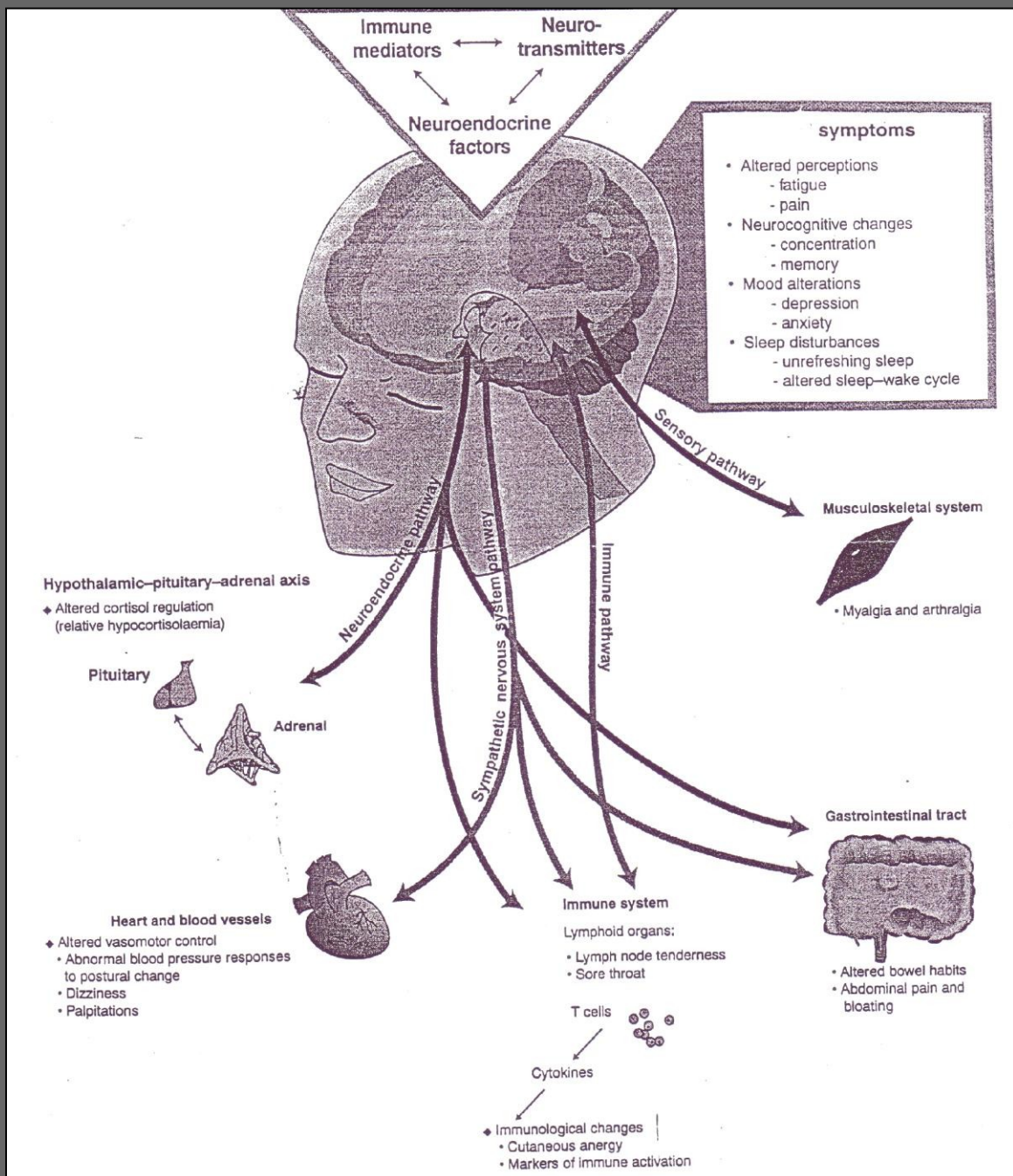


# Chapter 13

## THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION





# INTRODUCTION TO THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

In this chapter, we introduce the idea of the  
Mind-Body Connection -  
how our mind affects our body,  
and how our body affects our mind.

We link this idea to  
a new model of health/illness  
(the holistic model)  
and show how we can work with this model  
to plan a strategy for recovery.

We demonstrate how  
practising the self-management strategies  
outlined in this manual  
can have a powerful effect  
on how we can control symptoms.

## The Mind-Body Connection in Action

Have you ever....

Woken up from a dream -

sweating,

heart racing,

your body acting as if the dream was real?

Have you ever ....

Walked past a bakery -

and found your mouth watering?

Have you ever ....

Passed by a dark alleyway -

heard a slight rustle,

and sensed a movement in the shadows ....

....and your body reacted by bolting - not waiting to see that it was just a plastic bag rustling in the wind?

These are all phenomena  
which demonstrate how closely  
our brain, mind and body are linked.

Somehow, our thoughts or experiences  
have become real sensations or physical reactions  
in our body.

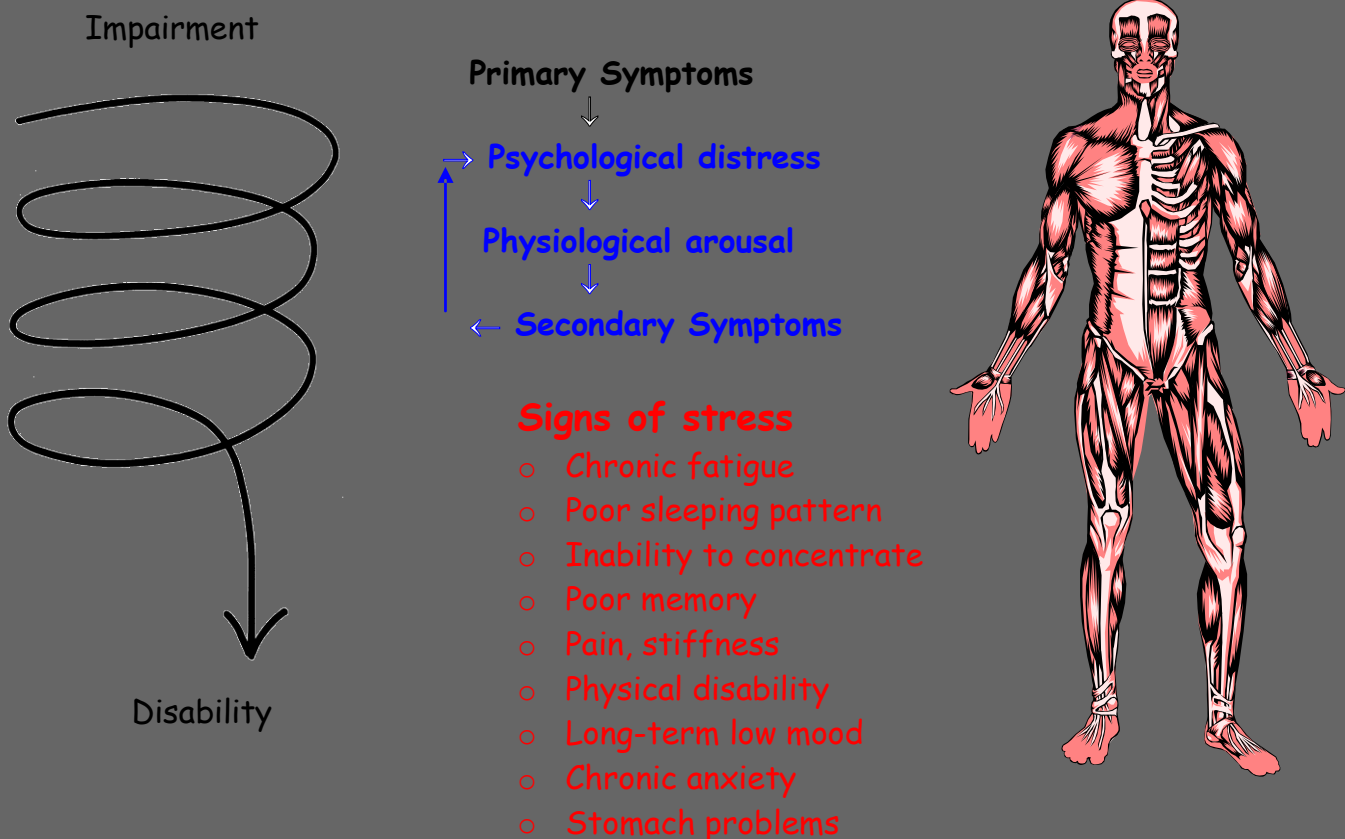
## What Goes on in our Brain?

