

Cure: A Journey into the Science of Mind Over Body

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A rigorous, skeptical, deeply reported look at the new science behind the mind's surprising ability to heal the body

Have you ever felt a surge of adrenaline after narrowly avoiding an accident? Salivated at the sight (or thought) of a sour lemon? Felt turned on just from hearing your partner's voice? If so, then you've experienced how dramatically the workings of your mind can affect your body.

Yet while we accept that stress or anxiety can damage our health, the idea of "healing thoughts" was long ago hijacked by New Age gurus and spiritual healers. Recently, however, serious scientists from a range of fields have been uncovering evidence that our thoughts, emotions and beliefs can ease pain, heal wounds, fend off infection and heart disease and even slow the progression of AIDS and some cancers.

In *Cure*, award-winning science writer Jo Marchant travels the world to meet the physicians, patients and researchers on the cutting edge of this new world of medicine. We learn how meditation protects against depression and dementia, how social connections increase life expectancy and how patients who feel cared for recover from surgery faster. We meet Iraq war veterans who are using a virtual arctic world to treat their burns and children whose ADHD is kept under control with half the normal dose of medication. We watch as a transplant patient uses the smell of lavender to calm his hostile immune system and an Olympic runner shaves vital seconds off his time through mind-power alone.

Drawing on the very latest research, Marchant explores the vast potential of the mind's ability to heal, lays out its limitations and explains how we can make use of the findings in our own lives. With clarity and compassion, *Cure* points the way towards a system of medicine that treats us not simply as bodies but as human beings.

Cure: A Journey into the Science of Mind Over Body Details


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From Reader Review Cure: A Journey into the Science of Mind Over Body for online ebook

Doris says

I appreciated this book for presenting a well-researched and balanced perspective on the importance of taking care of the mind- through maintaining a resilient mindset, social support, and compassion- in the maintenance of wellbeing.

In short, the mind & body comes together and works together in cultivating total health. Jo Marchant has presented this idea clearly with very compelling information.

Barbara (The Bibliophage) says

3 1/2 stars.

My reasons for wanting to read this book are likely atypical. I grew up in household that eschewed medical care and relied entirely on prayer for healing. Since leaving that environment in my 20s, I've wondered how intelligent people like my parents can feel that this belief or practice healed them. Reading Cure helped me find some answers, and perhaps the information it discusses will help you. Although I suspect your reasons for reading are different.

Author Jo Marchant reviews a wide variety of mind-body techniques, such as hypnotherapy, meditation, placebo and nocebo effects, virtual reality, bioelectronics, and religious pilgrimages. In each case she interviews experts and researchers who are trying to prove or disprove the way their chosen techniques impacts our bodies, our health, and our longevity.

Thankfully, she tells patient stories to bring the research-heavy text a human element. Marchant takes a potentially dry subject and infuses it with warmth and humor. She genuinely wants to understand the connection between mind and body. And the conclusions she draws help show how people living with chronic illness, pain, and even life-threatening conditions can benefit from mind-body or holistic approaches along with medical care.

She says in her acknowledgements, "I started this book fascinated by the science of how our minds might influence our bodies, but speaking to patients and trial volunteers helped me to realize that, beyond its intellectual importance, this subject has profound practical consequences for our health and how we all live our lives."

For the first time, I have some solid data-driven conclusions about why and how a group of people could believe in faith healing. This made the book well worth my time!

Melora says

Fascinating stuff! Marchant reminds us at every turn that more research is needed to confirm the effectiveness of many of the brain related health benefits she talks about, but still... so intriguing!

Marchant, a writer of popular science with respectable science-y credentials (PhD in genetics and medical microbiology, according to her website), presents this exploration of some of the current research and trials into ways that alternative medicine is trying to assist or replace conventional medicine in treating various health problems. Despite having read fairly recently some other books which described ways that the brain can alter perceptions of reality and physical systems in the body, I am generally skeptical about the power of things like hypnosis, meditation, and mindfulness to cure physical ailments (things like that seem more plausible to me as remedies for depression and stress). This is pretty much the attitude Marchant conveys at the book's opening also, which inclined me to feel comfortable in joining her on a tour of mind-focused health remedies.

She begins with a story of chatting with another mom at a park during an outing with her kids, and of her dismay at this intelligent woman's reliance on homeopathic remedies. Homeopathy, she tells us, is based on the idea that the most minimal traces of an "active substance" can effect a cure. "My new friend looked at me scornfully. "Nothing *measurable*," she replied, as if I were slightly dim for not grasping that its healing properties are due to an indefinable essence that's beyond scientists' reach. And in those two words, I felt that she summed up one of the major philosophical battles in medicine today."

