

Deciding if have Mind Body Syndrome

Take a look at the following list of symptoms and diagnoses that are likely to be caused by MBS (though they can also be caused by other medical conditions). The more of these you have had during your lifetime, the more likely it is that you have MBS. People with several of these conditions have usually seen many doctors and have been given multiple diagnoses, but their doctors have not considered MBS. This is because modern biotechnological medical practice tends to look at each body system in isolation of the others. You may have seen a neurologist, orthopedic or neuro-surgeon, gastroenterologist, rheumatologist, among others and each of them only looks at their particular section of the body. Who is looking at the whole person? MBS occurs in people, not in body parts and we can only understand it if we look at the whole person, i.e. both their mind and their body.

It is very common for MBS symptoms to start in childhood or adolescence. Many people develop headaches, stomach aches, dizziness, fatigue, anxiety or other symptoms while they are young and then later in life develop back or neck pain, fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome or other conditions.

Check each item on this list and write down at what age each set of symptoms first appeared in your life.

1. Heartburn, acid reflux _____
2. Ulcer symptoms or stomach pains _____
3. Irritable bowel syndrome _____
4. Colitis, spastic colon _____
5. Tension headache _____
6. Migraine headache _____
7. Eczema _____
8. Anxiety symptoms and/or panic attacks _____
9. Depression _____
10. Obsessive-compulsive thought patterns _____
11. Eating disorders _____
12. Insomnia or trouble sleeping _____
13. Fibromyalgia _____
14. Back pain _____
15. Neck pain _____
16. Shoulder pain _____
17. Repetitive stress injury _____
18. Reflex sympathetic dystrophy (RSD) _____
19. Temporo-mandibular joint syndrome (TMJ) _____
20. Chronic tendonitis _____
21. Carpal tunnel syndrome _____
22. Trigeminal neuralgia, facial pain _____
23. Numbness, tingling sensations _____
24. Fatigue or Chronic fatigue syndrome _____
25. Palpitations _____

- 26. Chest pain _____
- 27. Hyperventilation _____
- 28. Spastic bladder _____
- 29. Interstitial cystitis _____

- 30. Pelvic pain _____
- 31. Muscle tenderness _____
- 32. Tachycardia or low blood pressure _____
- 33. Tinnitus _____
- 34. Dizziness _____

History of stressors

Now mark down your age at the time each of the following stressful events occurred in your life.

- 1. Illness or death in your family or friends _____
- 2. Divorce or marital problems _____
- 3. Legal problems _____
- 4. Accident or injury _____
- 5. New relationship or marriage _____
- 6. Difficulties at work or change in job or business _____
- 7. Gain of a new family member or change in the family structure _____
- 8. Change in financial situation _____
- 9. Change in living situation _____
- 10. Violent experiences _____
- 11. Changes in sexual functioning or other issues regarding sex _____

Now answer the following questions:

Have you had any traumatic or violent experiences in childhood? Yes/No/Unsure

Did you feel loved and nurtured as a child? Yes/No/Unsure

Have you had significant losses or feelings of being abandoned? Yes/No

Were you happy as a child? Did you “fit in” and have close friends as a child? Yes/No

What words would you use to describe your father?

What words would you use to describe your mother?

Childhood experiences create very powerful reactions in our minds and these reactions live on for the rest of our lives. Emotions that are generated when we are young can very easily get triggered later in life and when they are triggered, can cause the start of the vicious cycle known as Mind Body Syndrome. A patient had a very difficult childhood because his father was abusive to him and never spent time with him or cared for him. After his parents divorced when he was 11 years old, he went to live with his father and when his father remarried, he was sent to live in a home for orphans and disturbed youth for 6 years until he turned 18. He had a tremendous amount of underlying anger and resentment towards his father (and towards his mother who allowed this to happen). However, he grew up without the development of any MBS type illnesses. When he was 35 years old, now employed and married with small children, he thought he was “over” his traumatic youth. One day, his father was visiting the area, and he asked his dad to stop by and see the grandchildren for the first time. His father came, was drunk at the time, and left after 15 minutes. Within days, this patient developed severe abdominal pain, back pain, and fatigue. For the ensuing five years, he couldn’t figure out or resolve these symptoms despite seeing many doctors. When I saw him, I explained to him that his father had poured the gasoline in the unconscious mind for his whole youth, and it only took a small event (his father treating his children the same way that he treated the patient) to light the match and trigger a massive outpouring of unconscious emotions which caused severe MBS.

Studies show that when you take animals in their infancy away from their mothers for a significant amount of time (creating an environment of neglect) or if you raise them in a stressful and fearful environment (creating an environment of abuse), these animals will have abnormal autonomic nervous system responses for the rest of their lives. They are conditioned to “over-react” to stressors with an exaggerated fight or flight response. This pattern of over-reaction causes MBS by the mechanisms mentioned above.

