

**The MindBody Syndrome TMS - Description and Equivalences - by Marc Sopher, MD  
Modified by Marion Bachra, MS, RD, LN      latest modification was on 07/08/2013**

Much of the chronic and recurrent pain and discomfort we all experience is either psychologically induced, psychologically aggravated, or if a physical incident did occur psychologically perpetuated. This is the premise of Dr. John Sarno, who has helped thousands of people in his own practice and reached thousands more with his books. *TMS, or tension myositis syndrome*, is the term he has coined to describe this pain that often appears in the back, neck or legs but can affect any part of the body or organ system. Having realized in recent years that nerves, tendons and other body systems could be targeted by the brain in the disorder that he has described, Dr. Sarno and I have decided that another term would be a more accurate designation for the entire process. After much thought and discussion, he and I have agreed that the term, *The Mindbody Syndrome*, would be a better choice and would be used henceforth in place of tension myositis syndrome. This has the virtue of retaining the acronym, TMS, which has become familiar to many that have read Dr. Sarno's work.

Some common TMS disorders include *headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, dyspepsia, gastroesophageal reflux disorder (GERD), carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), plantar fasciitis, tendonitis of shoulder, elbow etc, temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ), and fibromyalgia*. Using today's popular lingo, TMS is a mindbody disorder - the symptoms arise from the mind and are experienced by the body. Thus, The Mindbody Syndrome is an appropriate title.

TMS is a strategy of the brain's to keep unpleasant thoughts and emotions from rising from the unconscious into the conscious mind. The brain, through established physiologic pathways, creates pain as a distraction. By focusing our attention on physical symptoms, we keep these painful thoughts and emotions repressed. This is a very effective strategy as there is an absolute epidemic of mindbody disorders in our society.

Eliminating the pain is startlingly simple. We can banish the pain and thwart the brain's strategy by simply understanding and accepting that the pain has a psychological causation, that it is not physically based. (NOTE: BY READING ANY OF THE BOOKS LISTED LATER ON!)

While much of the pain we experience has a psychological basis, it is essential to first be evaluated by your physician to determine that there is not a significant disease process. Unfortunately, if your physician does not consider TMS in the process of generating a differential diagnosis of your symptoms, it is possible that he or she will give an incorrect diagnosis. This occurs all too frequently as a physical cause is mistakenly offered. This results in a treatment plan that is often unsuccessful. As an example, many people with back pain are told that their symptoms are due to a herniated disc or disc degeneration, when in fact these findings are often incidental and normal. This helps to explain why physical therapy, medications and surgery are often unsuccessful.

I have been treating patients from all over the US and Canada using Dr. Sarno's approach since early in 1999. A patient of mine asked me to read *Healing Back Pain* and offer my opinion on its value. Unbeknownst to my patient, I had low back pain for nearly two years and intermittent sciatica for more than fifteen years. This all vanished after reading the book. Intrigued, I contacted Dr. Sarno who graciously invited me to The Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine at New York University to train with him. After seeing patients with him and attending his

lectures, I decided to offer TMS treatment. With his support and encouragement, I have attempted to follow his approach faithfully. Like him, I screen all potential patients by phone or email. If their symptoms appear consistent with TMS and their mind is open to this way of viewing their health, an appointment for a forty-five minute consultation is offered. Following that, I follow up with all patients with additional office visits (if necessary) or by phone or email. Results have been excellent. Dr. Sarno and I have remained in regular contact, reviewing cases and theory.

### **Life is Stressful**

Life is stressful. Even if we are happy and feel good about our families, jobs and finances, we all experience stress. Stress, anger, conflict arise from three main sources. There are everyday issues such as: our home and work responsibilities, worrying about our children, worrying about our parents, the inconsiderate drivers, the long line at the market, etc. Some of us have experienced much emotional distress in childhood. Even if we have made peace with it, it is still there, a potential source of unpleasant feelings. Our personalities also predispose us to these emotions. If we have high expectations for ourselves, if we are ambitious and place great demands on ourselves, if we are very conscientious about our performance, then these perfectionist traits are causes of stress. If we go out of our way to help and care for others, even to the point of self-sacrifice, then these "goodist" traits also create stress as we make our needs subordinate to those around us.

These personality traits are not undesirable—they make us successful, kind and considerate. But it is essential to understand how these very qualities can contribute to the accumulation of stress, anger and conflict. The way our brains work, we repress unpleasant thoughts and emotions. They find a home in the unconscious. This is a very good defense mechanism—it allows us to move on and take care of our responsibilities and be nice people that others like and respect. Unfortunately, we can only hold so much of these unpleasant thoughts and emotions in the unconscious. Accumulated anger, stress and conflict become RAGE. This RAGE wants to rise to consciousness, but we usually do not let this happen. If it were to happen, we might rant and rave and do things which would not be acceptable--things that would make others not think well of us. To distract us from these unpleasant thoughts and emotions, our brain creates pain, real physical pain. In our society it is acceptable, even "in vogue", to have certain symptoms, like back pain, headaches and reflux. When we focus on our pain, we are distracted from these causes of RAGE. A brilliant strategy on the part of the brain. Why does this occur? No one can know for sure, but we know this happens because by learning about it, we can stop it. We can stop it and thereby eliminate the pain.

