

## Navigating Your Path to Health

Many new cars today are equipped with automotive navigation systems. These systems use satellite technology to locate the car and provide directions to a location of our choice. The directions are often provided by voice prompts, which describe the path to follow in order to reach our destination. Thanks to the wonders of modern science, we receive this information immediately. The voice prompts can also inform us that we have missed a turn or even taken a wrong turn. Again, we obtain this feedback right away. We have, in many ways, become a society of immediacy. We often expect immediate feedback or immediate gratification and anything less is seen as unfulfilling, slow, or outdated.

Now let's consider navigating our way to a different type of destination, a destination that most of us find vague and elusive. That destination is health. Imagine a health navigation system implanted in our bodies that is capable of directing us toward that goal. Perhaps it would notify us if our dietary choices are a deviation from the path we should follow. Perhaps it would inform us that our lack of exercise or our need for relaxation is thwarting our efforts to reach our ultimate goal. It may provide prompts in its monotone, mediocre, matter-of-fact voice such as, "To arrive at your destination, put that cookie down." It may also remind us of activities that we have neglected, such as, "You overlooked exercise again today. Engage in physical exercise at the next possible opportunity."

But alas, there is no health navigation system available at present. So, how can we find and follow our all-important path to health? One such approach makes use of an age-old, antiquated system. That is, we can measure our proximity to destination health by examining how we feel--physically, mentally, and spiritually. Yet, most of us rarely notice the feedback from this system immediately. It may take days, weeks, or even years before we see or feel the effects of our lifestyle choices, positive or negative. We may need to be hit over the head with a hammer before finally hearing the message. Thus, it would be wise to examine if we are listening to what our bodies have to say, while at the same time exploring how we can become better listeners.

One approach to increasing awareness and listening to our bodies is through receiving acupuncture treatment. As an acupuncturist, I am told by many patients that with regular treatment, they become more aware of their bodies and the way in which their bodies communicate with them. Many patients begin to see patterns that were previously not recognizable. These patterns may include vague low back pain due to lack of exercise, constipation during highly stressful situations, abdominal pain related to not expressing emotions constructively, or energy levels that spike and crash as a result of specific dietary habits. Even though patterns such as these may exist for years, many individuals fail to notice the connection. Once they finally choose to slow down and listen to their bodies, they begin to hear the subtle messages.

In many cases, acupuncture can help to treat these imbalances, but in some cases it may not. And when it cannot, most patients find that their problems are far more manageable with the knowledge of specific causative factors. They are pleased to learn that their lifestyle choices can directly affect how they feel, and that by making different lifestyle choices, as difficult as that may be, they can proactively choose to be healthier. I don't mean to imply that acupuncture is the only approach to increasing awareness and becoming a better listener. There are many such approaches. I believe that receiving massage or practicing meditation can be helpful for this purpose, as well as meditative activities, such as reading, conscious walking, gardening, or yoga. All of these modalities can help us learn to listen to the messages that our bodies are sending, until the day when we have our health navigation system implanted.

## About the Author

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Source: <http://www.healthcrazed.com>