Our thoughts, emotions, attitudes, beliefs and hopes can have a powerful effect on our bodies.

Scientific research is proving that our brain, together with our nervous system, immune system and endocrine system (which produces and controls hormones), translates these thoughts into chemicals which affect how our body works.

### Stress Revisited

In chapter 4, we looked at understanding the effects of chronic stress on the body, and suggested that many of the symptoms people experience when dealing with difficult situations, including illness, could be secondary and therefore potentially reversible. We can attempt to do something about these symptoms by practising the self-management strategies in this course.



# Unexplained Medical Conditions

Difficulties arise when people experience these "secondary" symptoms as their primary complaint.

When medical investigations show that "nothing is wrong", people may start thinking their symptoms are "all in the mind" and they may be referred to a psychiatrist.

Alternatively, they may request further medical investigations, worrying that a serious undiagnosed condition for which they need treatment has been missed.

Typical medical labels which may fall into this category are:

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

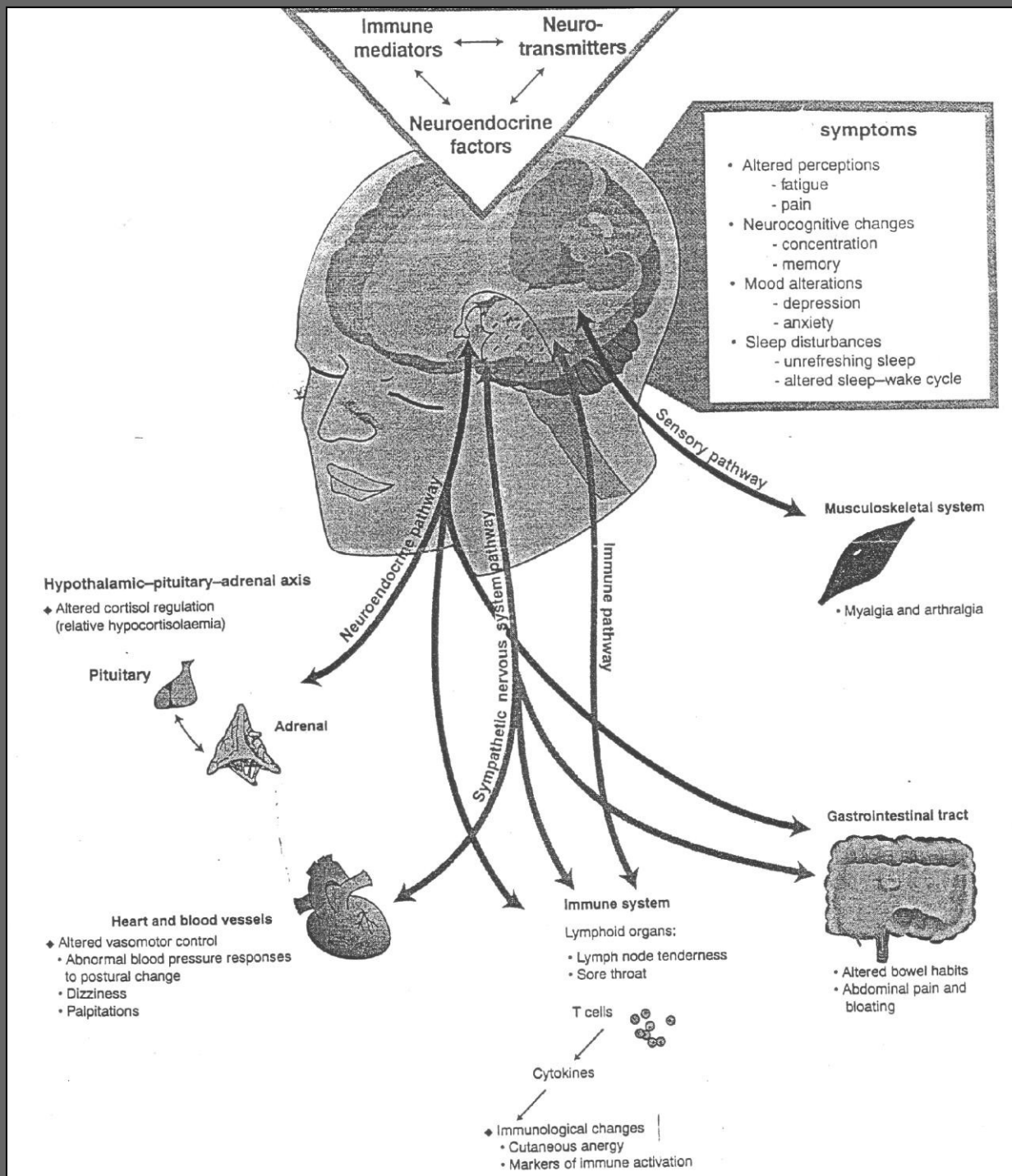
Fibromyalgia

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Myalgia and Arthralgia

Symptoms associated with Anxiety and Depression

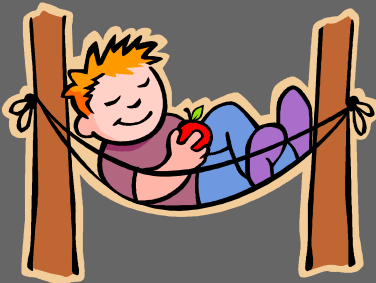
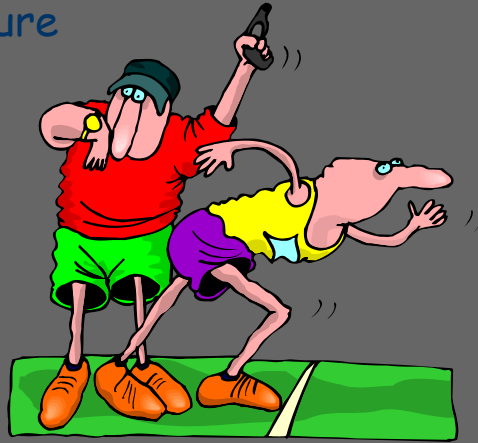
The diagram opposite shows potential central pathways from the brain to the body, which generates these symptoms.



# Understanding our Nervous System

The Sympathetic nervous system revs us up.