Dr. Sarno has pioneered this approach to the evaluation and treatment of a variety of pain syndromes. His treatment program involves education only--no medications, no special exercises, no injections, no surgery and no manipulation or massage. His results and those of the physicians, like myself, who embrace his theories, are outstanding, far exceeding any other modality.

TMS is the name Dr. Sarno has given to describe the chronic and recurrent syndromes of pain and discomfort. The pain, wherever it occurs, is very real. However, it does not have a physical cause, but a psychological cause. Getting better involves acceptance of this. It is not necessary to change our personalities to get better and we could not, anyway. Unfortunately, most physicians

are not familiar with Dr. Sarno's work or do not accept his theories. The traditional medical training seeks to explain most symptoms as having a physical cause. While this may be true in some cases, it does not explain much of the pain and discomfort that we all experience. Most physicians do not consider the possibility of a psychological cause for the pain. As a result, they will prescribe medication, special exercises, physical therapy, injections or even surgery to address what they believe is a physical problem. When this is not successful, people seek alternative remedies, such as chiropractic, craniosacral therapy, prolotherapy, etc. in an effort to relieve their discomfort with varying levels of results.

What does work is Dr. Sarno's approach--the acquisition of knowledge. Put aside the notion that there is a physical problem, accept that there is a psychological cause and understand how and why the brain does this. I recommend that all people read and re-read my book and/or Dr. Sarno's books to fully integrate this information. Some will benefit from seeing Dr. Sarno or myself for a consultation. You can thwart the brain's strategy and get rid of your pain. When you do, you will truly feel empowered.

***A Key Quote from the book Healing back pain: the Mind-body Connection:*** "One of the more difficult concepts to grasp is the fact that one does not have to eliminate tension from one's life. People ask: How do I change my personality and how do I stop generating anxiety and anger? If these were the prerequisites for recovery, my cure rate would be zero. It is not changing one's emotions; it is recognizing that they exist *and* that the brain is trying to keep one from being aware of their existence through the mechanism of the pain syndrome, this can include numbness, weakness as well as pain which Dr Sarno states can also be used by the unconscious to generate and/or perpetuate TMS symptoms. Dr. Sarno: That is the key point in understanding why knowledge is the effective cure."

**RESOURCES:**

<http://www.tms-mindbodymedicine.com/why.htm> by Marc D. Sopher MD

<http://www.mindbodymedicine.com/> by David Schechter, MD

<http://www.yourpainisreal.com/> by Howard Schubiner, MD

<http://www.tarpityoga.com/directory.html> Directory of TMS Physicians

<http://www.healingbackpain.com/> by John Sarno, MD

Healing Back Pain: The Mind-Body Connection by John E. Sarno MD  
(Paperback - Feb 1, 1991)

The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain by John E. Sarno M.D.  
(Paperback - Oct 1, 1999)

To Be or Not To Be... Pain-Free: The Mindbody Syndrome by Marc D. Sopher MD  
(Paperback - Feb 1, 2003)

The Divided Mind: The Epidemic of Mindbody Disorders by John E. Sarno MD  
(Paperback - Mar 27, 2007)

## **Marion Bachra, MS, RD, Lic. Clin. Nutritionist-Chinese Herbalist- A shift in my paradigm**

For me, in 1996, **Healing Back Pain; The Mind body connection** helped me resolve 6 years worth of chronic sciatica and low back pain ranging from almost unbearable to excruciating to an intermittent chronic nagging sciatic and low back pain. I thought that I had PHYSICAL problem as proven by me MRI!!! In 1991, my MRI showed a completely ruptured disc between L4 and L5 and two bulged discs above and below. The only option I was given was to have back surgery, namely a laminectomy, which I declined. I requested a prescription for massage and yoga therapy which helped me a lot during the acute phase, but did not resolve my intermittent chronic sciatica and low back pain. Because of my physical diagnosis, I experienced a resistance to even consider reading this book which came highly recommended by Andrew Weil, MD. It was not until there were no other options left, since surgery was unaffordable-I was kicked out of workman's compensation and had no insurance- that I finally purchased the book.

**The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain** published in 1999 describes how other body systems can be affected such as the immune system. This book for me was a stepping stone to reroute my overactive immune system and stop my allergic response to cats.

**The Divided Mind; Epidemic of Mind Body Disorders** published in 2005 is an excellent book. I read this book much later, after I fully accepted TMS playing a crucial role in my sciatica, and after I had been pain-free for many years. The book includes six fascinating chapters outlining the experiences of six specialists in: Family Practice, surgical/non-surgical Orthopedics, Rheumatology, Psychiatry, and Clinical Medicine research

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### **POEM by Ms. Norma Puziss, John Sarno's patient, printed: in Healing Back Pain, pg. 90**

Think Psychological not Physical,  
An idea the is most quizzical.  
No one would have guessed  
Emotions deeply repressed  
Could produce such tension  
Not even to mention TMS.

There is nothing to fear!  
Subconscious, do you hear?  
You concentrate on pain,  
A back sufferer's bane,  
To divert one's attention,  
From underlying tension.  
Your secret is out;  
You have lost your clout!  
So give it up, resign!  
TMS is benign!  
I am in control, not you.  
I have learned that I've got to  
Think psychological, not physical.