What if the symptoms of chronic illness were not foes to be fought or suppressed but instead served as our allies, telling us about the actions and directions we could take to heal? This radical shift in perspective comes from the burgeoning field of mind-body medicine.

An innovative treatment approach, Mickel therapy (MT) is making a difference to the lives of people with conditions that have defied conventional medicine, such as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), fibromyalgia (FM), and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Until recently it’s been a bleak picture for people living with these conditions, poorly understood by many and disputed by others. So sensitive to noise, light, and chemicals, sufferers need to cocoon themselves away from the rest of the world, often becoming lonely, isolated, and depressed.

**Body intelligence**
Although a talking therapy, MT differs from conventional psychotherapy. Medications, supplements, and dietary changes are not part of the approach, which was developed in 2001 in the UK by Dr. David Mickel. A clinical study, sponsored by Mickel and his associates, is underway (see mickeltherapy.com).

This new therapy focuses on what Mickel believes to be the underlying causes of these illnesses. Key to this approach has been the research of neuroscientist Dr. Candace Pert, author of the groundbreaking book *The Molecules of Emotion* (Simon & Schuster, 1999). Dr. Pert’s research shows that a part of the limbic brain known as the hypothalamus, understood to be overactive in people with CFS, FM, and IBS, produces chemicals known as neuropeptides. We experience these chemicals on a bodily level as feelings; they are the molecules of emotion. Their purpose is to message us about the body’s perception of our needs. Not responding to them at this level requires the body to increase the volume of its messenger to a physical symptom.
Learning to listen
Clients undergoing Mickel therapy are initially encouraged to notice when their symptoms change and connect this with what is happening at that time. They look for the emotion the body is producing underneath the symptoms, decipher its meaning, and take whatever action is necessary. Many clients report that, once emotions are cleared like this on a consistent basis, symptoms either significantly lessen or completely clear. One such patient is Tim, a long-term sufferer of CFS. His story provides a clear example of the link between emotions and symptoms.

"I was having supper with my family. My mother commented on something I had done a couple of years before. Soon after I noticed my symptoms—fatigue, brain fog, and headache—getting much worse. I knew the picture so well; within a few minutes I would have to go lie down and feel lousy for hours, even days after. This time I didn’t want to have to pay that price. I removed myself, checked inside to see what I was really feeling underneath the symptoms, and found that I was angry—one of the taboo emotions in my family.

"After a few moments, I returned to the table and quietly said what I needed to. Over the next couple of minutes my symptoms completely left. That was the moment I got it; when I held my feelings inside, especially anger and frustration, my body messaged me with symptoms.

"It didn’t mean I never got any again. That would have been much too easy! However, from that moment I knew that my healing lay in my own hands.”

Rather than managing symptoms, clients are encouraged to start attending to the meaning contained within them. Paradoxically, after a lifetime of looking for the answer outside of ourselves, we discover that the diamond has, in fact, always been in our own pocket.

David Greenshields, MA, RSW, works with people with chronic illnesses throughout North America and beyond. He lived with CFS for many years. For further information please visit davidgreenshields.com.

Happy Tummy, Happy Holidays!

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