

## Review Article

# Food and Thought: Happy Wedding or Eternal Enemies?

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### ABSTRACT

The latest scientific researches have emphasized that the entire body thinks, because every single cell hears, and feels emotion. There is a sort of body and mind functional identity, which is different in each person, because each person is a unique universe, and the body is the place where mind and body meet in a unique and unrepeatable alchemy. Consequently it is clear that if the two most important activities for the life of individuals, from the sunrise of the life up to the sunset of existence, are eating and thinking, it is necessary to study the thought activity together with the food behavior. Many people have a balanced relationship with food and mastication; for others, as in the case of anorexic and bulimic ones, this bond is pathological, and describes a complex and debilitating life-food relationship. As health researchers, we must help to explain

how the processes related to these two activities affect each other, and, consequently, we have to promote health-oriented behaviors in order to improve the physical and psychological wellbeing, therefore promoting the creation of a healthy relationship between thoughts and feeding. On the contrary, without this kind of awareness, toxic thoughts, not properly managed, could contribute to pollute both the mind and the body, creating an inflammatory dysfunctional physiological situation, which would lead, among the possible consequences, to lower the level guard of the immune system and open the door to diseases, first of all the oncological ones.

**MeSh Headings/ Key words:** Food; Cancer; Oncological; Body and mind

### A bond that last a lifetime

Nourishing and thinking are two fundamental activities of each individual, from the first moment of the life up to the last one. These two important activities, do not only keep one alive, but they determine the quality of life and its duration as well.

The latest scientific researches have emphasized that the entire body thinks, because every single cell hears, and feels emotion. There is a sort of body and mind functional identity, which is different in each person, because each person is a unique universe, and the body is the place where mind and body meet in a unique and unrepeatable alchemy. So, if it is true that only in the body the secret of its potential for development and transformation is well hidden, it is also true that this secret is unique for each of us [1].

According to Psiconeuroendocrinoimmunology (PNEI), that studies the relationship between the fluctuations of hormones and human behavior, it seems demonstrated that the psyche acts on the body [2].

Consequently it is clear that if the two most important activities for the life of individuals, from the sunrise of the life up to the sunset of existence, are eating and thinking, it is necessary to study the thought activity together with the food behaviour, as they are not two distinct moments but strongly connected each other.

This means that, as health researchers, we must help to explain how the processes related to these two activities affect each other, and, consequently, we have to promote health-oriented

behaviors in order to improve the physical and psychological wellbeing, which means therefore promoting the creation of a healthy relationship between thoughts and feeding. On the contrary, without this kind of awareness, toxic thoughts, not properly managed, could contribute to pollute both the mind and the body, creating an inflammatory dysfunctional physiological situation, which would lead, among the possible consequences, to lower the level guard of the immune system and open the door to diseases, first of all the oncological ones [3]. Already in 1877, Sir James Paget in his study on Surgical Pathology wrote a sentence that it is still possible to agree with: "There are cases in which deep anxiety, hopelessness, disappointment, are so promptly followed by growth and an increase in cancer, that we can hardly doubt that mental depression is an additional burden together with other influences which affect the growth of the cancerous constitution [4]".

If the anxiety, the fear, the worry, the demoralization, and anger are normal responses to the disease, when these feelings become more intense, more continuous and persevering, it is important to ask for specialist psychological help without shame of vulnerability, or fear, of being considered abnormal or mentally ill. This fundamental point - the evaluation of the emotional response of the sick people and their families - has been engaged from the psycho-oncology as a duty of medicine, since the psychological "pain", like physical pain, is a vital parameter to be regularly monitored during the course of the disease and the follow-up [3]. We have no definitive data to assert that stress is a cause of cancer, but we can affirm that stress, dejection, depression and states of deep and prolonged

psychological distress, are a pathogenetic cofactor. It is probable that the whole of neuroendocrine and immune changes that occur in an organism in a state of deep depression may facilitate the discovery of predispositions to somatic diseases. This might be applied for all diseases: gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, infectious, dermatological, etc.

On the other hand, we could consider that the cancer in itself may secrete substances (cytokines, growth factors, hormones, etc.) which, in turn, can act on the central nervous system inducing depressive symptoms, this causing a dysfunctional loop that continues to "feed" the internal inflammation favorable to the growth and progression of cancer.

In all the cases mentioned above, it is extremely important to take care of the food style, as it contributes to a healthy life style. Various types of psychological and psychotherapeutic intervention and social support seem to have a positive impact on both the quality of life, and on tumor progression and global survival [5-9], probably through influences on the neuro-endocrine-immune system [3,8]. Doubtless, this system is made stronger by a healthy food style. If the right mind and body synergies are created, it is possible to restore energy and wellness [1,10].

On the side of nourishing, we can consider how, in human history, food intake has not only been related to survival exigences, but it has been inscribed within cultural, social, economic, relational and anthropological facts. Vegetarians, carnivores, vegans, omnivores: humans are divided in relation to the prevailing consumption of a particular food rather than another one, and to the variety and type of the eaten food; thus it is necessary to take into consideration not only the "diet" but also different ways of interpreting the world and relationships.

