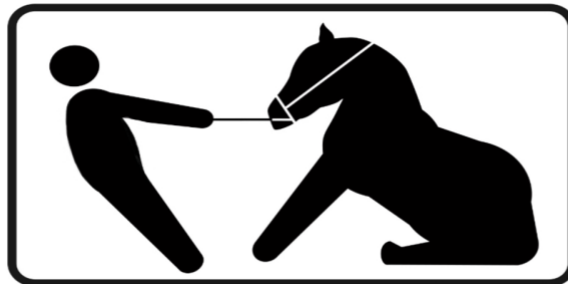




Health and Resistance

Written by Joelle Solomon – May 27, 2022



We can all relate to this experience: we desire to start taking better care of ourselves by ditching an old habit or incorporating something new, we know it's in our best interest, it will be good for us and it fits our vision of how we want to live. But no matter how important it is to us, there seems to be a force that keeps us from actually committing to it. Perhaps we have a hard time beginning, or slowly old habits begin to take hold, or maybe it begins to feel so stressful that it's not realistic to keep going. This force, no matter how it shows up is called: *resistance*.

Resistance feels like an internal, repelling force that prevents us from doing what is most important to us. It's usually strongest when we engage in any act that rejects immediate gratification in favour of long-term growth, health, or integrity. It can be incredibly confusing and frustrating but it is a completely normal experience and in fact, a very important one as it will always show up when we are doing something new that is challenging old patterns and beliefs.

Unfortunately, rather than viewing this force as something to overcome, we usually give in to it and quit without knowing what actually happened and often beat ourselves up about it.

Why would there be a force that stops us from being successful and healthy?

The answer comes down to our biology – protection. If you think in terms of survival, our brains and bodies will interpret anything new, outside of our current comforts, and especially ones that challenge our reality as a threat. If we were living in pre colonial times, and wanted to change the location of our shelter, there would be a risk that our new location wouldn't have as much food or access to fresh water. There might also be a higher population of predators. We would inevitably be on high alert for a while until we start to settle into our new reality.

It might seem dramatic to compare a new health practice to the threat of starvation and death but our body's alert system isn't logical at all. A threat is a threat and it will activate certain behaviours in order to protect itself.

Why would our bodies perceive a new health practice as a threat?

Most often, it's because we are challenging the reality and identity (shelter) we have created for ourselves. We all have a story in our minds of what "type" of person we are and what types of activities, thoughts, and habits we therefore engage in. We all have narratives surrounding how "good enough" or "capable" we are (that usually aren't a reflection of the truth).

When we begin to challenge these narratives, it can cause our bodies to react in confusing ways. If we are trying to eat healthier (new shelter) but have an identity as an "unhealthy" person (old shelter), we will be more likely to meet a lot of resistance along the way as our body believes it is being threatened.

Other common reasons our bodies will panic when we begin new health practices:

Past Adverse Experiences

Perhaps there was a point in the past where a traumatic event was tied to food, health, or the body in some way. It is a good opportunity to explore this with a mental health professional.

Goals Don't Align With Needs

Sometimes if we are in a season of stress in our life and are also trying to incorporate more health practices like exercise or diets, it can simply be too much. What might actually be needed is more rest, more sleep, or more nourishing food.

So, How does resistance show up?

It can be quite confusing when resistance shows up in non-apparent life or death situations because it appears in ways that are not straight forward but in the way we begin engaging with the practices themselves:

Chasing Perfection

If resistance wants us to stay in unhealthy (perceived as "safe") patterns, what better way than to make our goal unattainable. It might be a perfect body, perfect diet, or perfect enlightenment that we are chasing and this usually steers us towards extreme, overly strict practices with a momentum that is impossible to maintain.

Self Sabotage

This is usually behaviours or thoughts that feel intrusive and out of our control. We are doing well when suddenly the voice in our head starts telling us how incapable we are and we might as well give up (AKA the new shelter isn't safe). We then find ourselves right back into the behaviour we wanted to change.

Procrastination

While often times, procrastination can look like sitting on the couch, unable to turn off a TV show, sometimes it can show up in sneaky ways that seem productive like choosing to compulsively clean or being unable to put work away from the week, etc. These are all forms of procrastination (perceived as “safety” by our body). Usually procrastination takes over when our goal seems too big to accomplish or we are pressuring ourselves to get there NOW. This can be completely overwhelming and immobilizing.

The new practice is an attempt to fix

AKA, we believe we are not good enough as we are. Rather than the new health practice being motivated from a place of care, it is coming from a place of punishment, hatred, or seeking approval. Imagine trying to build a new home in an environment filled with punishment and hatred.

Extremes

A lot of people really like the idea of a “quick fix” that can change years of unhealthy habits in just a few weeks. Resistance loves this enthusiasm because it knows we are working from a momentum that will be impossible to maintain. Any sudden or extreme changes to food, exercise, or our daily routines will shock our body. Not only will we likely crash and burn, but we could possibly injure ourselves, cause hormonal damage, or mental health problems. Remember the importance of balance and start slow. Planning to build a new shelter takes preparation, thoughtfulness and a strong foundation.

Real changes to our health takes time and if you are committed to long term change, resistance will inevitably show up, sometimes every day, and it’s our choice how to respond to it. Each time it starts to take the wheel, it’s a good opportunity to pause and reflect. Remember not to be too hard on yourself when it does take over, you haven’t failed and it’s another opportunity to learn more about yourself.

Celebrate the small ways you overcome resistance every day that are in favour of your goal, whether that’s pushing yourself past your comfort zone, taking time to listen to your fears, or recognizing you need a break.

Having the awareness of how and why it is showing up can help us see it as an opportunity to learn how to truly develop a relationship with our bodies, our health and our resistance.

Joelle Solomon

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PS – These recommendations should not be considered medical advice. I encourage you to talk to your doctor or other health care professional so you can care for your body in a way that works best for you.

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