

Unraveling the Mind-Body Connection: Navigating Chronic Illness and Psychological Distress

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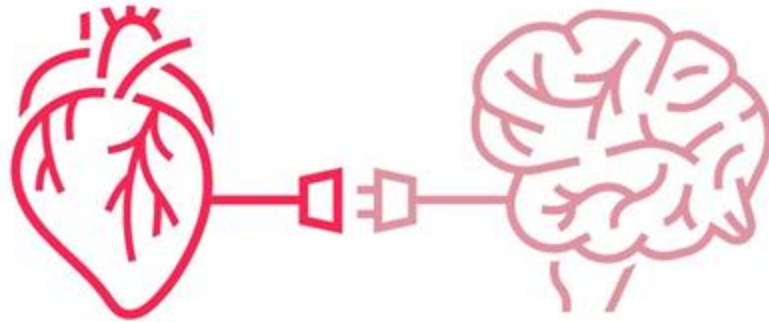
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Objectives:

- Define the mind body connection and its evolution in medicine.
- Review the connection between mental health disorders and chronic medical illness
- Explore the link with inflammation, stress response, and depression.
- Discuss psychological factors that affect pain

Integration vs. Separation

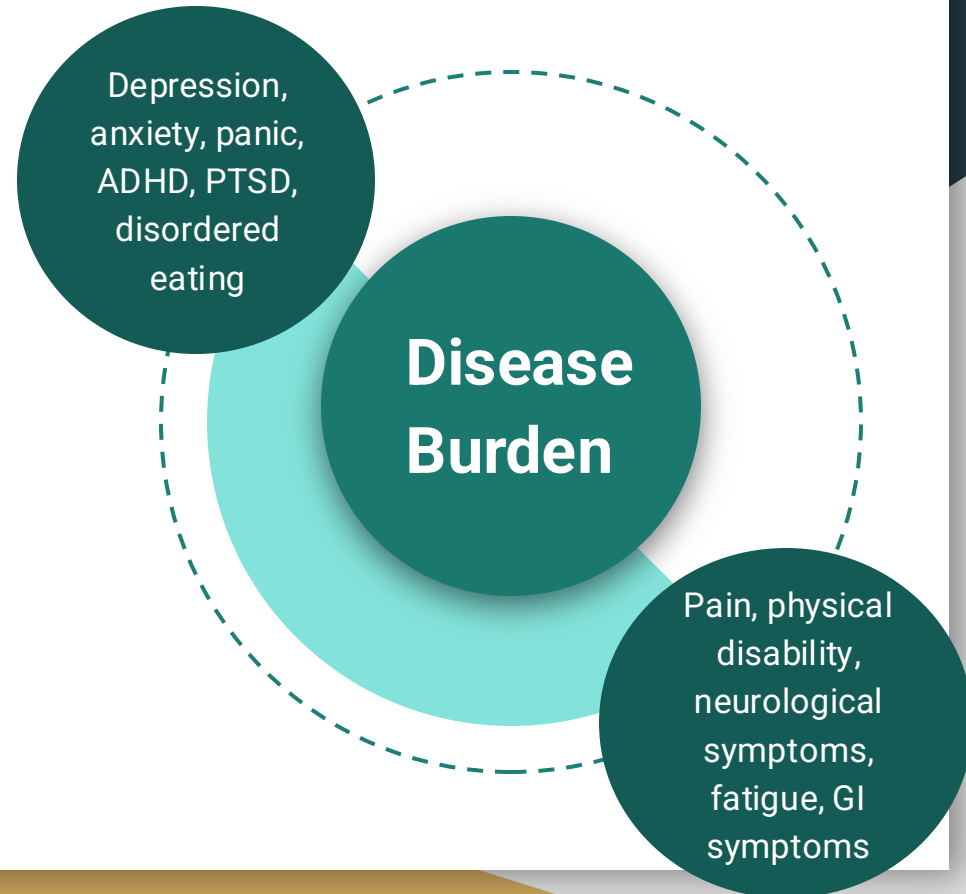
Mental health has traditionally and historically in medicine been treated as a separate entity from the rest of medicine, but this belief no longer holds true.



Studies show that integration can lead to meaningful improvement in health outcomes.

