

Am I crazy?

What do my medical symptoms have to do with counseling?

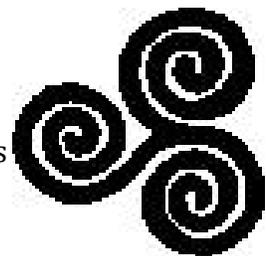
Health complaints are often complex. Many things, including mental and emotional stress, contribute to physical health symptoms and often more than one treatment approach is needed to manage such concerns successfully. Some common physical problems that can be created or aggravated by stress include:

headaches/migraines	rise in heart rate	digestive concerns
Insomnia & night waking	hypertension	aggravated ulcers
fatigue/ low energy	cold extremities	low sex drive
low frustration tolerance	sweating	intensification of PMS
poor concentration	allergic reactions/hives	intensification of menopause
dizziness	susceptibility to colds	muscle soreness & stiffness
shortness of breath	diarrhea & constipation	unplanned weight changes

The first approach is care by medical professionals: It's important to have a medical professional who knows your physical symptoms. Your provider can evaluate your concerns, prescribe physiological treatment interventions such as medication, nutritional changes, chiropractics, acupuncture and other traditional interventions.

Most medical professionals recognize the role life style, life transitions and external stressors play in health concerns but often do not have the time or training to explore these factors with their patients. Most people are also interested in learning how to manage symptoms with minimal medical intervention, less suffering and a higher quality of life. This is where a mental health professional trained in the psychology of health & wellness can contribute.

The mind-body-spirit connection: Physical and emotional tension both occur with major life changes, irritating physical symptoms, or chronic pain/disease. For some people, the symptoms make it difficult to manage everyday life. They may feel empty, sad, anxious or irritable. Additionally, relationships with family, friends and co-workers may be impacted. It can be frustrating to not be able to perform or relate the way you used to do. It can wreck our sense of self and faith, creating additional confusion and pain.



Many people with chronic health concerns have had difficult life experiences. The body stores these memories and finds ways to express the hurt of those experiences. The pain or other symptoms are very real, but treating it with medical interventions is often not enough. Finding new ways to express this pain and learn to listen to the body can help alleviate suffering. In general, recognizing the pros and cons of our old habits and learning new patterns for living plays a significant role in the healing process.

The second approach then is a counselor's care: Frequently talking about things in a

non-judgmental setting eases the burden by simply having someone listen empathetically. Additionally, counselors bring expertise in:

- insight into patterns of thinking or behaving,
- exploration of relationship dynamics,
- understanding what impact our history might play in our current challenges.
- guidance through life stages and transitions and
- creating a new vision/dream for life.

Counselors work with techniques such as:

- acceptance and grief around loss lifestyle and unsettling information
- relaxation and stress management techniques,
- assertiveness and communication skills,
- values clarification and strength development
- education about lifestyle choices and
- couples and family counseling as relationships adjust to changing health needs.

Appointments: Appointments are approximately 50 minutes. We start with building rapport and learning about your needs and interests. In subsequent meetings we explore contributing factors to your symptoms, build upon your strengths and resources and develop new strategies to address your goals. Your counselor serves as a guide: listening, answering questions, providing information and supporting you in practical ways. The process is a partnership. You are the expert about your life and the counselor is an expert in guiding a healing/change process.

Bottom Line: Studies have shown ties between physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health – specifically with chronic pain, diabetes, asthma, hypertension, heart disease and cancer. Studies also demonstrate the team approach to health care is the most preferred course of treatment for these and many other medical concerns. In fact, people who suffer from depression and anxiety and are treated through counseling or a combination of counseling and medication demonstrate far greater long term benefits than patients who use medication alone. The same is true for many other disorders. Most medical plans provide coverage for mental health services. If your medical provider has recommended a counselor to support your health and wellness, please consider making the call today.

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