CHAPTER ONE

Body–Brain, *Reclaimed*

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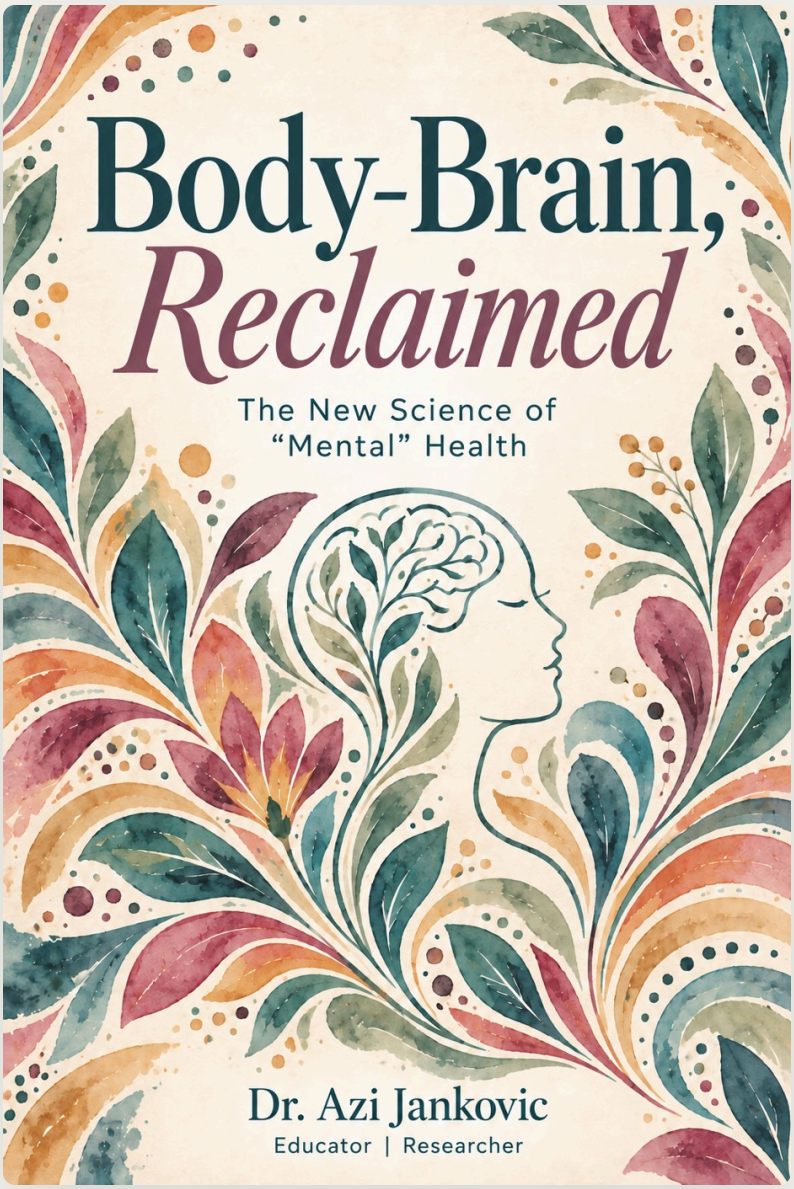

A FREE CHAPTER FROM THE FORTHCOMING BOOK

About This Book

The purpose of this book is to give you the most up-to-date, evidence-based, and humane pathways to better “mental” health. The word mental is in quotation marks because the latest science confirms that many diagnoses filed under “mental illness” have roots not only in the mind, but in the body and brain, an intimately connected system.

This book grew out of my book, Mental Health, Reclaimed (2025), and is rebuilt around one idea: when the body’s metabolism is out of balance, the brain often shows it, and food is one of the fastest ways to begin restoring both. The field of metabolic psychiatry, pioneered by Dr. Christopher Palmer and Dr. Georgia Ede, and the free training from the Metabolic Mind foundation, show the way. This book gathers that research in one place so you do not have to search alone. I’ve also included golden nuggets from the bio-psycho-social-and spiritual most effective practices in the space in order to provide you with learnings and resources that can support you in the most comprehensive ways possible.

