

There are few things more terrifying than a diagnosis of serious illness, whether it's for you or someone you love. It's the moment the world stops spinning and all your plans and dreams, even your arguments and daily niggles, pale into insignificance. The only thing that matters is how you, or your loved one, can get well again.

After the initial shock, it's easy to feel helpless as your condition is managed by teams of medical experts. But many alternative practitioners and healers, along with some conventional doctors and nurses, believe that people can supplement their healing and in some cases even cure themselves of terminal conditions that conventional medicine has been unable to help.

Although the link between the mind and the body is still one of the least-understood phenomena in the scientific world, it's an area that's being keenly explored. There's growing evidence that with a positive attitude and certain visualisation techniques, some people can cure themselves of anything from depression to cancer.

In his book *How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body* (\$9.99, Hay House), former pharmaceuticals scientist Dr David Hamilton says: 'Research published every other week is building a considerably strong case that our previous assumptions and beliefs – that the mind could not heal the body – are just plain wrong.'

Recent studies at Harvard University in the US have been able to show the incredible power

'Our thoughts, emotions and beliefs can cause real chemical and physical changes in the brain and the body'

of visualisation in particular, and discovered that it seems to work because the brain is unable to distinguish between what's imagined and what's real.

One study had a group of people visualising they were playing and hearing a series of piano notes for two hours a day for five consecutive days, while another group actually played the same notes. MRI brain scans of both groups were nearly identical.

Does this mean if we visualise ourselves getting better it will

Dr David Hamilton



happen in practice? Dr Hamilton believes so. He claims the mind can heal almost anything with the right mental attitude, belief, determination, and a positive outlook. Over the years he's collected stories from people who have healed themselves of medical conditions, from heart problems to hay fever, through visualisation. Many cancer patients, for instance, imagined the cancer cells being removed from their body.

What's more, the mind's incredible capacity to control many physical symptoms, from pain to Parkinson's disease, is backed up by the placebo effect.

'Recent research has shown that when a person takes a placebo and believes it to be a real medicine, chemical changes occur in the brain that can alter immune and growth hormone levels,' Dr Hamilton explains.

'So we know for certain that thoughts, emotions and beliefs are not just subjective ideas in the mind, but cause real chemical and physical changes in the brain and throughout the body,' he continues. 'Chemical changes in the brain lead to

cellular and genetic changes that heal the body.'

He's found that techniques such as neurolinguistic programming (NLP), visualisation, meditation and affirmations all produce amazing results, as will any form of healing – provided that the person really believes it's going to make them better.

Nowadays, many hospitals offer complementary and holistic healthcare on top of medical help. Steve Rowley is a senior nurse in the oncology department at



Clockwise from above: Jeanne was diagnosed with a crippling heart condition in 2002; Jeanne (right) with a friend; after using energy healing on herself, she's now made a full and remarkable recovery

University College Hospital in London, which offers a mix of reflexology, aromatherapy, reiki and massage. 'We've seen that it benefits patients in many ways, making them feel relaxed and positive about their situation,' he says. 'It is without a doubt valuable to patients, and they like it. We don't know how, for instance, reiki healing works, but it does.'

Miracles do happen

When Jeanne Ames, 59, from Norfolk, was diagnosed with an enlarged heart and leaky valve (dilated cardiomyopathy), the prognosis for her future didn't look good. The potentially terminal condition left her breathless, suffering from chest pains and unable to walk without a stick. In early 2002, doctors explained that she'd probably need a heart transplant – although the chances of getting one were slim – as well as a heart bypass operation.

As an experienced energy healer of 18 years, Jeanne decided to set to work on herself, using meditation, NLP and crystal healing techniques.

She imagined her heart growing stronger by the day, and also began visualising the colour orange surrounding her heart – in colour therapy, orange is

related to this organ.

Jeanne's health started to improve in just a few months, and in April 2002 her consultant commented on the dramatic improvements, as she was now able to walk without getting breathless or using a stick. A heart specialist at Papworth Hospital, near Cambridge, told Jeannie there was now no need for a bypass, because there was no longer any sign of an enlarged heart or valve failure. In fact, her heart was normal. The specialist



was unable to explain her miraculous recovery.

To those who doubt the possibility of spiritual healing for serious conditions, there is an argument to support spontaneous remission and recovery. Doctors have long known of occasional instances of skin and kidney cancers that just vanished. And a recent study of Norwegian women found that spontaneous remission of breast cancer may have occurred in over 20 per cent of cases. But why does this happen? Is it just by chance, or can it be down to a person's outlook, emotional response and attitude to life?

There is some evidence that our immune system is capable of wiping out even advanced disease. In February this year, the journal *Lung Cancer* reported on a man whose tumour had spontaneously disappeared. The patient had high levels of a certain antibody molecule in his blood, and this same molecule was also found where the tumours had been. Doctors at Japan's Nagasaki University said this indicated that his immune system had destroyed the tumours. But how and why did his natural defences react in this way?

Prof Peter Johnson, Chair of Medical Oncology at Cancer Research UK, is a British pioneer of research into this field. He explains: 'The immune system's role is tantalising because we know something is at work in spontaneous remission, but we don't know what makes the system do it. The question is, how do you turn the immune system →