

We Are Informational Beings

In every minute of our lives our bodies complete thousands if not millions of exchanges of information in order to keep us alive and maintain our health. Think of something as simple as picking up a hot cup of coffee. The signal about the hotness of the coffee travels along a complicated pathway ending in a portion of the brain called the parietal lobe where we form our sensory experiences. There are vast numbers of nerve cells each sending bits of information in order to process the awareness of temperature. There are many more cells involved in processing the touch and pressure sensations as well. This complicated processing results in the texture, shape and weight of the cup. We can think of our bodies as vast informational networks operating on a variety of levels. This is somewhat like a computer with its hardware, software, and input/output systems. The hardware represents the physical components of our bodies such as our DNA, cells, tissues and organ systems. The software represents the instructions by which our bodies operate. The input/output systems are analogous to our senses (inputs) and our behaviors as well as the waste our bodies generate (outputs). An important difference between us and computers is that we are the result of an evolutionary process that has made us self-sustaining and responsive to feedback. We are capable of capturing more information from our environments in order to maintain our bodies and our health. We can integrate information and actually change our hardware. For a long time it was thought that we were completely under the control of the information from our DNA. We were in essence slaves to our genes. Now science is discovering a whole new information system that is capable of turning sections of DNA on or off. This new science of epigenetics is hopeful in that we can exhibit some control over our DNA. What we eat, how we behave and what we do can make a difference not only in the software but also in the hardware of our bodies. Another way we can change our body's hardware is by changing our thoughts. What we think controls our behavior. Our nerve cells respond to thoughts and behavior by making and strengthening connections with other nerve cells. Over time this new "wiring" replaces the old. Cells are an important part of our hardware too. Our bodies contain over fifty trillion cells. Each cell communicates with other cells by sending messages encoded in proteins in what could be considered as an astoundingly immense communication network. Cells respond to molecular information. Molecules communicate with cells by attaching to minute receptors located on the surface or inside of cells. Information is exchanged when molecules combine with cellular receptors. Important sources of molecular information include the molecules contained in the food we eat, nutrients such as vitamins and minerals, herbal substances and medications. All of these have an affect on the cellular information and communication network. If we understand our bodies as information processors we will understand our health and how we heal on a deeper level. What we put into our bodies, our sensory experiences, thoughts and behaviors can all act as information sources. We can support the existing hardware of our lives or work to change it for the better or worse.

About the Author

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