- Increases our heart rate
- Increases our blood pressure
- Prepares us for action



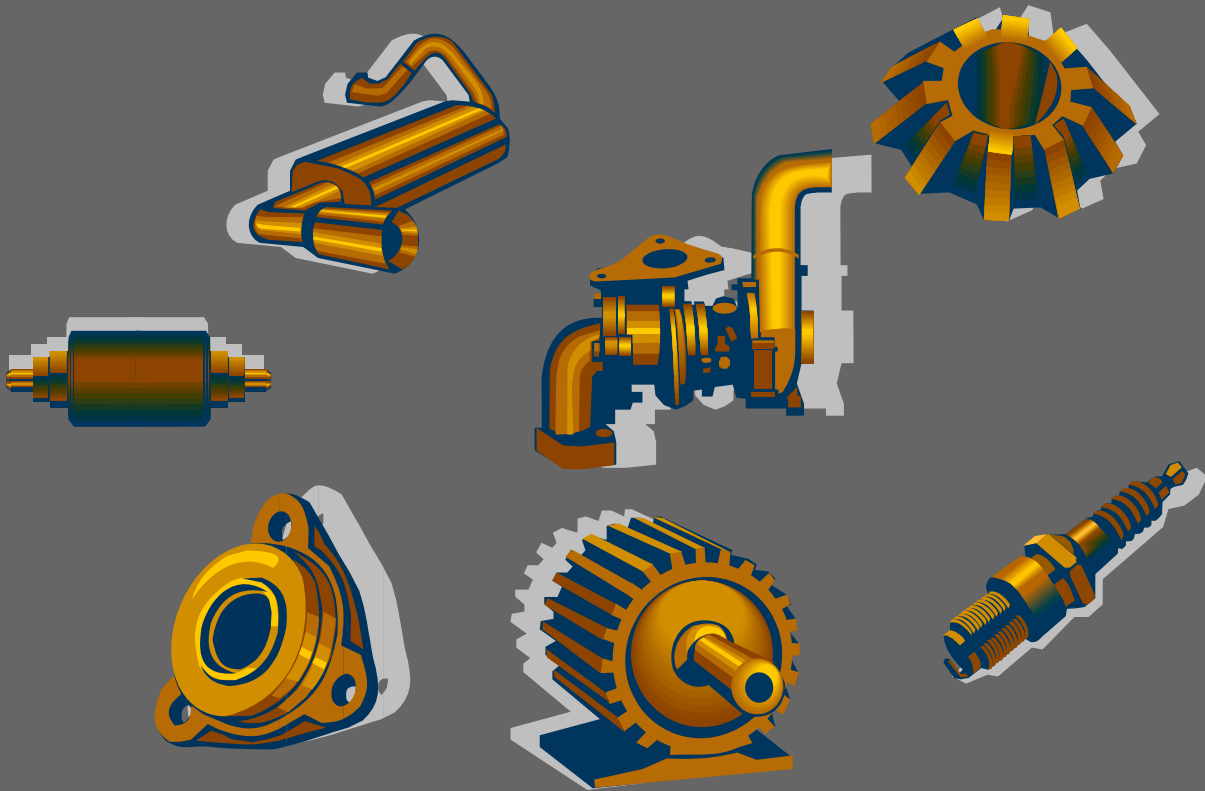
Parasympathetic activity slows us down.

An imbalance of sympathetic activity over parasympathetic activity (usually due to chronic long-term stress, acute distress or traumatic events) creates a hyper-aroused body-mind system, which often leads to unexplained symptoms - symptoms for which medical investigations indicate no known pathology/damage. Everything is working, but in a dysfunctional way.



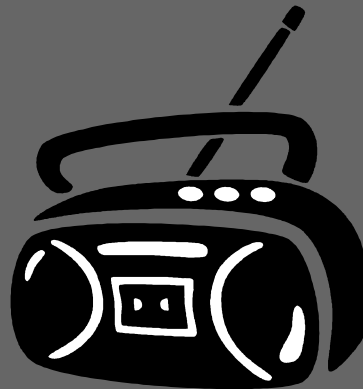
**SECONDARY SYMPTOMS**  
**Sympathetic - parasympathetic**  
**nervous system imbalance?**

All the parts are working but the car doesn't run !!



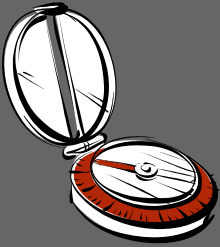
Or.....

The radio works but it's out of tune.



## How to Make Sense of this Information

There are many models of health and illness which try to explain how our bodies work. It's important to understand that models are like maps.



A map represents the territory.  
It is not the actual territory.

In western culture, the conventional model of health/illness is called the medical model. It is this powerful model that has resulted in the NHS service we know today.

It's great when it works (it can diagnose and offer treatment), and not so great when it doesn't (when investigations show that nothing is wrong, and so nothing can be done).

New models have been created to expand on the medical model, to help explain previously unexplained symptoms.

"The more refined the map becomes, the more accurately it represents the territory."

## MEDICAL MODEL

The medical model focuses solely on how the body functions. The body is viewed as a highly complex organic machine separate from the workings of the mind.



"If it's not in the body then it must be in the mind."

## SOCIAL MODEL

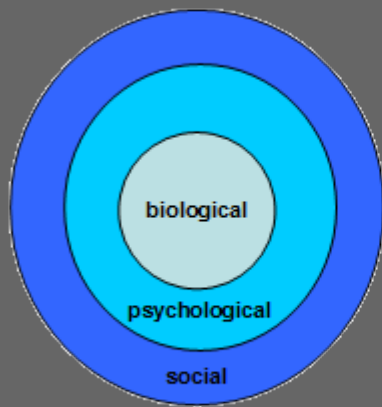
The social model doesn't focus solely on how the body functions. It works with people to try to help them move on in life despite their illness or disability.



## HOLISTIC MODEL (Biopsychosocial)

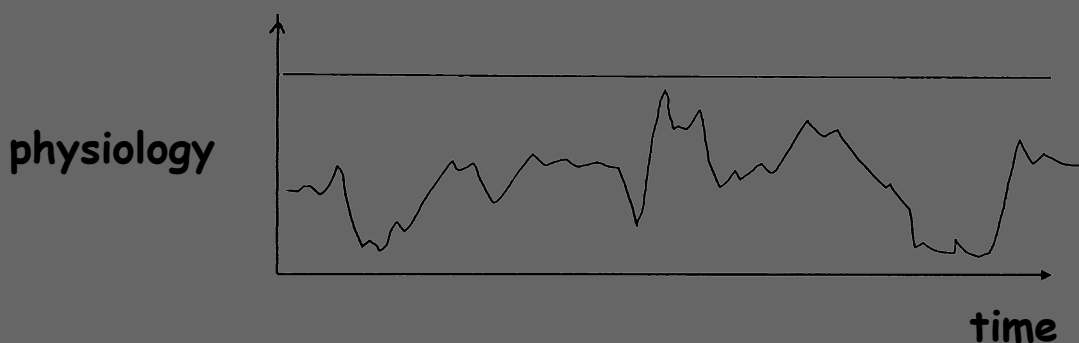
The holistic model considers that our mind (how we cope) and how we move on in life can actually have an effect on how our body functions. There is a relationship between biological (body), psychological (mind or brain) and environmental (social) factors.

## Biopsychosocial (holistic) model



The holistic model combines the medical and social models, and attempts to explain previously unexplained medical conditions.

Our physiology is always changing...