I am a doctor of education and a certified health coach, not a medical doctor. My training is in research: how to read evidence, weigh it, and turn it into something people can use. In this way, everything that I’m sharing from the field of medicine becomes yours to keep, use, and utilize as you find necessary. It’s taken me countless doctors appointments, thousands of hours of research, hundreds of interviews, and more time spent ill that I can count until I finally found answers. Once I wrote Mental Health Reclaimed, I began hearing countless stories from my readers about how they had been failed and even injured from convenentional psychiatry. This book is an answer to those questions and problems.

This book is available to you for free, because information that can change lives belongs to everyone, whatever their financial means. I believe that G-d put me through my own health challenges and guided me to learn to remedy these types of challenges so that I can help or even save lives. This book is my mission

and a resource for you; I am a messenger of this information and ask nothing in return from you other than that you believe in yourself throughout this process.

Suffering is painful, and often even by design. I see you, I hear you, and it is time to alleviate suffering.

Read this book, learn from it, and share it with anyone who needs it. I am asking you share it at absolutely no monetary cost. The thread that runs through every page is that healing can be joyful. My hashtag, which I invite you to use when you share anything related is: #healwithjoy

*A note before you begin: I am an educator and a health and wellness coach, not a medical doctor. This book shares evidence, research, ideas, and tools that have been useful for countless people. However, it is in no way personal or medical advice. Please talk with a qualified healthcare provider before you change your diet, your treatment, or your medication, and never stop or change a medication on your own as this is extremely dangerous.

Introduction

Why This Book Exists

Educators are often the first to see a shift in the next generation. In every setting I have taught or researched in, from elite private schools to some of the poorest neighborhoods in Los Angeles and a juvenile detention center, I saw the same pattern: more anxiety, more exhaustion, more inattention, and more young people on stimulants and antidepressants. This began several decades ago, and has continued to this day.

No one can honestly say that certain prescriptions aren't necessary or helpful in particular medical situations. In fact, even leaders in the space of Metabolic Psychiatry understand the nuance of prescription medication. The problem is not the drug industry as a whole; the problem is overprescribing, and managing symptoms while creating unwanted side effects and not assessing the root causes of the actual problems. For example, if someone suffers from anxiety and is prescribed one drug; they may experience a side effect of headaches and then receive another prescription. This second prescription could cause stomach upset and a referral to a GI, resulting in yet another prescription. This is what is called a "prescription cascade," and its what we are trying to move away from in order to treat 'mental' health issues at their root and avoid any unnecessary treatments or prescriptions.

In my experience as an educator, the settings in which I worked could not have looked more different. Near the elite schools: grocery stores, health food shops, and weekend farmers markets. In the poorest neighborhoods: boarded-up storefronts, liquor stores, no grocery store in sight, and classrooms short on books. Some of the young people I met in juvenile detention described jail as the place they chose to go so that they could recieve three meals a day and have a bed to sleep in. Inside the prison, this is referred to as "three hots and a cot."

In any case, the thread running through all of these communities was a growing mental health crisis, far worse where fresh food was hardest to find, and yet - visible and growing even in the elite schools. Many of the children would start their day with sugary cereals, eat chips, pretzels, or cookies for snack, a peanut butter sandwich for lunch, and pizza for dinner. As you'll come to understand in our exploration of nutrition, this carbohydrate and processed food laden daily food regimen is enough to knock anyone's body and brain out of whack, and all the more so in young children with growing bodies.

The answers may be more simple than you think. Consider a few very basic studies conducted within the confines of prisons, where violence was a regular and ongoing occurance.

In several controlled trials, researchers gave incarcerated people vitamin, mineral, and essential fatty acid supplements and tracked their behavior.[1] Those trials tended to report fewer rule violations and less aggression in the supplement groups,[2] and later reviews and trials of omega-3 supplements pointed in a similar direction.[3][4][5] If basic nutrients can shift behavior in violent populations living behind bars, what else might food be doing?