Many people have a balanced relationship with food and mastication; for others, as in the case of anorexic and bulimic ones, this bond is pathological, and describes a complex and debilitating life-food relationship. This relationship, sometimes, takes an intermediate place between normality and pathology. This is the case of those people who adopt nutritional styles that psychology literature describes as "conflictual" and "sucking style". The "sucking style" group includes people who greedily eat, who look food in a wheezy and neurotic way, and with difficulties in chewing properly; the "conflictual" group includes ipercontrollate people, who often suffer from nausea, vomiting, who tend to lack appetite, chewing for long time and swallow with difficulty [11].

### **Fight depression and combat cancer**

As a natural consequence of approaching the individual in its uniqueness and complexity, because "each person is a unique universe and the body is the place where mind and body meet in a unique and unrepeatably alchemy" [10], today a larger number of schools of thought in psychology, are seeking to integrate and to consider all the dimensions of the human psyche, the body and the mind, this is why some therapists

choose to give a transversal approach to clinical practice and research in considering psychics problems. One of the most innovative sectors seeks, for example, to integrate the best modern techniques of psychology with the philosophies and ancient medicines.

The Body and Mind Project for example, is a research project with the aim of involving mind and body in order to improve physical and psychological health using and harmonizing the principles of the philosophy of the ancient Eastern medicine such as shiatsu, with methods of strategic psychotherapy such as clinical interview, guided fantasies, and hypnosis.

Brief strategic psychotherapy, a type of therapy that comes from California (Palo Alto), and that is now widespread all over the western world, is a type of therapy that, as the name in itself suggests, prescribes specific behavioral strategies to get out of a disease in a short time. It has nothing to do then with the analysis, or psychoanalysis. Brief strategic psychotherapy does not investigate on the "why", but "how" to help the person to leave the depressive state. One of the positive aspects of the brief strategic therapy is that it doesn't create dependence on the therapist, as it could happen in the long treatments, such as for example the psychoanalysis, but it is based on relationship of trust and support [12,13]. One of the instruments used within the strategic psychotherapy is the hypnosis, which is definitely a valuable contribution against depression combined with psychotherapy.

The Body and Mind 'B & M' research project, "fight depression and combat cancer" moves from these assumptions. The project, developed by the Writer in cooperation with a team of expert in different areas, started in 2015 and continued in 2016 with the aim to focus the attention on the problem of depression related to physical disease states, in particular oncological disorders. People are welcome not as simple containers which merely record external incitements, on the contrary, they are able to evaluate and weigh what happens around them. In the first version of B & M project (January-June 2015) according with the type of treated disease, specific body stimulation such as shiatsu have been associated with psychological techniques, guided fantasies and regressive hypnosis techniques. These mental techniques have been used in order to focus the thought on specific inner images appropriate to the situation of the treated patient and to generate consequently positive emotions connected.

After the interesting and promising results, it has been decided to continue in this specific research field that observes the correlation between oncological disease and depressive state. In the 2016 edition "fight depression and combat cancer", the project involved a sample of 50 people, 20 males and 30 females aged between 25 and 70, patients who had previously requested a psychological support for a depressive situation, enabled in part by the fact of facing an oncological disease. Unlike the first version of the project in which the aim was the achievement of an improved state of general psychological well-being, in this

case the goal was represented by the coping of a depressive state already 'in place, through the improvement of the general physical condition, compatibly with the level of disease progression. On the occasion of one of the talks in the study, patients were given short questionnaires with Likert scale of three steps, the same of the first version of the research project, the purpose of filling in the questionnaire, was to allow those involved in the research, to test their sense of psychophysical adequacy perceived at the beginning, in particular on 3 different areas: perception of their physical appearance and its current impact on quality of life; perception of their psychological aspect and its current impact on the quality of life; perception of a specific difficulty, freely identified by the person. The study on the results of this research is still in progress and will be published soon.

### Conclusion

In the research project B & M it has been paid attention to the patient rather than the disease. Moreover, as we have already exposed in the course of this discussion, it is the opinion now shared by many researchers with a holistic perspective that the disease is often the "top", the most obvious expression of a global energy imbalance, the less blatant but similarly identified through medical diagnostics such as Body and Mind research has experienced during the two years of research. The energy imbalance is often due also to an incorrect diet. On this side we have considered how, food intake has not only to be related to survival exigences, but it is integral part of cultural, social, economic, relational and anthropological facts. The style food chosen is strictly connected with different ways of interpreting the world and relationships. Moreover, it is not only a matter of style, as an imbalanced relationship with food could lead to an inflammatory dysfunctional physiological situation, one of the possible causes of oncological disease. This is the reason why the professionals of human behavior in food consumption, and the chemical and science processing experts, have the duty not to limit themselves to a single refusal against the use of certain foods, but framing the phenomenon in a wider perspective and, as experts of human health, to propose alternatives with the aim to treat the person in its complexity and entirety.

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