The holistic model holds that ...

- How we perceive our environment **affects** our health.
- Our thoughts and feelings **affect** our health.
- Our actions and their consequences **affect** our health.

... and also holds that ...

- Our health **affects** our feelings
- Our health **affects** our thoughts
- Our health **affects** our perception
- Our health **affects** our actions and their consequences

There is no more powerful example  
of the effects of perception  
than that of  
**The Placebo Response.**

## PLACEBO FACTORS

### The role of hope and expectancy

#### A TRUE STORY

Many years ago, in a foreign country, there was a man who lay dying in a small provincial hospital. The medical staff had all but given up hope of curing him. The problem was simple: the staff could not figure out what was making the man ill. Fortunately, a famous diagnostician was scheduled to visit the hospital in a few days and the local doctors told the man they could probably cure him, if the mystery illness were accurately diagnosed by the famous doctor.

When the doctor finally arrived at the hospital, the man was very close to death. Making his way to the patient's bedside, the doctor took one look at the man and then muttered, "Moribundus" (the Latin word meaning 'being in a state of dying') and moved on to the next patient.

Several years later, the man, who did not speak or understand a word of Latin, managed to track down the famous diagnostician. "I've been wanting to thank you for your diagnosis," the man said. "The doctors told me that if you could diagnose me, I'd get well, and so the minute you said "Moribundus" I knew I'd recover."

Medical journals are full of these curious stories about healing. The powerful influences of belief, optimism, hope and expectancy, have long been harnessed by traditional healers across the globe. The power of rituals and strange procedures, if deemed credible by the patient, seem to have a powerful effect.

In order to separate "Placebo" effects from the effects of the active ingredients in medical treatments, research trials provide a placebo treatment to compare medical and non-medical healing effects.

Time and time again, the placebo treatment has proved its effectiveness, and yet is largely dismissed as a psychological phenomenon - or worse. The symptoms must have been "all in the patient's mind".

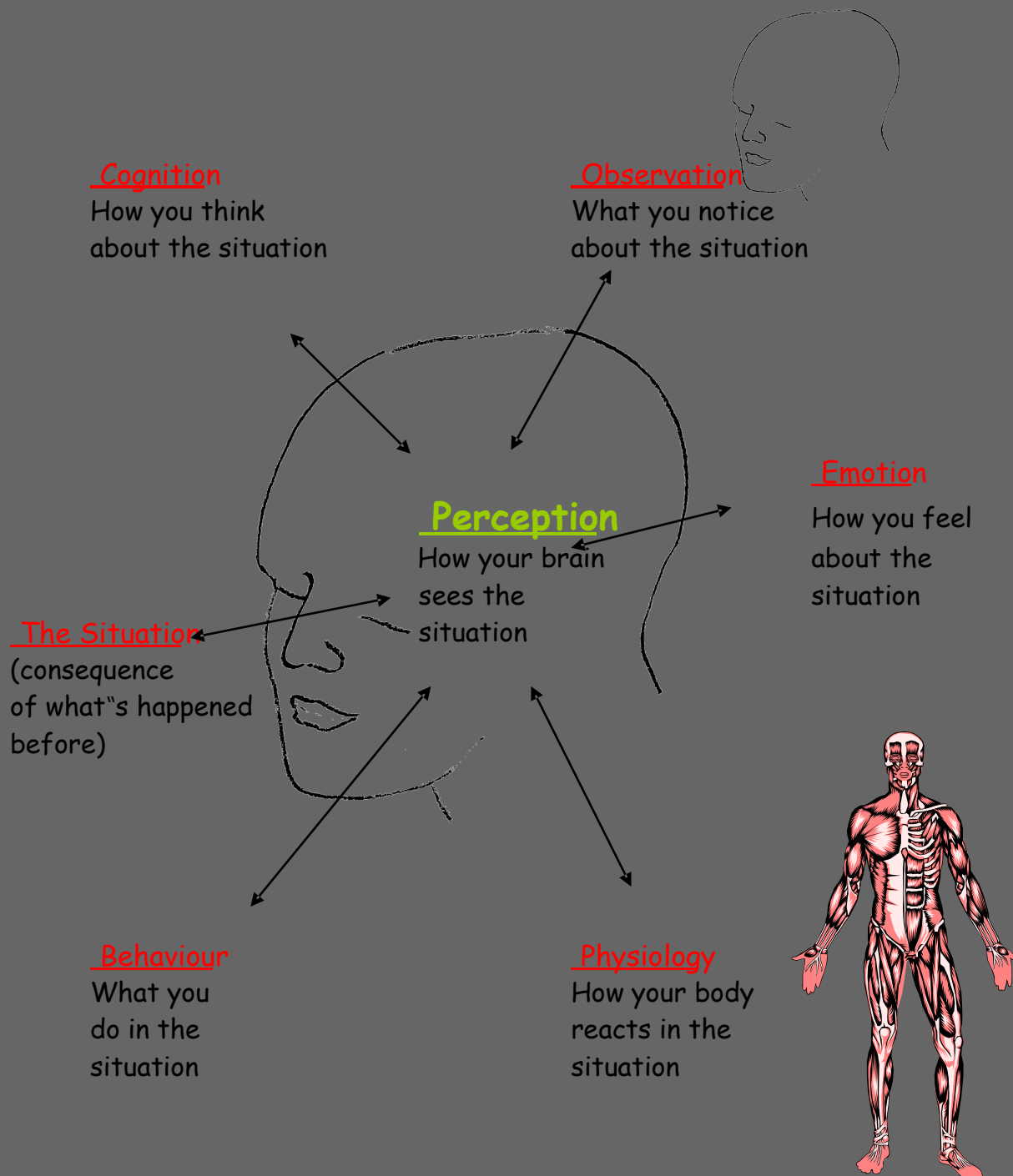
Good health practitioners harness the placebo in their work with clients. They know that:-

THE PLACEBO HAS A PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECT.

This is why this course is about accepting where people are in their situation, and providing an environment which fosters hope and a positive expectancy of recovery.

While the placebo is a powerful example of the mind-body connection, this effect is played out moment by moment in our daily lives.

Our minds (thoughts, feelings, and what we notice), bodies and behaviour are influenced by how we see a situation (perception).





And how we see any particular situation depends on the sensitivity and past experience of a part of our brain called the Amygdala.

Our brains hold all our memories.

Present situations can remind the brain of a previous memory - and we recall it.

For example

Going into an old-fashioned sweet shop can cause a rush of memory, emotion and sensations (symptoms) of joy and nostalgia.

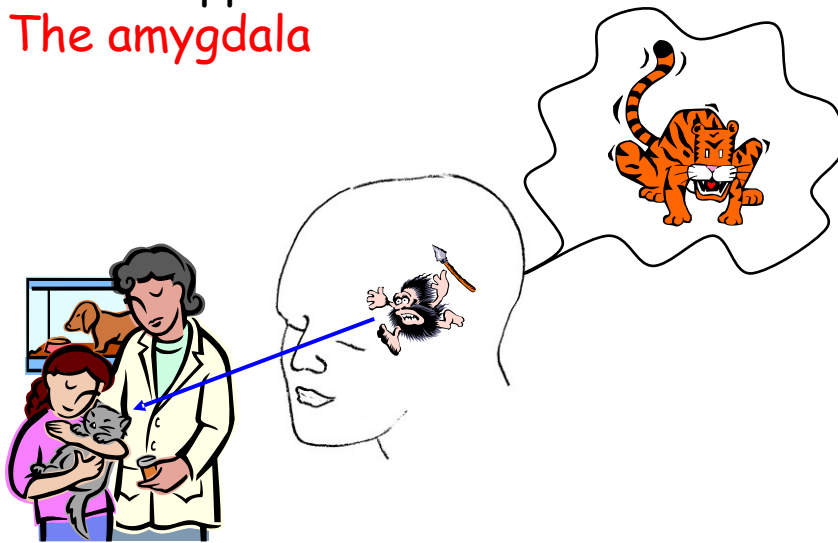
You might be aware of the connection or you might not.