It is well known that a large percentage of the people with irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, TMJ syndrome, and other MBS illnesses have been abused and/or neglected as children or adolescents. The type of abuse can be sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or physical abuse. One of the commonest statements I hear when starting an interview of a patient with MBS is “I was never loved as a child.” People who have suffered from severe childhood abuse are most likely to have many forms of MBS. I saw one woman whose mother was a prostitute and a cocaine addict, her father was a heroin addict who sexually abused her and even tortured her. She became a prostitute and a cocaine addict as an adolescent. She eventually went to jail, broke her addiction to drugs, and was able to raise a daughter and find a job. However, over all these years of traumatic experiences, she had developed over 16 different MBS illnesses including

fibromyalgia, migraine headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, TMJ syndrome, chronic fatigue, back pain, insomnia, anxiety and depression. The strong emotions that are generated in our minds are stored in the amygdala for the rest of our lives, even if we are not aware of these emotions

Not everyone with MBS has had severe childhood traumas however. For many people, the childhood issues that generate strong emotions are normal childhood experiences. How many of us have felt jealous of a sibling or ostracized by friends in middle school or picked on by a bully in elementary school? These common experiences can also generate enough emotions to cause MBS syndrome, either at the time of the events or later in life.

For example, there was a man who moved from a poorer neighborhood to a more upscale neighborhood as a child. He was overweight and didn't dress like the new kids and was teased for several years. However, his parents were loving and he grew up without any MBS symptoms. When he was 27 years old, he moved from one church to a more upscale church, and one day while working on a church project, got an anxiety attack. A dozen years later, he developed ringing in his ears to such a severe degree that he could barely function. This condition started just before a holiday when he was visiting his mother in law. When I asked about his relationship with his mother in law, he stated that he hates her because she has never accepted him as being good enough for her daughter and always makes derogatory statements towards him. He grew up with a core issue that has been stored in his emotional memory for his whole life: not fitting in, not being good enough, being put down by those who see themselves as "better," and feeling insecure, disrespected and resentful towards those people. The ringing in the ears was his unconscious mind's way of saying to him, "You're not going to listen to her anymore." Unfortunately, once this vicious cycle we call MBS gets started, it can continued for years unless it is recognized as MBS and dealt with accordingly.

Once you have carefully and honestly reviewed the stresses that have occurred in your life, you will most likely begin to see patterns. You will be able to identify your "core issues", i.e. those issues that have been stored in your unconscious emotional mind and that are most likely to trigger the onset of physical and psychological symptoms. Some of the common core issues are:

1. Loss and abandonment (losing a parent or sibling, divorce, moving, etc.)
2. Childhood abuse or neglect (physical, sexual, emotional abuse, never feeling loved or cared for)
3. Not fitting in or being ostracized (being teased or picked on, being shy and reserved, not being athletic or popular, etc.)
4. Feeling pressure to be good, perfect or to succeed (this can be placed upon us by parents, other family members, church or religious organizations, and ourselves as we shall see)
5. Feeling inferior to other family members, often siblings (not as beautiful, funny, athletic, interesting, accomplished, etc.)
6. Never feeling good enough, having to "earn" love from parents, feeling criticized much of the time
7. Feeling overly close to a parent, such as being upset when you are apart, being "best

friends” with one parent, confiding secrets to one or both parents, or being the confidante of a parent

When you identify your core issues, look at the times in your life when you developed any of the MBS manifestations. Think carefully about what events occurred just prior to the onset of the symptoms, usually within a few days to a few weeks before the symptoms began or worsened. You will likely find the connections between your physical (and psychological) symptoms and events which triggered your core issues.

Personality Traits/Psychological factors

These factors are commonly seen in people with MBS. Check those that apply to you.

Would you describe yourself as:

1. Having low self-esteem _____
2. Being a perfectionist _____
3. Having high expectations of yourself _____
4. Wanting to be good and/or be liked _____
5. Frequently hostile and/or aggressive _____
6. Frequently feeling guilt _____
7. Feeling dependent on others _____
8. Being conscientious _____
9. Being hard on yourself _____
10. Being overly responsible _____
11. Often responsible for others _____
12. Having rage or resentment _____
13. Worrying, being anxious or afraid _____
14. Being sad _____

The psychological traits listed above are typically seen in people with MBS. A significant part of the mechanism in our minds that creates and perpetuates MBS is conflict that occurs within our minds. Many of the traits above are part of the conscience, i.e. things that we feel obligated to do or ways we feel obligated to be. Most people with MBS are people who try hard, who care what others think of them, who want to be good and want to be liked. They tend to be conscientious, responsible and hard on themselves, i.e. they are often self-critical. These personality traits are generally found in good people, people you would like to know and be friends with. However, the problem with people like this is that they tend to put extra pressure on themselves. They tend to get down on themselves and “beat themselves up” for their failings. This internal pressure that we put on ourselves is an important component of the development of MBS. In particular, when external events and stressors occur and we compound the stress by putting more pressure on ourselves, we are more likely to develop MBS.