The book has two main parts, divided roughly as Marchant says,

"In writing this book, I traveled around the world to investigate some of the pioneering research that's happening in this area right now. My aim was to track down those scientists swimming against mainstream opinion to study the effects of the mind on the body, and using that knowledge to help patients. What can the mind really do? How does it work, and why? And how can we use those latest findings in our own lives?

We start with perhaps the purest example of mind's influence on the body – the placebo effect – and the scientists looking at what really happens when we take fake pills. After that we explore some astonishing ways to trick the mind into fighting disease, from using hypnosis to slow gut contractions, to training the immune system to respond to taste and smell. And we learn how simply hearing the right words from your caregiver can determine whether or not you need surgery – and even how long you live.

The second half of the book moves beyond the immediate effects of thoughts and beliefs to look at how our state of mind shapes disease risk throughout our lives. We visit scientists using brain scanning and DNA analysis to test whether mind-body therapies from meditation to biofeedback really make us healthier. And we look at how our perception of the world around us influences our physical makeup, right down to the activity of our genes."

I found the first chapter, on the placebo effect, a fascinating introduction to the subject. Marchant describes some patients who were "cured" of their problems after being treated with fake medicines or surgeries. Rather than writing this off as merely wishful thinking on the part of the subjects, however, we learn that as a result of expectations, the patients' brains released chemicals in the same way they would have if treated by conventional means. We see this, for example, in the case of a Parkinson's patient who, brain scans demonstrate, gets the same improvement in the response of her motor neurons from her placebo that she does from the drug used in her treatment. "Benedetti (an Italian neuroscientist) has chased a belief right down to an individual cell – demonstrating that in Parkinson's patients, motor neurons fire more slowly after injection of a placebo, exactly as they do in response to a real drug."

Marchant continues through various mind-related treatments, always presenting her material in a lively, engaging, nontechnical way which the common reader should find easy to follow. I was reminded of Oliver Sacks, Sam Kean, Bill Bryson, and others who have the wonderful gift of presenting the work of specialists and cases of subjects they describe in such a clear and interesting way that the nonspecialist reader feels that highly technical subjects are really quite understandable after all. Details of nervous system and immune system function all fit together nicely, as presented, and I felt (very briefly) quite at home with things like the amygdala and the parasympathetic nervous system.

She notes where study sizes are too small for results to be meaningful, and also instances where other specialists in the field involved offer particular objections to an alternative treatment. She also comments on where evidence of the effectiveness of an alternative medical treatment is strong, but where the medical system fails to pay attention, often due in large part to opposition by the powerful interests of drug and medical technology companies.

Marchant concludes with a call for greater openness to treatments which harness the power of the mind to heal the body. Without discounting the amazing advances of modern drugs and surgical techniques, she advocates an approach which also recognizes the importance of human relationships and support.

"I am not advocating relying solely on the mind to heal us; but denying its role in medicine surely isn't the answer either. My hope, then, is that this book might help to overcome some of the prejudice against mind-body approaches, and to raise awareness that taking account of the mind in health is actually a *more* scientific and evidence-based approach than relying ever more heavily on physical interventions and drugs.

Perhaps one day this realization might help lead towards a system of medicine that combines the best of both worlds: one that uses life-saving drugs and technologies when they are needed, but also supports us to reduce our risk of disease and to manage our own symptoms when we are ill; and when there is no cure, cares for us and allows us to die with dignity. I hope that such a system of medicine would respect patients as equal participants whose beliefs, experiences, and preferences matter in their care; and that it would no longer stigmatize those with unexplained symptoms; and that it would recognize that the vast majority of health problems we face aren't physical or psychological – they are both."

I received this book from LibraryThing through their Early Reviewers program with the understanding that the content of my review would not affect my likelihood of receiving books through the program in the future. Many thanks to Crown Publishers and LibraryThing!

JDK1962 says

A lot of very interesting ideas about how the mind can be leveraged to deal with physical injuries or illness. The early material on the power of placebos--including honest placebos--is especially fascinating. A topic that comes up again and again is how damaging stress is to the physical body, and how growing up in stress can lead to a lifetime of chronic problems. It's a shame that this is an area in which research moves so slowly, due to the lack of funding (not too many drug companies want to sponsor research into a replacement product that doesn't come out of a bottle).

