

It is becoming more recognized that emotional stress has a significant effect on the immune system. People who have a more pleasant disposition tend to have fewer illnesses and recover more quickly than individuals with cloudy dispositions. Recently a study was conducted that showed that not only can we carry the mental memories of previous emotionally stressful situations, we can also carry immune memories.

In this study they looked at a group of individuals who had experienced two significant childhood emotional stresses; physical abuse and time in an orphanage. The way that they measured the immune function was to measure for antibodies to the herpes simplex type 1 virus. This virus is responsible for cold sores and fever blisters. It is a virus that never goes away once acquired, but is usually easily controlled by the body. In other words, in individuals with healthy immune systems, they typically don't have outbreaks very often.

This virus is carried by two thirds of Americans. When it is active, there are high levels of antibodies in the blood stream. In individuals who are immune suppressed, they will have higher antibody levels than individuals with normal immune systems. In the individuals who had experienced significant childhood stress, the antibody levels were abnormally high..

This type of immune suppression does not only affect the herpes virus. It is a reasonable assumption that all illnesses that depend on a healthy immune system (which are all of them) would be affected by this effect. Individuals with an emotionally suppressed immune system would likely have more colds, flues, and even cancer than those with a normal immune system.

It would also seem likely that individuals with a more optimistic disposition could counter act this effect. If you have had significant stressors in your life, whether they occurred in childhood or last week, choosing to remain positive about life could re-strengthen your immune system.