The Mind-Body Connection in Chronic Illness

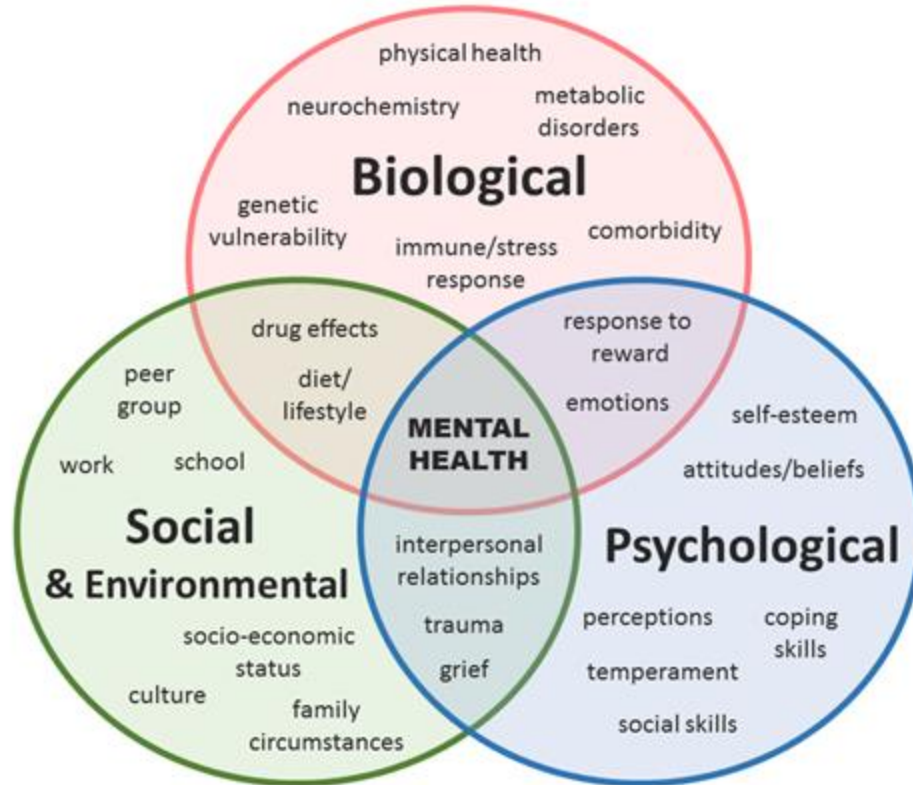
- Mental and physical health are deeply intertwined.
- People with chronic illnesses are at increased risk of mood disorders including depression and anxiety.
- This relationship is “bidirectional”- one can worsen the other.



Medication

Old view:

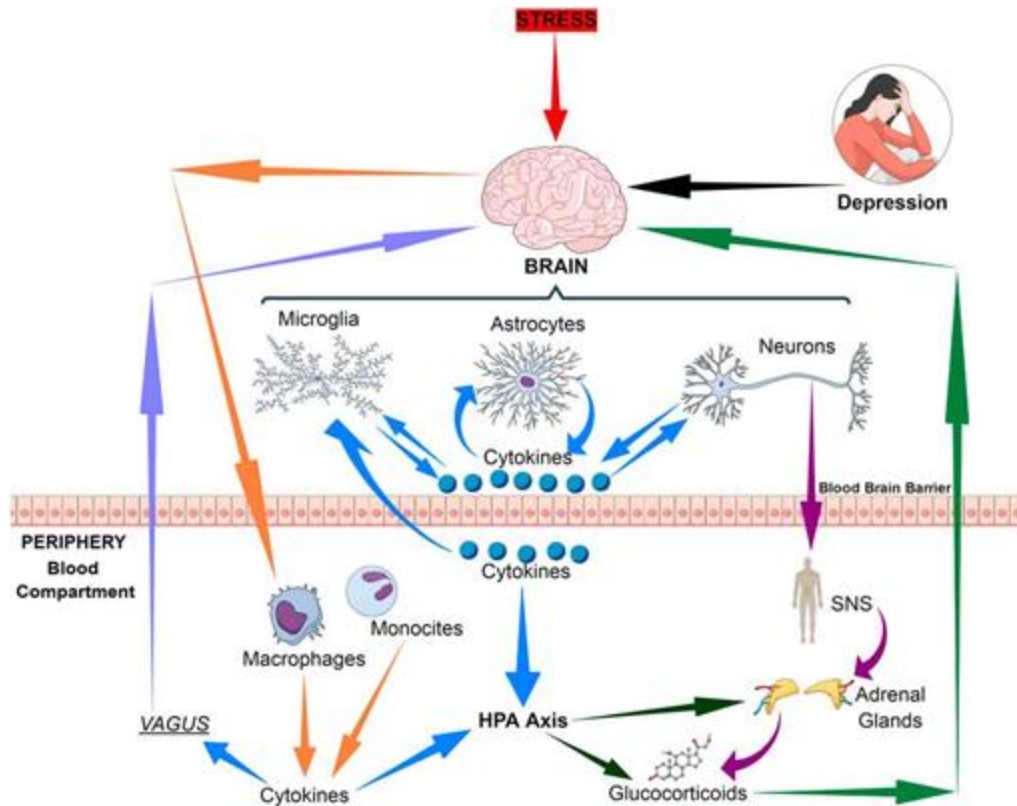
“A chemical imbalance”