SO

Someone with neck pain following whiplash injury when a white van drove into the back of their car might experience recurrent neck pain every time they see a white van in their rear-view mirror.

They may, or may not,  
be aware of this connection.

What happens in our brains ?  
**The amygdala**



## The amygdala - our emotional sentinel !!

The amygdala is constantly on the lookout for danger and can trigger a “neural alarm” which unleashes a strong emotional response. This in turn leads to “fight or flight” actions.

This can all happen before our thinking mind has had a chance to decide whether this reaction is appropriate to the situation or not. This reaction happens below the surface of our conscious thinking.

# This is what you want to happen in a real survival situation.

You **don't think** - you just

You need **powerful emotions** to drive you to

You need your **body** to mobilise itself to

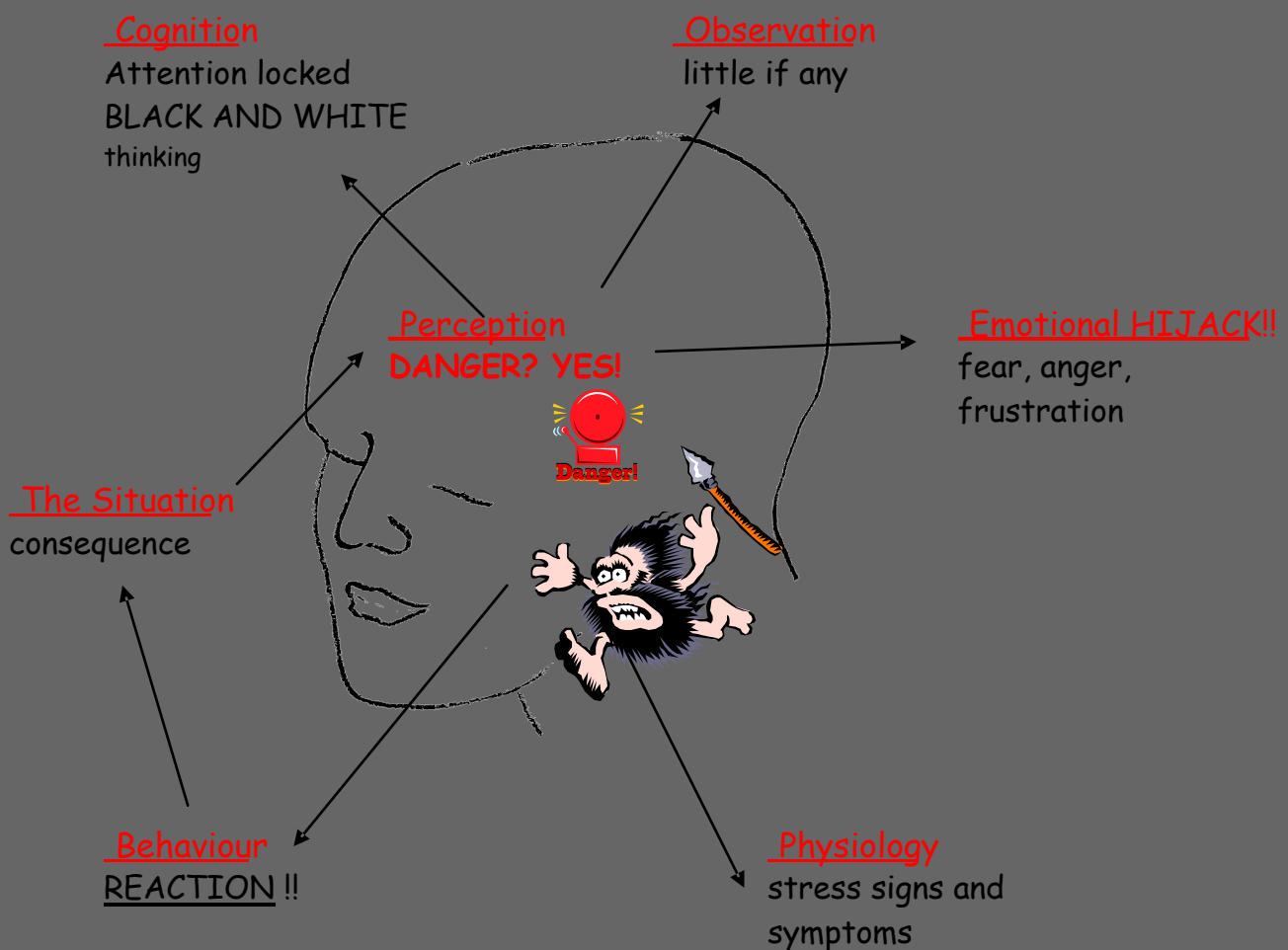
**ACT NOW !**

**ACT NOW !!**

**ACT NOW !!!**

No time to think about consequences.

You just need to **ACT NOW!**



This is great if it's a real survival situation.  
Not so good if it's not.

So - what happens if our brain and our body react automatically, in an extreme way, to situations that are not dangerous to us?

How can we deal with:

- Anxiety
- Phobias
- Post-traumatic stress



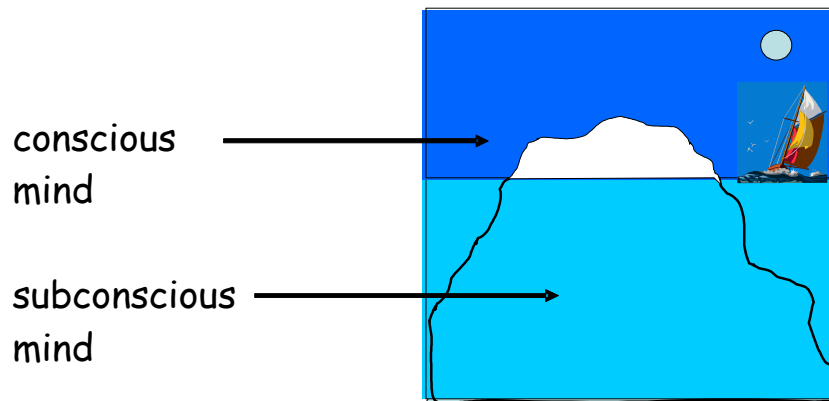
### Understanding Automatic Reactions

Some situations can automatically “trigger” symptoms such as pain, fatigue, anxiety and low mood states.

How does this happen?

If we imagine our mind as an iceberg, our conscious mind is the tip of the iceberg and our subconscious mind is all that lies under the water.

## What is conscious and subconscious in our brains?



Basically, anything that you are aware of right now is in your conscious mind. Everything else slips down into your subconscious mind.

The subconscious mind includes aspects of your brain responsible for all the automatic regulatory functions of your body. It also screens your environment for any sign of danger. It learns what is dangerous from our huge reservoir of genetic knowledge and from our past experience.

