

Have you ever asked yourself why you get sick?

There have been many different answers to this question since the dawn of civilization but it wasn't until the work of Louis Pasteur that science started to see the connection between microbes and human diseases. The application of the germ theory to public health eliminated many diseases in the Western world as we began to develop sewage disposal systems, clean water supplies and antibiotics. Today, all the infectious diseases combined claim less than 1 percent of American lives.

It is hard to believe that there could possibly be a downside to this accomplishment but there is. A concept as powerful and successful as the germ theory often blinds us to other causes of disease. A competing idea during Pasteur's time came from the physician and researcher, Jacques Bechamp. Bechamp felt that the overall condition of the "host" determined the course of a disease. He felt diseases were the manifestation of many variables that were unique to each individual.

Pasteur and Bechamp started a debate that is still being carried on today - the germ versus host debate. Even though the debate still continues, we are starting to embrace the idea that both scientists were right. The diseases that now plague us in the 21st Century are multifactorial, a consequence of our genetics, environment and lifestyle. DISEASES of CULTURE might be the best way to describe them.

All of us are born with genetic variations that can eventually lead to a disease state if they are not nurtured properly. These genes encode for our uniqueness in how we respond to the circumstances of our environment and our personal behaviors. What that means is that your lifestyle matters to your overall health - how and what we

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eat, drink and breathe, whether or not we exercise regularly, and how well we handle the many stressors in our lives.

The stressors in our lives can be categorized as psychological, biochemical, environmental and structural but it is easier to just think of them as nurture while your genomic/genetic status is nature. During the 20th Century, the scientific argument was which was more important nature or nurture. It has now become very apparent that they both matter so the phrase "Nurture your Nature" or "Nurture your Genome" will hopefully become the 21st Century's new medical mantra.

How we think about disease and its cure is still locked into a single cause and a single cure and that is the downside to the germ theory dominance of Western medicine. The information encoded in our genome can tell us how we are going to get sick, but mainly it tells us how we should live our lives to maximize our health over the extended lifespan we have been given.