I especially appreciated the skeptical mindset that the author brings to the work. So-called alternative therapies should not be afraid of the scientific method: if things work, they work, and rigorously studying the how and the why is fascinating stuff. It's the snake-oil crowd that fears looking too closely.

Marianne says

“...in many situations, we have the capacity to influence our own health, by harnessing the power of the (conscious and unconscious) mind”

Cure: A Journey into the Science of Mind Over Body is the third book by British scientist, science journalist and editor, Jo Marchant. In it, she looks at many different, often “alternative” therapies and examines the claims they make in a rational and thoughtful manner. Many of the results are not just unexpected, but frequently quite astounding. If Text had offered a “be surprised or your money back” guarantee on this one, it would have been a safe bet for them.

Quoting actual trials and real patients, Marchant reveals some stunning facts about placebos, looks at how to train the immune system, fighting fatigue, hypnotherapy for a myriad of ailments, and pain therapy of quite a different nature (will some future pain relief trials be funded by gaming software developers?). Marchant looks at biofeedback, mindfulness, talk therapy, reiki and prayer, and reports amazing results in conditions as diverse as autism, IBS, spinal surgery, ageing, HIV, childbirth third degree burns, autoimmune disease, Parkinson’s and transplant rejection.

She speculates on a different approach to aged care: “What if reshaped care for the elderly not around managing their decline, but harvesting their abilities? We could use that ageing brain to give back to a society that’s in great need.....We don’t know what the message does to a person when they are told ageing is a time of deterioration. If we reframe it, and say ageing is a time to give back to others, it might actually help them age better”

She concludes that “...the vast majority of health problems we face aren’t physical or psychological – they are both”. She also tells us “At the heart of almost all the pathways I’ve learned about is one guiding principle: if we feel safe, cared for and in control – in a critical moment during injury or disease, or generally throughout our lives – we do better. We feel less pain, less fatigue, less sickness. Our immune system works with us instead of against us. Our bodies ease off on emergency defences and can focus on repair and growth”.

All the information that Marchant conveys may be readily available, but her talent, no doubt a product of her career in both science and journalism, is to compile and present it in an easily understandable form for readers without scientific expertise. Readers will find themselves looking at how they can apply these discoveries to their own lives and the lives of those they care about, not just for treatment of illness, but for ways to improve their quality of life now and in the future. An absolutely fascinating read.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original

author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

As a middle-aged guy with barely any health insurance and who is officially now pushing 50, I find myself more and more interested in lively NPR-style nonfiction guides to taking your health into your own hands; and that subject doesn't get much more dramatic than Jo Marchant's brand-new *Cure*, instantly controversial for its main message, that traditional science is starting to more and more prove something that the New Agers have been saying for decades, that your thoughts and attitudes can and do have a direct influence over such physiological, biological traits like your mood, pain levels, even the way your autoimmune system works. Although let's be clear -- the PhD holder Marchant says right in the introduction that New Age BS is still New Age BS, that it's simply impossible to do things like "wish away cancer" or trick a diabetic body into thinking it's getting insulin when it's not, and that the vast majority of new discoveries about this subject have mostly to do with things that the brain and the brain alone controls in our bodies, things like our heartrate and the amount of hormones that get released into our bloodstream, the amount of pain we perceive, even such things like how tired or alert we feel when fighting off the flu.

That said, however, this book is a real revelation, especially mind-blowing because of all of it being based on actual Western-type scientifically rigorous testing going on around the world, showing through lab-based control-tested experiments such things as that placebo pills can often work just as well as "real" medicine in certain cases (even when the patient knows they're taking a placebo), that you can train your body like a Pavlovian dog to get a full effect out of half-doses of medicine, that a 99-cent iPhone app can let regular schmoes regulate things like their heartbeat in a way traditionally reserved for yogis who practice for decades, and that such seemingly innocuous things like meditation and having friends who take care of you when sick have an actual, quantifiable effect on the biological processes that go into recovering from illness. As Marchant says throughout this eye-opening tome, you need to take all of these things with a grain of salt (and in fact this is a big running theme throughout, that all of these findings need much more official studies before we can start taking them for granted, which are nearly impossible to get funded because 95 percent of the medical experiments done in this country are sponsored by drug companies, who have no interest in funding experiments that prove that people need less drugs and not more); but certainly this book has given me a brand-new way to look at the subject of illness and just how much control I actually have over it, an illuminating read that is worth your time regardless of what kinds of conclusions you come to by the end. Strongly recommended to one and all.