**Social support,
External factors**

Therapy

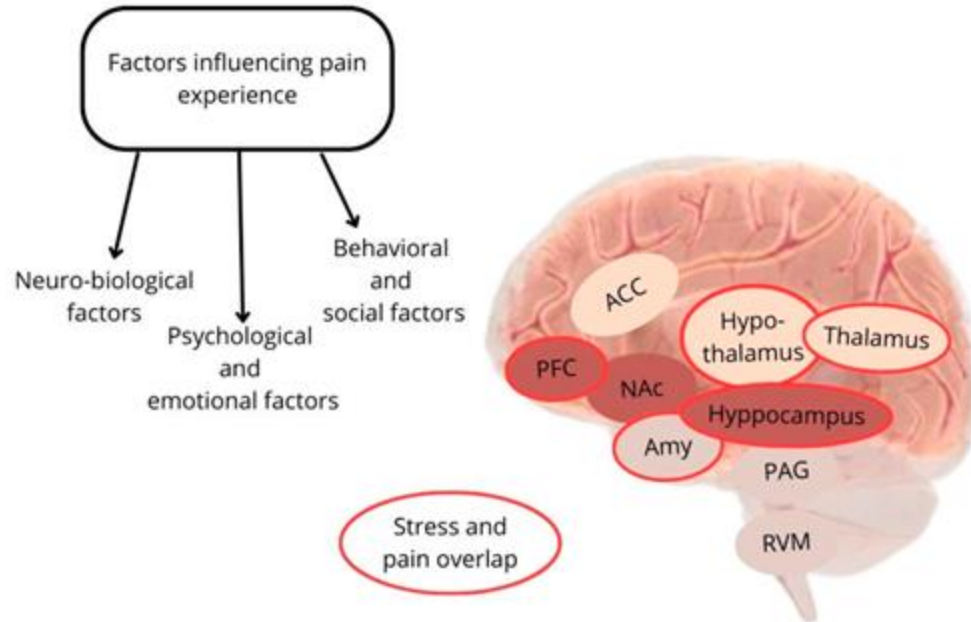
Inflammation, Stress, and Depression



Leonard et al. 2018

Psychological Factors and Pain

- Bidirectional relationship
- Disability from pain is associated with higher risk of developing depression
- Nearly half of all chronic pain sufferers also suffer from depression



Reframing How We Understand “Somatic Symptom and Related Disorders”

- **Psychological response** to distressing or disruptive physical symptoms, regardless of whether those symptoms are medically explained or unexplained
- In one study, 53% of patients with EDS were also diagnosed with a functional neurological disorder (Margolesky et al. 2022).
- Causal relationship between somatic symptom disorders and EDS is still unclear, more research needed (Chen et al. 2021).



Practical Strategies for Patients and Providers

- Regular mental health screenings for depression and anxiety.
- Engage sooner with mental health professionals.
- Consider psychiatric medication and psychotherapy as two important aspects of a holistic treatment approach.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration among medical, psychological, and rehabilitation professionals is essential.
- Lifestyle modifications (e.g., sleep hygiene, physical activity, social support) are vital.

Questions?

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