Meanwhile, our modern grocery stores are built largely on processed foods made from subsidized crops such as corn, wheat, and soy.

What this points to is the need for widespread access: to nourishing food, and to plain knowledge about how food affects the brain. With both, we can build a healthier future, one with vitality, creativity, empathy, connection, and harmony.

Wellness begins with nature; healthfully grown produce and animals, robust selection of these foods in every neighborhood at subsidized prices when necessary. As the saying goes, "you'll either pay at the farm, or you'll pay at the pharmacy." Paying at the farm, in this day and age, is certainly the more financially sound option, not to mention far more joyful and far less painful.

So let's dive in to the solutions for our brain-body disease epidemic and what the latest research says so that we can understand where to start and how to heal... with joy.

This book starts with the basics of brain-body health, because that is where change tends to be fastest and most tangible. Each chapter offers tools you can try. Take what helps and leave what does not; your path will be as unique as your fingerprint.

Believe That Healing Is Possible

What You Believe Can Change the Brain

Changing a belief is the highest level of learning and transformation. What you believe guides the way that you function from the moment you awaken, to the way you sleep throughout the night, what you dream about, and everything in between. The first step in healing with joy is believing that it is possible. My doctoral research asked the question, "what makes a teacher effective in educating high risk students efficiently," and the answer was both 'relationship,' and 'belief.' Ultimately, having an adult figure who both cared for the student and ensured that their needs were met, and also believed in that student, holding them to high standards led to success.

As adults, we can be that 'teacher' or 'mentor' for ourselves. We can focus on developing a caring relationship with all parts of ourselves, learning how to take care of our brains and bodies as best as possible, and also believing that your vision of your healthy and joyful future self is not only possible, but factual. If you have the will to heal and shine, every ounce of light in this universe will be on your side. Your innate power - the gift that only you can give to the world - will shine forth when you are at your healthiest.

Consider for a moment this study on the power of belief in the field of medicine.

Neuroscientist Tor Wager and his colleagues published the study in 2004.[6] Volunteer subjects received painful exposure to heat while their brains were

scanned. Some had been given a cream they were told would reduce the pain, although in fact it was a placebo and contained no pain killers whatsoever. The participants who expected relief from the cream reported less pain, and their scans showed less activity in brain regions that process pain. Simply put, what people expected by way of their beliefs was able to physiologically change their brain function, detectable through a scan. While this does not mean that belief alone can cure every ailment, it does point to the power of the mind in effecting actual processes within the body - including the brain.

A Whole-Person Model

Many mental health practitioners today work from a biological, psychological, social, and spiritual model of health. The idea of mental health being multifaceted in nature goes back to physician George Engel, who posited in Science in 1977 that illness cannot be understood from biology alone; there were psychological and social components affecting the mental state as well.[7]

Researchers later added the spiritual dimension to the picture,[8] which in my own process has spoken volumes.

Since '77, even with that model widely known, and since the number of prescriptions for mental health issues have been growing steadily, we have not seen a decline in suffering - and in fact, we have seen the exact opposite.

The Global Burden of Disease study found that the number of years of healthy life lost to mental disorders worldwide rose from 80.8 million in 1990 to 125.3 million in 2019, and that mental disorders went from 3.1% to 4.9% of the global disease burden.[9] Long-term studies in the United States, Switzerland, and New Zealand suggest that most people will experience a diagnosable mental disorder at some point in their lives.[10]

In 2025, 3.7 million Americans ages 12-17 experienced a major depressive episode in the previous year. For 2.7 million, it involved severe impairment.[11] In a separate

CDC survey, one in three high-school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless, including more than two in five girls.[12] These figures have improved since the pandemic peak, but the burden remains staggering.

In 2024, nearly one in five U.S. adults took prescription medication for their mental health in the previous year.[13]

The conventional psychiatric approach has not made mental health problems disappear, and in fact, the opposite has transpired.