Now consider your responses to all these checklists. Place the symptoms and diagnoses that have occurred next to the life stresses, and see if a pattern emerges. This is a critical step in figuring out if you have MBS. Be as open and honest as you can in this process.

It is common for mild stressors in adult life to trigger significant symptoms if the stressor is related to earlier (often childhood) stressors. Neglect or lack of love by a parent can create a childhood hurt that can get triggered later in life by seemingly mild interactions.

Here are some cases I have encountered in my work with MBS. See if any of them remind you of a similar situation with you.

*A woman who felt that her mother never really nurtured her and was often off “playing bridge and tennis” developed fibromyalgia at a mildly stressful time in her life, when she [and her husband] were building a new home and raising two small children. When I asked what her mom was doing at the time, she started to sob, because her mom was still off playing bridge and tennis rather than nurturing her daughter and grandchildren.

*A 35-year-old man developed pain in his groin one day, which persisted for three years despite seeing multiple doctors (including neurologists, urologists, anesthesiologists and pain specialists). His sister had died suddenly two weeks prior to the onset of the pain. The night before the pain started, he had been to a bachelor’s party and felt guilty about getting an “erotic massage” so soon after his sister’s death.

*A 45-year-old woman developed stomach pains and anxiety attacks in the fall one year after her husband died. He was terminally ill and she had to decide about disconnecting his life support, which was a conflict with her religious beliefs. Each fall, her pains returned and increased. Several GI specialists saw her, but no one could help her resolve her pain. Through my program, she learned that her feelings about her husband’s death caused her pain. Her anxiety attacks were generally in the afternoon, the time of day that he died.

*A 48-year-old woman developed fibromyalgia symptoms during a time when her three teenagers were very demanding of her time, her husband took another job and worked extra hours, and her mother-in-law and her brother both moved in with her—all of these obligations preventing her from going back to school.

*A 22-year-old woman was working as a full-time nanny for two children, whom she adored. The family had a new baby who cried much of the time. The nanny developed leg pains and numbness that became so severe that she had to quit her job.

*A woman developed migraine headaches as a child after her parents divorced and then developed interstitial cystitis as an adult after her own divorce.

*A man developed fibromyalgia after his son told him that he was gay, moved out, and started smoking.

*A woman developed pain in her buttocks after her husband retired.

Sometimes the connection between life events and MBS symptoms is not obvious. In my own life, I developed neck pain after my daughter was born. She was our first child, and I was extremely happy. Even so, her arrival complicated our lives. I was busy with work and busy at home, and my daughter didn't sleep well at night. I was up several times a night with her, walking up and down the stairs with her. My wife and I disagreed on how to deal with her crying at night. Now, looking back, I realize I was stressed and feeling resentment at the changes in my life. Not wanting to take out that resentment on my daughter, my wife or my work, I started waking up in the mornings with neck pain.

If you use the checklists on this worksheet to look at your life, you might begin to see patterns emerging. MBS disorders typically occur in people who have had significant stressful experiences, often in childhood. The symptoms usually start at times of stress, whether the stress was recognized or not, and often the emotions that lead to MBS are unconscious—we are not aware of the anger, fear, guilt, sense of loss, or abandonment that is triggering the symptoms. Consider what your story might be and what might explain your symptoms.

Perhaps just doing these exercises makes it clear to you that you do have MBS. Maybe you can see the connections between your life experiences and your symptoms. If so, you are probably reading the right book.

If you're not sure, though, how your life experiences relate to your pain, consider these steps:

*Discuss these issues with a counselor or good friend to help uncover the connections between the stresses in your life or your symptoms.

*See a doctor or psychologist who specializes in MBS. There is a list of such people in the appendix. If you would like to make an appointment with me, you can contact me at 248-849-4728.

*Do further reading. I recommend reading Dr. John Sarno's landmark book, *The Mind Body Prescription*. Dr. Sarno is a pioneer in this field, and this book describes how the MBS syndrome works (his term for it is Tension Myositis Syndrome). He reports that many people have been cured of their pain just by reading his book.

I have also had similar results with some patients. For some, just understanding how the Mind Body Syndrome works is enough to unlearn their pain. For most, however, it is the first step.

This web site will take you through all the steps in a comprehensive educational program to help you understand yourself, your stressors, your unconscious mind and the root causes of your physical and psychological symptoms.