

ON THE BLOG

New year, new me? - by Paula Harrison-Ross RMN Bsc(Hon)



“New year, new me” - that seems to be the motto that has been everywhere since the new year. Everything can be changed if I do the couch to 5k, and if you join a gym, your life will miraculously change. If you switch to organic, your low mood will drift away; if you stop eating red meat, your life/marriage/children will be wonderful..... Well no. All the above can help you move forward, but nothing will be a miracle one-stop cure for all that is going on in your life or your body.

Our brains are outstanding brilliant organs, the engine that drives our bodies, but just fixing the oil filter for the engine isn't going to change the wheel bearings screaming at you. mental health issues can affect our physical health. For instance, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) increases our risk of diabetes, increased blood pressure problems, or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). These are only a few examples of what can happen within our body physically when in mental distress. If the engine isn't working to its full potential, the car isn't going to go anywhere.

If we are struggling with anxiety or low mood, our appetite will often be reduced; we won't want to eat, and we won't want to get off the sofa and walk the dog, even if we know it might help. Trauma and isolation can also have real-time effects on our physical body. This is a subject that fascinates me as a mental health professional. The artificial separation between physical and mental health is a modern divide. An aspect I don't understand fully. How can one not affect the other?

If this is a subject that interests you, I would recommend reading the following article:
<https://www.besselvanderkolk.com/resources/the-body-keeps-the-score>

Although not a new book, I found Bessel van der Kolk's "The Body Keeps The Score—BRAIN, MIND, AND BODY IN THE HEALING OF TRAUMA" to be an interesting, fascinating, and informative read. Understanding how experiences can have an effect on the hormone levels within our systems, which in turn affects our body's health, yep, it did feel like a “well duh” moment to me, but this is a subject many medical professionals just don't acknowledge or consider when assessing someone's health needs. It does need a broader conversation. Maybe this should be our New Year's resolution, taking note of our bodies. Many pharmacies now have the ability to check blood pressure. A multivitamin can be purchased at the supermarket, taking the stairs rather than the lift at work, whatever it might be, taking steps to learn to listen to our bodies and understand their language. Those aches and pains after a tough day, the upset stomach after that meeting with HR, and the lack of appetite whilst at work could be your body attempting to converse with you.

Stop ignoring it and take some time to listen.