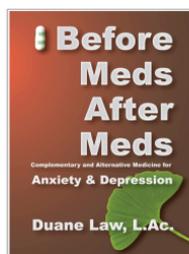


# 1. Self-Healing

## *Welcome to the Work*

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Excerpted from the forthcoming book. [More.](#)

If we want to avoid unnecessary medication or when meds stop working, it's crucial that we realize just how profoundly the healing game changes when we cut back our reliance on conventional approaches.



*Healing means confronting our habits. Getting out of our ruts. Healing is the most interesting and demanding thing most of us will ever do.*

Healing is not for wimps. Real healing, especially on an emotional level, sooner or later requires unflinching self-examination. Therapy definitely helps.

Many of the tools we can use to get more out of life and therapy are naturopathic in nature and do not lend themselves to conventional research approaches. That means the conventional evidence base is weak. Don't expect most MDs to understand or be supportive, although there are a precious few who do (many from outside the US.)

Healing also generally requires that we recognize that commonly accepted habits and attitudes often contribute to chronic disease. That's why investigation, change and growth are all essential parts of the healing process. Seen this way, disease becomes a teacher ... at times a very demanding teacher forcing us to come to terms with sides of ourselves we'd rather ignore or let run on autopilot.

When we're young many of us treat our bodies and minds as indestructible. As we age we learn better, but by that time we're often deeply invested in dietary habits, work habits, relationship patterns that may not be healthy for us. This causes stress. That stress in turn ages us and undermines good mental health.

These habits can be a bit like running a car with tires out of alignment. Sure, we can keep driving the car. We may feel some instability on the road. Mileage suffers. A wise driver aligns and rotates the tires from time to time, knowing that parts of misaligned tires wear out faster than the rest of the tire. The shoulders start showing fabric while there's still plenty of perfectly good tread left.

The money for the tire shop is in replacing the tire. Few remind their customers to come in for regular rotations.

Most of us wait until we've got thread showing before we start to take self-care (or any other medical care) seriously. It's not really our fault; most of the money in medicine comes from replacing the tires ... or in fixing their worn out shoulders once the wear can't be ignored. Medical knowledge and practice reflects this.

And for good reason. Doctors long ago noticed that most patients preferred to be taken care of rather than participate actively in their care. Epidemic non-compliance with drug regimes and other instructions has soured most of them on the idea of trying to coach their patients in self-care. This general lack of patient compliance/physician interest reflects itself in medical education and practice, in medical research, and even in the understanding medical science has about how the body itself works. I'd suggest that it's at the root of the crisis in medicine facing the US today, with billions of dollars in research and care chasing diminishing returns in terms of the population's health metrics. In the US, these metrics are declining.

We've been taught to think that the body is such an impossibly complicated thing that we need an advanced degree in order to do anything to help heal it.

Still, many of us realize in the part of us that thinks without words that that's not true.

The best indicator of truth in conventional medical research is an approach called the randomized, controlled trial—the double-blinded trial. These experiments are expensive. In a day when pharmaceutical corporations fund so much research this allows corporate agendas to tilt the science playing field and destroy the consensus required for truth to emerge. Witness the debate in the US over climate change (though the technical issues and therefore the strategies there are different than the ones resorted to in the medical arena.)

Nutrients and herbs cannot be patented. This removes the potential for corporations to make the kinds of profits on these substances required to justify the huge expense of undertaking these kinds of tests. From the standpoint of the pharmaceutical industry, the biggest funder of medical research, natural forms of medicine are the competition. The goal is to defeat them. The primacy of the RCT trial—its status as the “gold standard” of research, its assumed lack of bias—makes this easy.

Lifestyle changes, comprehensive and individually-tailored herb or nutritional interventions—heck, surgery!—none of these kinds of interventions can be truly randomized and adequately double-blinded on humans. Best-practice, effective healing means adjusting the mix and strengths of interventions according to each individual patient’s responses. But RCT trials get very,

very large and very, very expensive when they try to test more than one variable at the same time, let alone vary the doses of those variables in any individualized way.

RCT trials assume the primacy of western diagnostic categories, a practice guaranteed to throw false negative results when applied to medical systems with their own ways of understanding and categorizing disease. It's extremely easy to use *incorrect* dosages, poor quality herbs, nutrients that aren't prepared in the right forms or supplied with essential cofactors, too-brief a trial or one-size-fits-all regimes that don't work for more than a few.

Consider this: the human body is a complex phenomenon based on multiple inputs. Nutrition studies that evaluate the effects of a single or only a few nutrients on a test population are a little like a guy who comes out of his house in the morning to find all the wheels stolen and missing from his car. If he goes about trying to determine which wheels he needs to replace to get back on the road by only installing only one or two at a time, testing, then removing those before checking the others, it's going to be awhile before he gets his answer.

Science-based medicine as it's been practiced since the mid-20th century has produced miracles. But just as powerful antibiotics kill off all but the most resistant microbes, so too the power of conventional, technology-based medicine has made many ancient medical scourges ancient history, leaving only the



diseases that don't respond to its approach. We call these diseases chronic. And since we've come to think of the body as something so complex that only professionals with advanced degrees can heal it, we sometimes give up.

But this may not be the only reality. Could it be instead be the artifact of a medical worldview compelled by economics, intellectual inertia, patient disinterest and noncompliance to rely on novel substances and highly technical interventions while getting in the habit of dismissing legacy medicines as unproven and the everyday observations of ordinary people as anecdotal and easily ignored?

If one is not trained in medicine but has a stubborn problem to solve and wants to explore the world that exists beyond conventional approaches ... the learned helplessness that this overprofessionalism of medicine enables has to change.

Right now.

Fortunately, many of the healing tools we can use ourselves are found naturally in the body and so are less toxic than pharmaceuticals can be. That means we have a bit more slack as we set about putting them to work. It doesn't mean we can be careless, though (especially if we're medicated. In that case we need to be very, very careful—and get professional help.)

If we're not ready to shoulder the responsibility of learning a bit about how our bodies work, how common

modern habits set the stage for anxiety, depression and other psychopathologies ... and most importantly, if we're not ready to confront our habits, grow and change ... please put this back on the shelf or return it; no need to waste our time and your money.

If, on the other hand, we're good and ready to embark on an empowering journey of self-discovery, change and healing, let's rock.