## Triggers and Warning Signs

Our triggers are conscious or subconscious reactions to:-

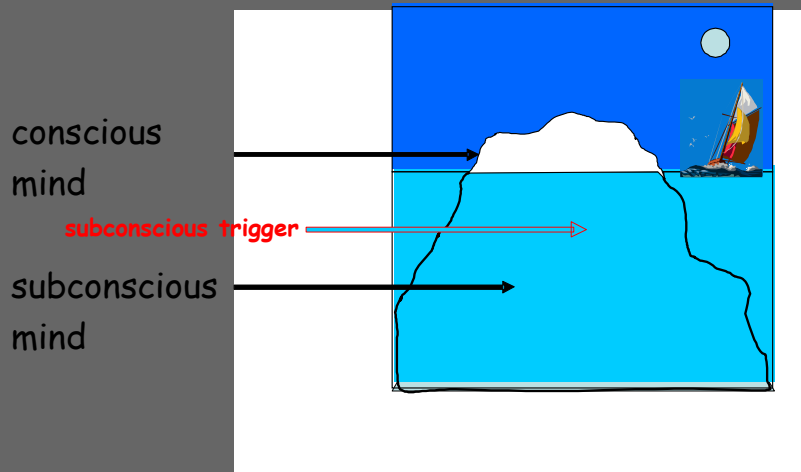
- Our life situation
- Our own thoughts
- Situations that resemble our past experience
- Fluctuations in our physiology or mood



Those triggers can have a positive influence or a negative influence.

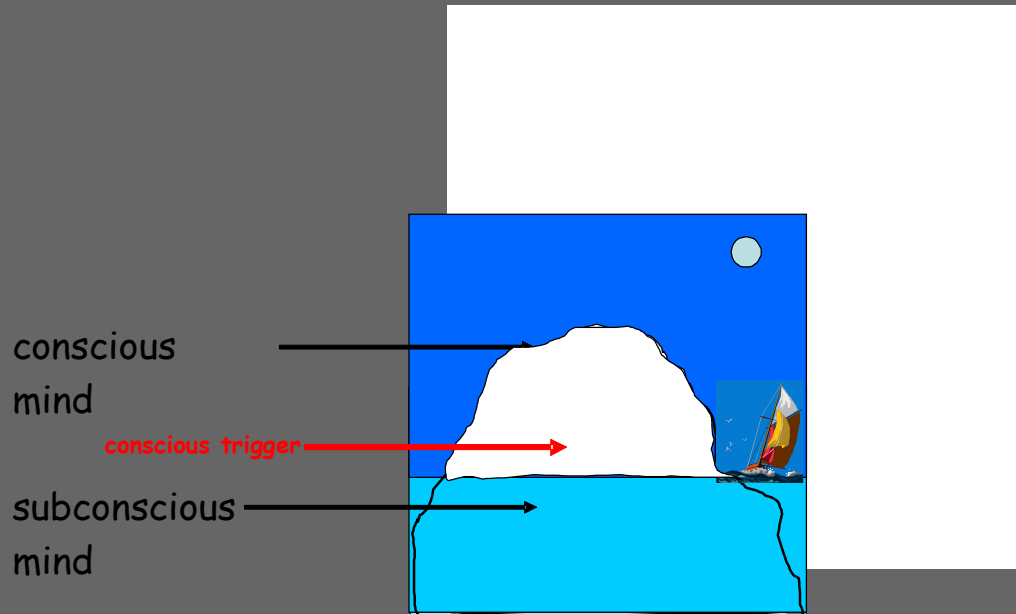
Negative triggers can cause symptoms and strong negative mood states.

If triggers are subconscious, we are unaware of what has influenced changes in our moods or symptoms.



Reacting to these situations can then become a well established habit of the brain.

Through practising self-awareness, mindfulness and relaxation, we can identify triggers and make them conscious, allowing us to then do something different. This can reduce or eliminate the trigger's effects.



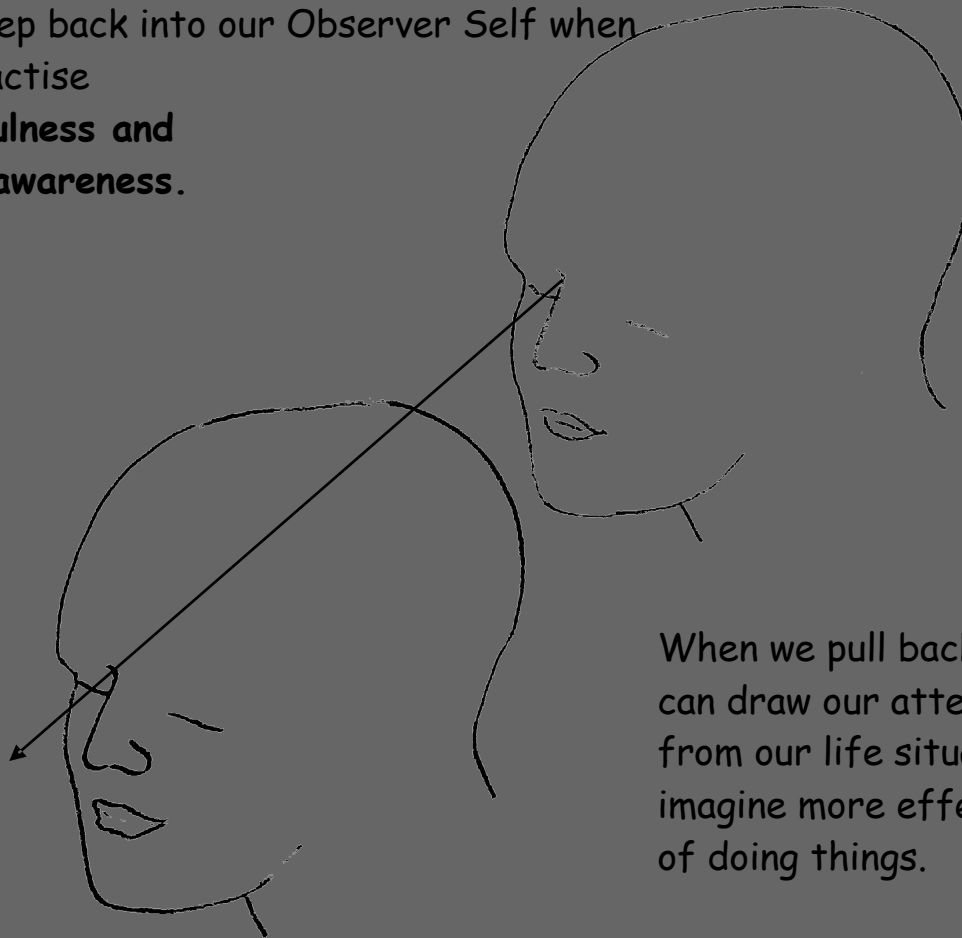
We can raise the iceberg to bring more of our subconscious reactions into our awareness.

This is why we focus on self-awareness and the idea of the "Observer Self".

## Self-Awareness and the Observer Self

It's not such a strange idea when you think about it.  
Basically, the Observer Self is that part of our awareness  
that can step back from our situation  
and look on in a detached way -  
just noticing  
without judging.

We step back into our Observer Self when  
we practise  
**mindfulness and**  
**body awareness.**



When we pull back a bit, we  
can draw our attention away  
from our life situations and  
imagine more effective ways  
of doing things.

When we are more aware or mindful,  
  
we can **RESPOND** rather than **REACT**.