Why Our Brains Need Reclaiming

People are not suffering because they are broken, or because their brains are genetically destined to suffer. Many of us live in societies that were not designed with our brain health in mind, and the reasons are layered. The good news is that the answers are far more humane and less invasive than most people expect.

ATTENTION

Consider attention in the age of mobile devices, for example. In experiments, people had less available cognitive capacity when their own phone was simply nearby, even when they never touched it.[14] A later review of 56 studies found that only one effect held up, a small dip in working memory; your attention is something that brands are competing for, and the cost is real.[15]

One low-hanging fruit: take your phone out of your line of sight, or leave it at home on a nature walk. Many people find the result is more peace of mind and more real conversations. Let's remember, before the advent of the cellphones, our consciousness was not being swept out of the present moment by a digital device. Before the advent of answering machines, we somehow managed to connect, make plans, and run our lives. No one "needs" to have a cell phone on

hand all of the time unless you're a doctor on call. You are not a slave to your phone. Period.

NUTRITION

If there is ONE starting point that is most often recommended in the metabolic health and metabolic psychiatry worlds, it is nutrition.

Much of what is eaten in the Western world today is ultra-processed, a style of eating that took off in the 1960s alongside the processed food industry.

Internal documents show that in the 1960s a sugar industry group sponsored a review of heart disease, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, that downplayed sugar and instead pointed to dietary fat as the cause of heart disease.[16] The researchers were paid a combined total of about $50,000 in today's money.

Consider this short and simple study for a moment that encapsulates this issue in a nutshell: In a four-week hospital trial of 20 adults, ultra-processed meals led people to eat about 508 more calories per day than unprocessed meals matched for presented calories, sugar, fat and fiber.[17] Over time, that gap adds up to roughly a pound of body weight per week - and fifty two per year.

MEDICINE

Consider medicine. We can be grateful for the many life-saving treatments that have brought healing and longer lives.

With all of that being said, when we focus on prescription drugs, a deeper analysis is needed in order to take a bird's eye view of the business of pharmaceuticals.

The United States and New Zealand are the only countries that allow full direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs.[18] This means that when you turn on your television or communication device in one of these two countries, you

can come across a commercial - literally advertising a pharmaceutical to you, as a potential consumer. The pharmaceutical industry understands the health challenges of its audience, and uses persuasive marketing techniques to entice their audiences to ask their prescribing doctor for drugs. This is a partial explanation for the prescription cascade that has taken off in the last several decades.

Consider OxyContin, made by Purdue Pharma. Approved by the FDA in 1996 and marketed as a pain pill, it became a case study in how persuasion can outrun evidence.

Purdue trained its sales representatives, young and beautiful women, to carry the message directly and in person to medical doctors that the risk of addiction was less than one percent. Between 1996 and 2000 it grew its sales force from 318 to 671 representatives, paid $40 million in sales bonuses in 2001 alone, and hosted more than 5,000 doctors, pharmacists, and nurses at all-expenses-paid “pain-management” conferences. Sales climbed from $48 million in 1996 to almost $1.1 billion in 2000. An in-depth analysis of this campaign shows what can happen when a controlled drug is overpromoted,[19] and in 2020 Purdue pleaded guilty to federal criminal charges, including conspiring to defraud the United States and to violate federal anti-kickback law.[20]

The lesson is not that every prescription deserves suspicion. It is that what reaches your doctor and your television screen is shaped by marketing as well as science, so it pays to ask questions. We need to be well informed, understand the efficacy of any treatment we choose, and keep our radars up in terms of what is being marketed, promoted, and prescribed to us.

EDUCATION & BRAIN HEALTH

Even most schools in the West, which exist to serve young minds, run on logistics. In 2011-12, only 17.7% of US public middle and high schools started at 8:30 a.m. or later, the earliest possible that time the American Academy of Pediatrics

recommends for teens' sleep, health and learning.[21] The same pattern holds for what schools feed young minds. Each school day, the National School Lunch Program serves lunch to roughly 30 million American children, and while federal standards have improved - fruits and vegetables, whole grain-rich foods, caps on sodium and saturated fat - the first federal limits on added sugar only began phasing in during the 2025-2026 school year, and day to day, many cafeterias still rely on pre-packaged, heat-and-serve items.[22] This mirrors children's diets at large: according to the CDC, American youth now get nearly two-thirds of their daily calories from ultra-processed foods.[23] And what is missing matters as much as what is served: the developing brain depends on nutrients school menus rarely prioritize, including omega-3 fats, choline, iron, zinc, iodine, and B vitamins, each linked to attention, memory, and mood.