Out of 10: **9.3**

Text Publishing says

If you think this book is going to be full of wellness guff then think again! *Cure* is a balanced and relatable feat of science journalism. Once we started reading we couldn't put it down.

Jo Marchant goes to the forefront of mind-body medical research and uncovers case studies that offer an impressive insight into the relationship between the mind and body. The anecdotes Marchant uses to reveal this relationship are fascinating. From virtual reality simulations that ease pain in burn patients, to placebo effects that re-engage autistic children, *Cure* cuts through the noise to provide a thoughtful, in-depth study.

You don't need a science major or a medical PhD to enjoy this book. Regardless of your background this is a topic that will interest everyone. As Publishers Weekly said in their STARRED review, *Cure* is: "A critically needed conceptual bridge for those who are frustrated with pseudoscientific explanations of alternative

therapies but intrigued by the mind's potential power to both cause and treat chronic, stress-related conditions."

Read Marchant's popular LinkedIn article 'How to Thrive on Stress':
www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-thrive-str...

Listen to an interview on NPR: www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/201...

Pequete says

Five big, fat, shiny stars. But this book deserves a good review, so I will take some more time and write it tomorrow. Right now, I am still in the process of mourning the fact that it came to the end so soon...

And here is my complete review.

Quite frankly, I am not sure I will be able to write something that makes justice to the quality of this book, which is among the best non-fiction I've read lately.

The book deals with a controversial issue, the influence of human mind over physical condition, and describes the cutting-edge research currently ongoing in this area. I like the skepticism of the author, who has a scientific background herself (a BSc in genetics and a PhD in microbiology), having later become a science writer. I think some of the main reasons why I liked this book so much were the fact that the theme is so interesting and yet controversial, and the research being done in new, still ongoing. I liked to have access to information contained in the book (some of it left me dumbfounded) and I really liked the way it is presented, in the form of case studies, narrated as patient's stories, paired with interviews with scientists and doctors, citations from scientific papers and the author's own experience. In addition, she makes a point of always presenting the opposing points of view and the arguments for and against the idea, hypothesis, or experiment in question. And yet, this thought-provoking book, packed with so much information and written with scientific accurateness, reads just like a novel...

I was going to finish by saying that I recommend this book to everyone with an interest in science in general and in health in particular, but in fact I think this is a book that I would recommend to everyone that likes to read non-fiction. Really, just go get it and read it!

Joy D says

Non-fiction in which Jo Marchant takes a scientific approach to recounting the latest research on the mind-body connection. She undertook this effort to find out the latest on what the mind can and cannot do to assist in achievement of overall better health and quality of life. Topics include the placebo effect, mindfulness meditation, the immune system, virtual reality, pain management, social connection, kindness in caregiving, stress, aging, depression, hypnosis, electrical impulses, and much more.

A self-professed skeptic and advocate for the scientific method, she systematically explores each topic and examines results of recent research. She brings a human component to these findings by providing case studies of people currently going through treatment. For the most part, these are people she has met, and she tells their stories in an empathetic way. The scientific jargon is kept to a minimum, and the concepts are explained in a straightforward manner. She is careful to cite areas where more research is needed, and documents dissenting opinions. Unfortunately, the pharmaceutical companies, which sponsor a vast amount of current research, are not motivated to spend money to support experiments that may reduce the need for

their products.

In the author's words:

"I am not advocating relying solely on the mind to heal us; but denying its role in medicine surely isn't the answer either. My hope, then, is that this book might help to overcome some of the prejudice against mind-body approaches, and to raise awareness that taking account of the mind in health is actually a more scientific and evidence-based approach than relying ever *more* heavily on physical interventions and drugs."

Recommended to those interested in health and brain-related science. Those with current health issues may discover some helpful coping strategies.

Paul says

The field of alternative medicine is plagued with claims that can be as misleading as they are lethal. In Simon Singh's book, *Trick or Treatment*, he covers a number of the alternative medicines with a solid scientific rebuttal of those that fail to live up to expectations. But is there something going on that science is beginning to uncover? In this book Marchant considers the latest scientific research into the effect that our minds can have over our bodies, with solid evidence of the effects of positive thoughts and mindsets.

In the book she considers some fairly fundamental questions; the way our minds work, the almost magical effect of placebo, the management of pain and how the act of caring for someone can be transformative. There are chapters on training your immune system and the power of friendships. All of these things, when used in conjunction with a sympathetic doctor and the appropriate course of drugs can have an amazing effect compared to just regular treatments. Alternative medicine has lots of flaws, but what it does do well is to spend time with and care about the patient, something that conventional appointments with their rushed 10 minute slots and almost guaranteed prescription at the end of the consultation seems to have now lost. Throughout the book she meets with the scientists, doctors and patients who are at the leading edge of this research, bringing us their perspectives and trying to articulate why they think that it is working.

