

Language and Health: Exploring Your Choices

Creating powerful language that supports your life and health

When it comes to the connection between language and health, people sometimes stretch to see how things work. Yet in a world where energy rules, there's no question that what you say ... the words that circle around both inside and outside of your own mind ... plays an enormous role in creating your state of health. For example, there are those seemingly insignificant day-to-day choices.

Did you ever talk yourself out of picking the salad and into a burger and fries? Or perhaps it went the other way around. Either way, language influenced your health. Or maybe it was something else:

- Stairs or the elevator?
- Call mom or watch TV?
- Go to the emergency room or try and deal with that excruciating pain in your abdomen a little longer?

Insignificant choices, perhaps. Yet any one, depending on the circumstances under which it is made, could make a significant change in your state of health. Here's the interesting thing. Except for the last, none of the choices we just presented has a single "right" answer with immediate clear consequences. It's about the habitual nature of the choice. The "why" you did it. The context ... both created and revealed by your language.

Stairs or the elevator? You probably expect "stairs" would be the healthier choice, but not necessarily. What if you just sprained your ankle? If you feel compelled to take the stairs even with a sprained ankle, then you'll irritate that ankle even more. Crazy? There are people who would take the stairs no matter what. They have their reasons, communicated by their inside and outside language.

Phone mom or watch TV? Well, if you haven't called mom for a month, it might be time to pick up the phone and punch some numbers. But what if you've spent every night this week on the phone listening to mom obsess about her poodle's bad haircut? Maybe a little mindless TV is good self-care. How do you choose? Just listen to that little voice in the back of your head. It'll tell you what to do.

Language drives your choices.

- Can't find time for the gym, but always have time for the movies? Can't find time for the movies, but always have time for the gym? What's your rationale? You know, that little voice in the back of your head. "Too tired, too fat, too busy, too fickle, too broke..." That voice doesn't always reveal the most empowering options, you know. Sometimes it sabotages you.
- Can't afford fresh vegetables, but always have a couple bucks for the drive thru? If "you deserve a break" and

that means junk food, then consider re-visiting what it means to really treat yourself well. Take good care of yourself, and your inner language will lead you down a health-promoting path.

- Counseling won't help your stress issues anyway, so you don't bother to go? (Since your self-talk explains the situation as unsolvable.) Yet isn't that what counseling is for ... to help you sort through confusing situations and find alternatives you may not have considered on your own? Voice the possibility for peace of mind. Your perspective can change.

Now about that emergency room visit. As I was preparing to write this article, I had a timely conversation with a woman who told me that several months ago, she had faced exactly that choice. She has a recurring condition that causes short-term abdominal pain and then usually resolves itself. Here she was with abdominal pain, only this time it was somehow worse.

"Oh brother," she told herself. "I should just be able to tough this out!"

But it kept getting stronger. "Well, I'm not going to be able to work tomorrow anyway," her inner voice said, "So I might as well go in and let them give me something for the pain. Then at least I'll be able to get some sleep."

Turns out she had a nearly-perforated colon. Not at all the condition she thought she was dealing with. The ER Doc said that if she'd waited even a few more hours to come in, it would have gone through and she'd have been in much more serious trouble. Even so, she spent a week as an inpatient on IV antibiotics. Thank goodness she didn't try to tough it out any longer!

Funny thing about language, though. You can change it any time you want!

Try this on for size. Think about a situation that challenges you. Then create a positive statement that describes the type of thinking that would create a break-through solution. Maybe your statement will be as simple as this one: "I'm a resourceful person and I can figure this out!"

Plan your positive statement in advance. Then all you'll have to do in the moment is fill your mind with possibility.

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