None of this necessarily proves that anyone is intentionally plotting against us; it means that the default settings were built for goals other than your long-term health, and best interest in mind.

This book is not a black and white approach about opting out of a system. It is about progress over perfection: choosing one thing at a time, making upgrades that suit you, and beginning. That is what reclaiming the brain looks like, and it is what this book is for.

Helpful Notes and Disclaimers as You Read

Tapering Off Medications: If you are experiencing side effects of medications or interested in exploring tapering, it's always advisable to do so with the help of a trustworthy and accredited professional. Your life may very well depend on it. Leading experts in this field include Dr. Mark Horowitz and Dr. Anders Sorenson.

Disordered Eating: As a content warning for sensitive readers, please note that throughout the book, I discuss eating habits, nutritional plans, and other topics as they pertain to physical and mental well-being and the health-care system. If you have or have had a history of disordered eating behaviors, please let a

medical professional or qualified nutrition specialist guide you before making changes to your eating.

Professional Supervision for Rigorous Diet Plans: In the chapters that follow, I outline several dietary approaches, including Dr. Georgia Ede's Quiet Paleo, Quiet Keto, and Quiet Carnivore. Please note that a highly controlled nutritional plan or elimination diet can, in some circumstances, negatively affect the body and may not be right for everyone, especially if you have underlying health conditions or take certain medications. Seek guidance and supervision from a qualified professional to make sure that any plan you choose aligns with your age, medical history, lifestyle, and other factors.

The Complex Houseplant

As you read on, keep in mind that humans are a lot like complex houseplants. If you've ever planted a garden or cared for a houseplant, you know growing a thriving garden usually requires more than just the occasional watering. From the type of soil and size of the pot to lighting, temperature, water levels, and fertilizer, countless factors influence the health of even the simplest living thing.

Now, imagine your beloved plant isn't doing well. Its leaves are sagging or discolored, a common frustration even for dedicated gardeners. Your first instinct might be to feed it a chemical compound to "fix" the problem. While this might help in some cases, if the lighting, water, or soil conditions are off, no amount of chemical intervention will make a lasting difference. For example, a shade plant placed in direct sun—or a sun-loving plant left in the shade—will struggle to survive, let alone thrive.

We now have evidence that nutrition plays a critical role in brain health, yet many medical schools are still falling short of providing future doctors with remotely adequate nutrition education.[24] This leaves far too many people experiencing mental health challenges, labeled as disordered, and prescribed long-term medications, often without addressing or understanding the root cause of the problem.

We also have evidence that certain supplementation and exercise protocols can be as effective, and even more effective long term, than commonly prescribed pharmaceuticals for some conditions.[25] These are just two basic examples of how addressing the needs of the whole person can offer comprehensive and sustainable solutions for mental health symptoms.

THE FOUR P's

Learning about the big four influences and how they're all connected helps to prime the pump as you think about your mental well-being. Mental health isn't one-dimensional; it's shaped by a dynamic interplay of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors. To make this easier to remember, we will refer to them as the 4 P's moving forward: Physiology, Psychology, People, and Purpose.

Physiology refers to what's happening throughout the body. We'll address gut health, circadian rhythm, nutrition, and lifestyle choices that support optimal functioning.
Psychology encompasses our thoughts, beliefs, emotional patterns, and past experiences. This is the lens through which we see the world, deeply influencing our beliefs and how we make meaning out of our realities.
People speaks to the influence of our relationships; how connection, community, and support from others can impact our well-being.
Purpose reflects the a philosophical or even spiritual dimension, which I define broadly. Whether or not you identify as religious or spiritual, the essence here is a sense of meaning: believing we're here for a purpose, and that we can live in alignment with that purpose. Beyond the greater purpose, is the possibility that there is purpose in every micro moment of our existence. While you may not believe this as you're reading it, I implore you to stay open to the possibility that there is some grain of truth to this idea.