When reading this it did bring to mind Pratchett's headology, the way that people see themselves and the world around them. But this is about real lives and people who are being treated with regular medicines, but who are fortunate to have doctors who are considering the whole individual at the same time. Marchant writes this with sparkling clarity and authority, and thankfully rarely dips into obscure medical jargon. It made for very interesting reading too, with some well written examples of those that have been healed or had their lives return to something closer to normal. Based on the research here, we need to consider both mind and body treatments not just a blind acceptance of the newest drugs. All very interesting stuff and much food for thought.

Ho?i B?ng says

Having pretty much knowledge about alternative treatments and the impact of placebo effects, it was quite easy for me to start and appreciate this book.

It's vital to know and understand the mind-body relationship and how the mind can shape people's physical condition (was proved by notorious scientific evidences and experiments). From that, alternative treatments

can pass through all the stigmas to come close to the public health setting, provide other ways of healing not only for mental problem but also for physical illness. This is a good beginning to rethink about illness and healing, as well as to have some sense of what contributes to a better health of human. Highly recommend to anyone who in medical field or simply care about health and healing.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Most books about the mind-body connection seem to be wildly leaning one way or the other: it's nonsense or it's gospel. *Cure* by Jo Marchant is different. Marchant cautiously approaches each claim in a deeply scientific way, remaining both open and skeptical to results.

I loved this read and I highly recommend it. It's a readable book, with both stories and science, to investigate all the many ways mind and body are connected. If you have interest in this topic, without permanently aligning yourself to one end of the spectrum or the other, I think you will find this book to be fascinating.

Rebecca Foster says

(Nearly 4.5) In this absorbing and well-written work of popular science, Marchant, a journalist with a PhD in genetics and medical microbiology, investigates instances where the mind seems to contribute to medical improvement: the use of placebos in transplant recipients, hypnosis for IBS patients, virtual reality to help burn victims manage pain, and the remarkable differences that social connection, a sense of purpose, meditation and empathic conversation all make. On the other hand, she shows how stress and trauma in early life can set (usually poor) people up for ill health in later years. She also travels everywhere from Boston to Lourdes to meet patients and medical practitioners, and even occasionally proffers herself as a guinea pig.

A relentless scientist, Marchant is skeptical of any claims for which there is no hard evidence, so when she acknowledges that there's something to these unusual treatments, you know you can believe her. As Jeremy Howick of the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, Oxford puts it, "I think it's more important to know *that* something works, than *how* it works." I finished the book feeling intrigued and hopeful about what this might all mean for the future of medicine. The problem, though, is that most medical trials are funded by big pharmaceutical companies, which won't be supportive of non-traditional methods or holistic approaches.

(Compare with *It's All in Your Head: Stories from the Frontline of Psychosomatic Illness* by Suzanne O'Sullivan - reviewed alongside this book on my blog, Bookish Beck.)

Rebecka says

The content of this book is very, very interesting, but both the author and the audio book narrator ruin the book, the author by ridiculous descriptions of the people she uses to make a point (who all have "delicate features", "beautiful brown eyes" etc. -- WHO CARES!?) and the audio book narrator by imitating the accent or dialect of EVERY SINGLE PERSON WITH A DIRECT LINE. As a result I can't help hating the author for having so many direct lines in her book as well.

What happened to scientific books? Why are they all so full of fluff? Because they could really have been

summed up in a 25 page article? Probably.

Still, a very interesting read.

Cait • A Page with a View says

This is just approached very, very strangely.

The book description says *"the idea of 'healing thoughts' was long ago hijacked by New Age gurus and spiritual healers."*

The author totally discounts so many people in an attempt to gain credibility and be taken seriously... but then still proceeds to use her book to "prove" exactly what those people and *so* many cultures have been saying for centuries.

So most of this book is absolutely nothing new. It's just presented in a way that might make the concept of mind over body appeal to people who need a lot of new scientific studies to back up any idea before they consider it on their own.

The information here IS really important and could help a lot of people. But it just seems really odd to essentially mock, stereotype, and discount New Age thought, spiritual healers, and many associated cultures and world religions by extent... and then present their ideas as now legitimate once seen through your lens.