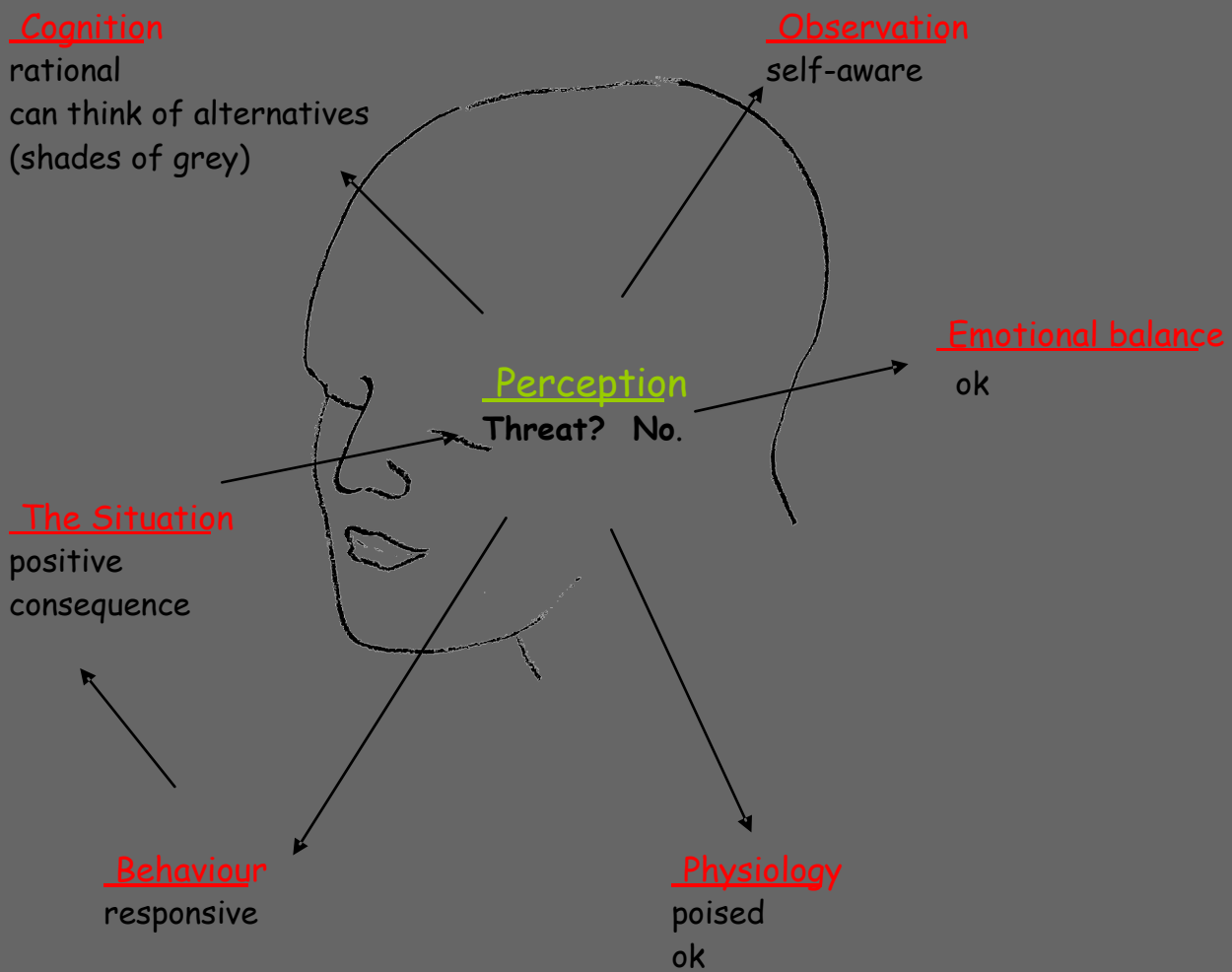


## This is how you might like to respond to non-threatening situations:-

Is this situation a threat?

Possibly but not probably. OK, stay calm, breathe, assess the situation.  
Stay poised, choose the best course of action.  
What outcome do I want ...?

OK ... act



## Summary

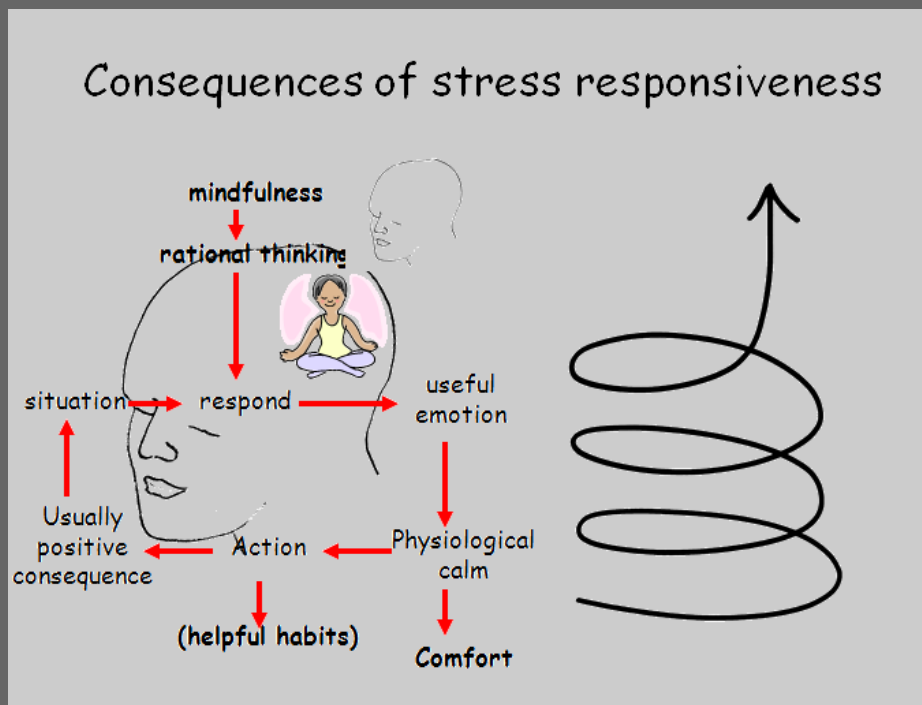
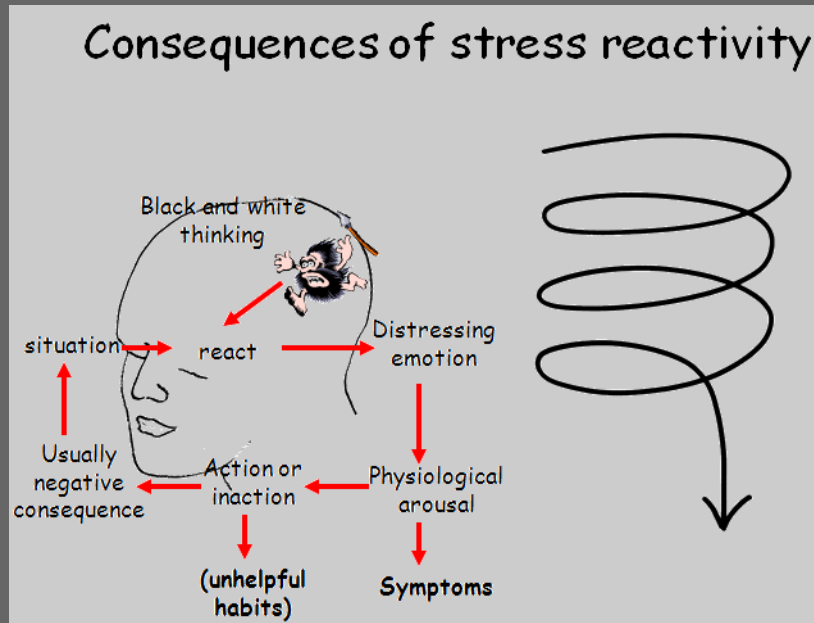
**Our minds affect our bodies.**