Together, the 4 P's offer a whole-person framework for understanding and reclaiming mental health. This book is divided up into sections based around the 4P's.

I hope you'll commit, right now, to being your best advocate. You were born with the potential to thrive. Don't let anyone, or any system convince you otherwise. Stand firmly in your power, speak up for your needs, and become the fiercest advocate for your own well-being.

Here are three helpful truths to keep in your back pocket as you read this book:

1. Healing isn't always a straight line.

Healing is a process of discovery, and it is rarely a straight line. Setbacks are a normal part of behavior change. When one comes, return gently to your chosen course.

2. A diagnosis is not a destiny, and your symptoms need not define your story.

If you're dealing with unwanted mental health symptoms or care about someone who is, I want you to hear this loud and clear: your diagnosis is not your destiny. You don't have to resign yourself to a lifetime of side effects, suffering, or mediocrity. Deep down, you may already sense that there's a better way forward.

3. Your progress is unique to you.

Healing is not about fitting yourself into a box labeled "healed" or "not healed." Only you can feel what progress looks like, and only you can define what thriving means in your life. Get clear on how you want to feel, and why. This is your permission to dream.

Calling Upon Hope

Hopelessness and doubt can act as protective and even survival mechanisms. While we humans are strong and resilient, we're also wired to conserve energy. If you believe the thought that you're beyond hope, you're also, perhaps unknowingly, giving yourself permission not to make an effort and to avoid the anguish of failure.

When you believe that healing is possible, that belief alone can set powerful biological and psychological change in motion. Research on the placebo effect shows that a belief in the possibility of improvement can activate real healing responses in the brain and body.[26]

Mental health symptoms are not your fault; you can look at them as signs and symptoms that the symphony of your systems is out of harmony, and these imbalances have become a sign of our times. What's great to keep in mind is that the healing process doesn't have to feel hard to be effective. I've come to believe that healing can even be joyful! The ideas you're going to learn are not prescriptive. You can implement what feels right for you and still find relief. So, setting aside any possible doubts, just for a moment, you're invited to lean into a new possibility:

Key Concepts and Questions

1. Healing may require a whole-person approach. It can also be addressed with parts of the whole. Mental health is influenced by four key areas, the 4P's: physiology, psychology, social environment (people), and spirituality (purpose). Just as a plant requires the right soil, light, temperature, and water to thrive, humans need attention to these four areas in order to thrive.

2. Healing is not a one-size-fits-all process. Because we each have different needs, stressors, lifestyles, resources, etc., we all require a unique path to healing. Take your mental health into your own hands by being curious, researching, and seeing for yourself.

Questions

1. What would it feel like to trade hopelessness for possibility? What beliefs or doubts might you gently release to make room for healing and growth?

2. If you truly believed that your symptoms or diagnosis didn't have to define your future, what hopes might begin to bloom? What would thriving look and feel like—for you?

3. Healing isn't a straight line—but an individualized, unfolding journey. How might this perspective shift the way you view your own path?

Where to Begin: Food

You now have the map: four areas that shape how we think and feel, and a real reason to believe that change is possible. The next question is where to start.

Start with food. We are getting into this in the upcoming chapter.

Of the four Ps, physiology is where change tends to show up fastest, and food is the input you control every day. Metabolic psychiatry, the field built by pioneers such as Dr. Christopher Palmer and Dr. Georgia Ede, looks at many brain conditions through the lens of metabolic health: insulin resistance, oxidative stress, and inflammation. Each of these is shaped by what you eat.

In the next chapter you will learn what to take out, what to put in, and how to begin with a single change. You do not need to do it all at once, and you do not need to do it perfectly. Take what helps, and bring this book to your doctor, especially if you take medication.

Notes

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