

An Introduction to Body Memory

By Jonathan Tripodi

"It has been discovered that recurrent physical conditions and dysfunctions can be caused by body memory that has accumulated for years."



What is body memory?

Simply stated, body memory is past experiences and stress that is suppressed in the body.

What kind of experiences are you referring to?

DNA carries the memory of ones' ancestors while the body's cells, connective tissues and fluids contain the memories of one's life since conception.

Although there are many types of experiences, they are all composed of similar information which the body records including physical movements, sensation, emotion, thought and perception.

I have never heard of body memory. Is it something new?

The term body memory is new. The concept of past experiences being suppressed in the body dates back to the early 1900's. Current medical and scientific research is providing breakthrough discoveries that describe the body as a an advanced communication system that is capable of receiving, storing and transmitting information of one's experiences via various forms of bioenergy.

In the field of biophysics, the body is being realized as an advanced communication system referred to as "a living matrix" - capable of storing the information from a lifetime of experiences.

How does body memory develop?

That is the question that pioneers in mind-body medicine are exploring right now. What has been discovered is that the body converts the physical sensations, emotions and psychological impressions of an experience into vibratory patterns which are conducted by the body's connective tissue, fluids and cellular membranes (cytoskeleton).

How does energy become stored as body memory?

A chain of events occurs almost simultaneously as every system in the body responds to a stressful or overwhelming experience. The nervous system sends electrical currents to the muscles so that a person can either confront the threat or move away from it.

When a person is unwilling or unable to confront or move away from a threat, they freeze.

The freeze response coincides with changes in the electromagnetic energy field that surrounds and interpenetrates your body. (11) These changes immobilize and suppress the vibratory blueprint of the experience in the body. When a person comes out of the protective freeze response, the energy that was suppress is released and expressed through the body.

It seems quite a stretch to believe that an experience which happened years ago can still be held in my body. How can that happen?

Great question! In general, one reason a carries body memory for so long is because the freeze response remains habitually on autopilot which keeps stressful experiences suppressed. Even though the threatening or overwhelming experience has passed, unconsciously and out of habit a person continues to protect them self from it.

In his book *Waking the Tiger*, Phd. psychologist and trauma specialist Peter Levine states that although most animals come out of the freeze response and discharge stress immediately after a threat has passed, humans can remain in the freeze response and carry the stress of the past in their body for years, even a lifetime.

What are the symptoms of body memory?

Initially, body memory causes muscles to tense, and over time, the surrounding fluid hardens and connective tissue restricts. The longer body memory has been stored, the harder, tenser and more restricted the body will feel.

As body memory accumulates, the tensions multiply and become stronger. When a person is unable to adapt successfully to these added tensions, symptoms develop.

The most common symptoms of body memory are movement problems, spasm, pain, mal-alignment of the spine and joints, headaches, stress, phobias and recurrent emotional challenges. It takes energy to suppress body memory, especially the emotional component, and so fatigue is often experienced. Michael Ryce, Ph.D., author of "Why is This Happening to Me Again," believes that as much as 90% of our personal energy is used to suppress Body Memory.

How do I know if I have body memory?

Anywhere in your body that feels tense, tender, painful or hard is a likely indicator that you have body memory, especially those parts of your body that have felt that way for a long time. Chronic fatigue, anxiety or emotional challenges are also indicators of body memory.

Think back to when you felt overwhelmed by an injury, trauma, surgery, or an exceptionally stressful event or time in your life. Then, you can appreciate the fact that you have survived many challenging experiences.

The question really isn't if you have body memory, but how much and to what degree is this stored energy affecting the way you look, move, think & feel.

Can I release body memory?

Yes, but release is the second phase of body memory transformation. There are four phases.

Phase 1: Recall

Recall is when you become aware of or feel the physical sensations, emotions, perceptions, movements or positions of a past experience.

