



Wellbeing

Forgiveness

The body keeps the score

Our bodies are incredible. They have a way of telling us how we are doing with what is occurring in our lives and in our emotions. In essence, what is happening shows up by way of physical symptoms. Everything really is so interconnected.

We see this particularly clearly when we are feeling anger, annoyance or frustration. For all of us, there definitely been, and are, those moments when we 'see red.' And when we do, things happen to us physically – it might be in the way we clench our fists or our teeth. It might be that our shoulders are tight or raised. We might struggle to sleep at night. We may even 'feel' it in our stomach – as it seems knotted with angst. We might notice we feel hot or sweaty. Our hearts might race - and then there are the tension headaches, along with numerous other things.

As well as all this, we will have noticed how we can go over and over in our heads the wrong that has been done to us that has caused the anger or annoyance to rise in us. And on top of that are sometimes the thoughts of revenge; of how we can get back at the person that has caused us to feel such things, making them see what they've done.

During all of this, our brains have changed gear switching into 'fight-or-flight' mode. This causes changes in our blood pressure, our heart rate and even affects our immune response. We are in 'unforgiving mode' and our body is under stress in many different ways as a result. These changes in our blood pressure and heart rate can, for example, increase the risk of depression, heart disease and diabetes, among other things.

The body is literally keeping the score of our anger, annoyance and frustration.

Thankfully, there are some simple steps we can take to counteract all this – and one in particular may be a little surprising!

Incredibly, choosing to practice the habit of being forgiving serves to calm our stress levels which obviously leads to improved health. This is because being forgiving is about 'letting go' of what has caused us to feel anger and annoyance in the first place. 'Letting go' is not an easy thing to do – but it is the smart thing to do. Choosing to not allow anger, annoyance or frustration to take up residence inside of us by forgiving is a way of showing stress the door.

So, next time we experience any of those feelings rising up in us lets pause, just for a moment, take a couple of deep, slow breaths, and picture ourselves slowly opening up our clenched fists until our palms feel free and empty – symbolising letting go of all of the anger that has caused the stress to build up inside of us.

And as we do this, we are choosing to not let our bodies keep the score.