**Our bodies affect our minds.**

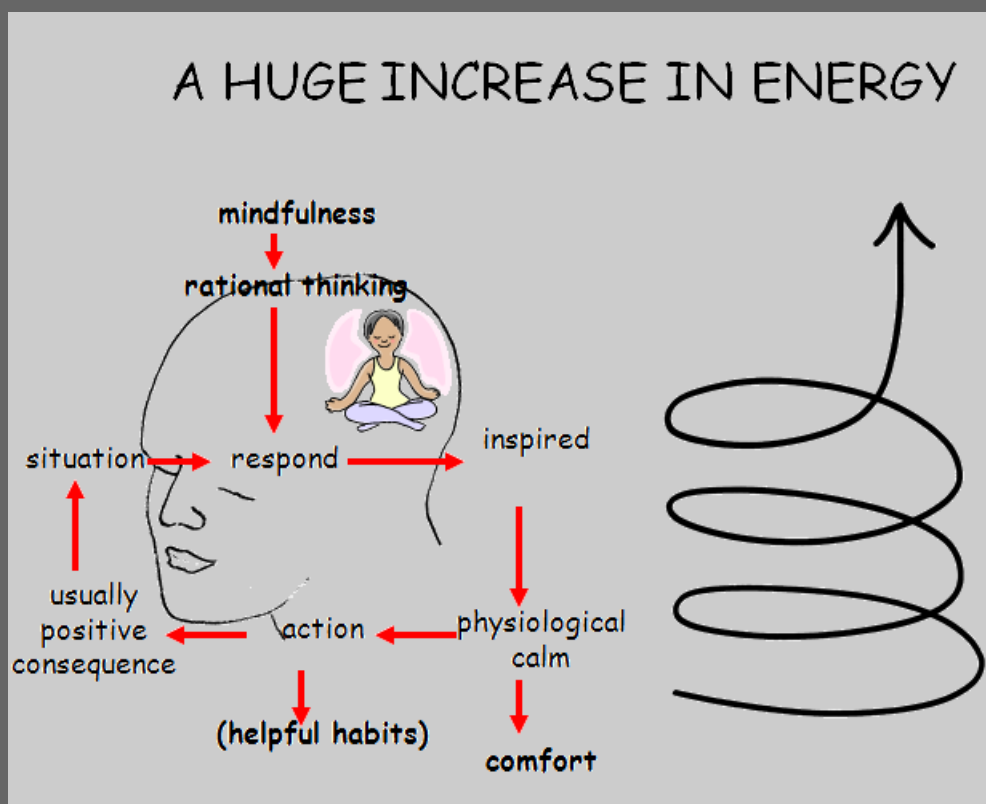
The holistic model offers to explain  
previously unexplained medical conditions.

The self-managed strategies outlined in this manual can have a powerful effect on how we control symptoms and how we can enhance our energy levels.

You may find  
the following diagrams helpful.



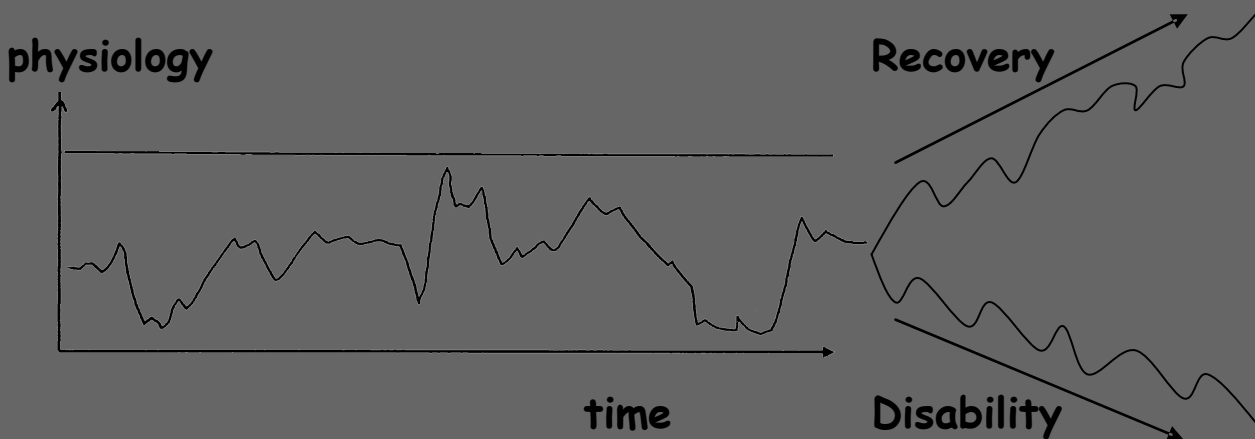
## Outcome of being more responsive and less reactive:-



## Creating a therapeutic routine

- How we plan our day
- How we manage our stress levels, mood, thoughts and activities
- How we manage our relationships
- How we cope with our environment

All of these can enhance recovery and rebalance our physiology - or not.



We can make changes in any aspect of the mind-body environment system.

Our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, awareness and actions will ALL affect our bodies and how they work.

# Where we can make changes

## Observer Self

(self-awareness)

noticing exercises  
mindfulness  
body awareness

## Cognition

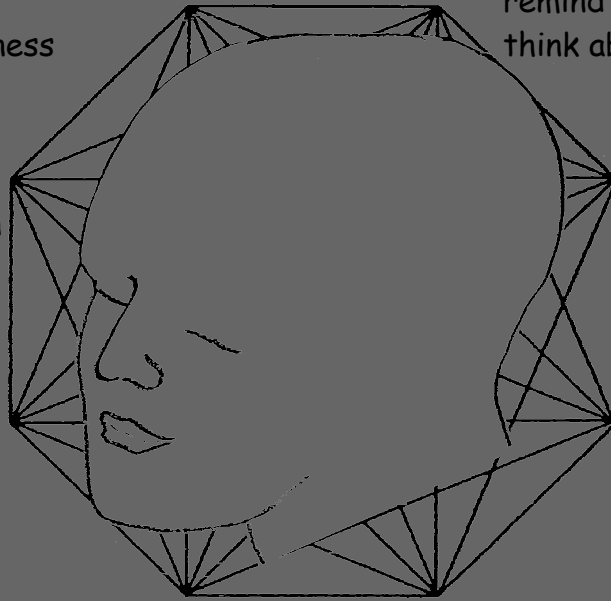
(how you think)

rational thinking (shades of grey)  
remind self of strengths, abilities  
think about future

## Perception

(what's in here)

specific relaxation  
techniques to  
reverse automatic  
reactions



## Emotion

(how you feel)

mood control  
effective  
communication  
listening  
expressing  
feelings  
assertiveness

## The Situation

(what's out there)

Change it if you can.

## Behaviour

(what you can do)

pacing  
planning  
time management  
goal setting

## Physiology

(for your body)

relaxation  
exercise  
complementary therapies

