



## Practitioner Corner:

# From a Functional Medicine Perspective by Mark Hyman, M.D.

In his important new breakthrough book, *The UltraMind Solution: Fix Your Broken Brain By Healing Your Body First* (Scribner, 2008), Dr. Hyman calls himself an “accidental psychiatrist,” a physician whose efforts to help people find and eliminate the causes of their physical disorders have led to the surprising discovery that his treatments often cure their mental problems as well.

Dr. Hyman, who is the founder and medical director of the UltraWellness Center in Lenox, Massachusetts, explains how problems of the brain, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disease, attention deficit disorder (ADD), Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, and mood swings can be prevented, improved, or even cured by his innovative program of diet, nutritional supplements, exercise, meditation, and lifestyle changes. Dr. Hyman’s findings are a harbinger of a new approach to dealing with what he calls “broken brains,” representing a more natural, healthy, and effective method that might one day make traditional psychiatric medication and treatment obsolete.

### **Functional Medicine: A new paradigm**

Referring to the widespread incidence and exorbitant cost of treating mental disorders, Dr. Hyman explains that, “Functional medicine is a map or model for addressing a chronic disease epidemic which affects over half of Americans and costs 80% of our health care dollars.” He says that while conventional methods are effective

for acute illness, they simply do not do the job with chronic disease. “We need to change access to health care and create improved coverage for our population,” he adds, “But we have to change the type of health care we have access to.” Dr. Hyman says that functional medicine grows out of Western science and predicts, “It will reinvigorate primary care medicine and provide success, where today there is mostly failure, in addressing the epidemic of chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, obesity, autoimmune disease, digestive problems, and brain and mood disorders.”

He does not reject scientific medicine and, in fact, the future of scientific medicine is functional medicine. Dr. Hyman also distinguishes functional medicine from alternative or integrative medicine. The key difference lies in functional medicine’s focus on finding the root causes of an individual’s health problems, as opposed to a focus on prescribing alternative treatments such as acupuncture or biofeedback for conventional symptom-based diagnoses.

The aim, he says, “Is to navigate through the maze of chronic disease and understand the very few basic things that can go wrong, that





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can cause a myriad of symptoms and be easily corrected by addressing the root. So if you have depression because you have a vitamin B12 deficiency, or you have a food allergy or you have mercury poisoning or your thyroid is not functioning properly or you've had some psychological trauma, each one of these things is different and needs a different treatment."

#### The Emotional Epidemic

"We have 1.1 billion people in the world with mood problems or cognitive disorders," explains Dr. Hyman. "One in 10 Americans is on antidepressants, one in 10 children are on stimulant medication, and one in four people will be affected by major depression during their lifetime. Today, we have a chance to fundamentally address the causes. This has never really been possible before, because we never understood how biology works and how it all fits together."

As he explains in *The UltraMind Solution*, "There are only a few, common underlying mechanisms responsible for all disease. Our diet is becoming increasingly toxic, our environment is increasingly toxic, we have significant nutritional imbalances and deficiencies, and we're under constant stress. The results weigh on us day after day after day." He adds that while we cannot escape exposure to all environmental toxins, we can avoid many in food, water, and pesticides.

"The average person consumes a gallon of neu-

rotoxic pesticides a year," Dr. Hyman remarks, "And there are 3,500 different additives put into our food supply."

In his new book, he explains that the old idea that the blood-brain barrier acts as an impenetrable shield against harmful elements is no longer sufficient. "What I found," he says, "Much to my surprise, was that when I treated people for problems with insulin, or when I treated food allergies or when I got people detoxed from heavy metals, their mental problems also went away. Their mood got better, their depression lifted, their dementia reversed. There were children with autism who began to talk again and others I treated for asthma or allergies who suddenly found their attention deficit disorder (ADD) went away. They went from having brain chaos to having healthy inner brain function. And I said, 'Wow, what's going on here?'"

Dr. Hyman writes that if people "eat wild, fresh, organic, local, non-genetically modified food grown in virgin mineral- and nutrient-rich soils that has not been transported across vast distances and stored for months before being eaten... and work and live outside, breathe only fresh unpolluted air, drink only pure, clean water, sleep nine hours a night, move their bodies every day, and are free from chronic stressors and exposure to environmental toxins," then, perhaps, they might not need supplements.



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For the rest of us, whom he considers to be all of us, supplements are an absolute necessity. His book lists daily nutrients that he considers basic for everyone, including vitamins A, B1, B2, B3, B6, B12, C, D, E, K, carotenoids, biotin, choline, and inositol; macrominerals calcium, chloride, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, and sulfur; trace minerals copper, iodine, iron, manganese, molybdenum, selenium, vanadium, zinc, boron, chromium, and silicon; essential amino acids tryptophan, meth-ionine, phenylalanine, threonine, valine, leucine, isoleucine, and lysine; and essential fatty acids linoleic acid, gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), alpha-linoleic acid (ALA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

“Think of nutrients as fertilizer for your brain,” Dr. Hyman says. “Think of them as little helpers that improve communications and connections.” He believes that approximately 80% of us will do well and maintain a healthy brain on basic supplements (combined with a healthy lifestyle and diet), including a high-quality multivitamin; calcium and magnesium; vitamin D3, omega-3 fatty acids; probiotics; and the methylation factors folic acid, B6, and B12.

#### **Better Diet, Better Brain**

Dr. Hyman has a simple two-fold approach for improving both brain and body: take out the bad stuff and put in the good stuff. He pinpoints a few dietary elements as causes of major mental and

physical problems, urging us to eliminate them from our menu: gluten and dairy, which he calls “staples of our American diet;” sugar and high-fructose corn syrup; trans or hydrogenated fats, which he calls “markers of poor quality food;” and artificial sweeteners

“Hidden food allergies are a major unrecognized epidemic in the twenty-first century,” he asserts, adding that most of us fail to make the connection between what we eat and what we feel.

“Optimal nutrition is the most important factor in keeping your brain healthy,” says Dr. Hyman. “Feeding your brain is not something most of us know how to do.” He explains that most doctors know little or nothing about proper nutrition, something that is slowly beginning to change, as it becomes more evident that “vitamins and minerals are so essential for brain function and health.”

Dr. Hyman is on the Board of Advisors of the Yellow Courtyard and the Earthrose Institute.