collective mind has been trained to understand ourselves by splitting up our human experience into parts. This is good for business. Each part has an industry surrounding it all claiming that they are bigger, better or have found the answer to the challenges of modern living. It reminds

me of the blind men and the elephant parable where each man, touching the elephant in different places, disagrees with the next one on what he 'sees' in front of him.

The spirit, the part of our humanity that drives us to stay alive, is energised when we find purpose, passion and love for who we are and for life itself. This does not involve a religious belief system. The bit we call the spirit is inherent in life yet since it contains aspects of the mind and body and vice versa, it is not something that can be easily dissected and labelled distinctly.

The Environment

The fact is though, we can nurture our sense of purpose, invigorate our body and feed our mind, when we make a decision to grow our own foods wherever we can.

Growing your own fruit and vegetables, enables you to build a relationship with the environment; with the soil, the rain, the sunshine, the seasons, with the very building blocks of life. All life comes from the soil. If the soil is poor then so are we. Learning how to compost, cultivate and nurture your own foods, and then to prepare or cook them, fills you with the vital nutrients that most foods are lacking - even fresh fruit and vegetables from the stores.

In addition, it empowers you to effectively print money, because nature doesn't cost anything, enabling you to feed yourself and your families with a rich source of natural health giving foods for free. It cleans and purifies your environment by cutting out thousands of road miles, pesticides and artificial fertilizers. It recycles all your kitchen waste, cardboard, tree and grass cuttings, and secures your food source, regardless of what is going on on the world stage - whether food prices are rising or falling - to you it is irrelevant.

Growing your own food makes you eat less, savour more, create more recipes, build communities with your neighbours and extended families - because I can guarantee you will always grow more than you need and will have to share your surplus - and it slowly rids you of the disease of consumerism because everything you need is already around you. As you learn how to nurture your plants, so learning to nurture yourself comes more naturally. Growing your own veg exercises the body, gives you a cardiovascular workout, builds strong and leaner muscles and improves your immune system. It gets you outside in the air, in air that is moving and blowing freely which is better for you than hot, centrally heated indoor air where microbes and bacteria may collect. It exposes you to a natural source of Vitamin D - the sun, which produces a

healthy glow in your body. It sets your mind to solving challenges and learning new things. And more than anything, there comes a sense of achievement and pride in your work and your ability to provide for yourself and your family - whether you are male or female - and to take up the place in your family that is yours to hold.

My experience - from Therapy to Ecotherapy

As I've come through this whole process myself, something peculiar has started to happen to me, almost involuntarily. Though I don't call myself a vegetarian, I have slowly stopped eating meat. It seemed pointless when I had an abundance of vegetables. As I've grown more and more of my own food, I've created more beautiful recipes, and found countless ways of preparing the same foods differently, combining them with other foods that are in season at the same time. This has made my diet more adventurous, more varied and absolutely brimming with nutrients. In the growing season my food bills are minimal, I'm physically fit and vital, and I'm still learning to grow veg through the winter which stimulates my mind.

As a result of stopping eating meat, I've started to feel a great compassion for the animals that are factory farmed and then mindlessly slaughtered every day for our consumption. As I've developed compassion for them, I've noticed that I'm automatically, without seeking it, feeling more connected to other people, our planet and the plight that we have been lead into, almost as if blindfolded. I've realised that my wellbeing is no good on its own. My wellbeing is tied up with that of other people's. As I feel more centred and strong because my body and mind and my immediate environment at least, is being nurtured and fed, I feel able to inspire and lead others to do the same. This is the role of the Ecotherapist - a therapy that seeks to link us back up to our natural human rhythms by bringing consciousness to our choices and compassion back to our communities.

The 3 cornerstones of wellbeing are the birthright of us all: wellness of mind, body and spirit. Reclaiming your wholeness has to be one of the most important challenges of the 21st Century. One step on the path to your wellbeing is taken by deciding to grow your own food. In fact, it's the most radical act of protest against corporate interference and exploitation that anyone could make. It bypasses the tax system, develops communities, empowers individuals, reduces medical bills and improves health on every level, and turns wasted lawn into valuable growing land.

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing Recovery Programme

Part of any mental health recovery programme, especially serious mental health issues, I believe, should go hand in hand with a whole person evaluation of the foods you are eating, and should seek to uncover and reveal to you your passions and your meaning beyond your pay check and your material possessions. Then you can be said to be in charge of your life, in alignment with your thoughts and feelings, eating an optimal diet, and reaching out to rebuild communities.

If you would like a 360° approach to your mental and emotional wellbeing, I would be happy to see you. In the meantime, consider growing something on your windowsill, balcony or back yard. You'll be amazed how good it makes you feel.