Phase 2: Release

The release phase occurs when a person relaxes deeply enough to come out of the protective freeze response to a past experience which allows the suppressed bioenergy from the experience

to circulate. During a release of body memory, a person will experience one or more of the physiological activities.

- A change in the rate or depth of breathing
- Twitching, shaking or spontaneous muscle contractions
- Temperature changes
- Involuntary movement
- Spontaneous expression of suppressed sounds or words
- Absolute stillness
- Flashes of memory inside the mind's eye

During the release phase, a person consciously embodies, releases and expresses the physical sensations, movements, emotions, words or sounds of a suppressed experience. Sometimes the body will assume the actual positions of past injuries, abuse or trauma, an experience referred to as "positional" memory release. The positions can also be symbolic - representing a suppressed feeling, desire or belief.

Psychological memory of a specific event does not always occur. More often, a release of accumulated physical stress or stored emotions is all that is needed.

Phase 3: Integration

Integration is when the mind processes the information that was released and the body re-organizes into a more balanced stable posture. Integration occurs naturally and automatically after a release.

After a release of body memory, the mind and body are fertile for new programming. The integration phase involves sending new, positive, healthy messages to yourself about what is true about you, your past and what is possible for you to create in your life. Integration can be supported and enhanced with counseling, journaling or quiet time alone.

Also after a release, every structure in the body including bones, muscles and organs are free to move into a new alignment now that the protective tension of body memory has been released. Strengthening, flexibility and movement exercises are essential for the body to learn how to maintain the newly attained freedom of movement and a balanced, stable posture. Energy levels and metabolism often increase during or after the integration phase.

Phase 4: Resolution

Resolution occurs last when you have released the protective fears of a past experience or experiences. In addition, some memory resolves only when new mental programming is created. Resolution represents a completion and acceptance of the past and the onset of creative living.

Can I heal from body memory on my own or do I need a special kind of therapy?

Body memory transformation is a natural, innate ability we are all designed to experience, but most of us need help overcoming the unconscious habit to survive, ie. the freeze response which is preventing body memory from releasing.

Keep in mind, most of us have adapted to being in survival mode for years. So, it is beneficial to seek help so you can become aware of your protective tensions. This awareness begins the whole healing process and is the first step towards releasing body memory.

The connective tissue restrictions that develop from long term body memory can be difficult to release on your own. Yoga, breath work can help as can acupuncture, but most of us will benefit from therapeutic bodywork that releases connective tissue and body memory.

What therapies treat body memory?

Most all therapies directly or indirectly treat body memory, but to varying degrees. Here are some general indicators that body memory is being treated.

1. The therapy supports you to develop an awareness of the freeze response active in your body.
2. The therapy supports a release of the freeze response and suppressed emotions.
3. The therapy supports a release of connective tissue restrictions.
4. The therapy incorporates active listening and guidance.
5. The therapy includes home exercise instruction for flexibility, strengthening and movement reeducation.

Keep in mind that body memory cannot be forced to release, only supported. The presence of body memory indicates that you are protecting yourself from a past experience that you perceive to be threatening or overwhelming. Underlying this protection is fear. Even with the best intentions, force often causes the body to protect even more.

More important than techniques is the approach. Courage tempered with sensitivity, support, patience, persistence, awareness and non-judgment cultivates trust, the most important condition for body memory transformation to occur.

Resolving body memory does not occur by accident. It takes courage, sensitivity, patience, persistence, awareness, non-judgment and ultimately trust.

As a therapist, how do you treat body memory?

After years of training and experience treating body memory, I developed the Body Memory Recall approach, or BMR for short. BMR provides the full spectrum of touch from light to deep and is combined with therapeutic dialogue, customized exercise training, and movement reeducation to support the complete healing process of body memory.

Body memory transformation is an amazing process that reminds us how sensitive we truly are and that our ability to heal and transform stressful experiences is as powerful as our ability to survive them.

References & Suggested Reading

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