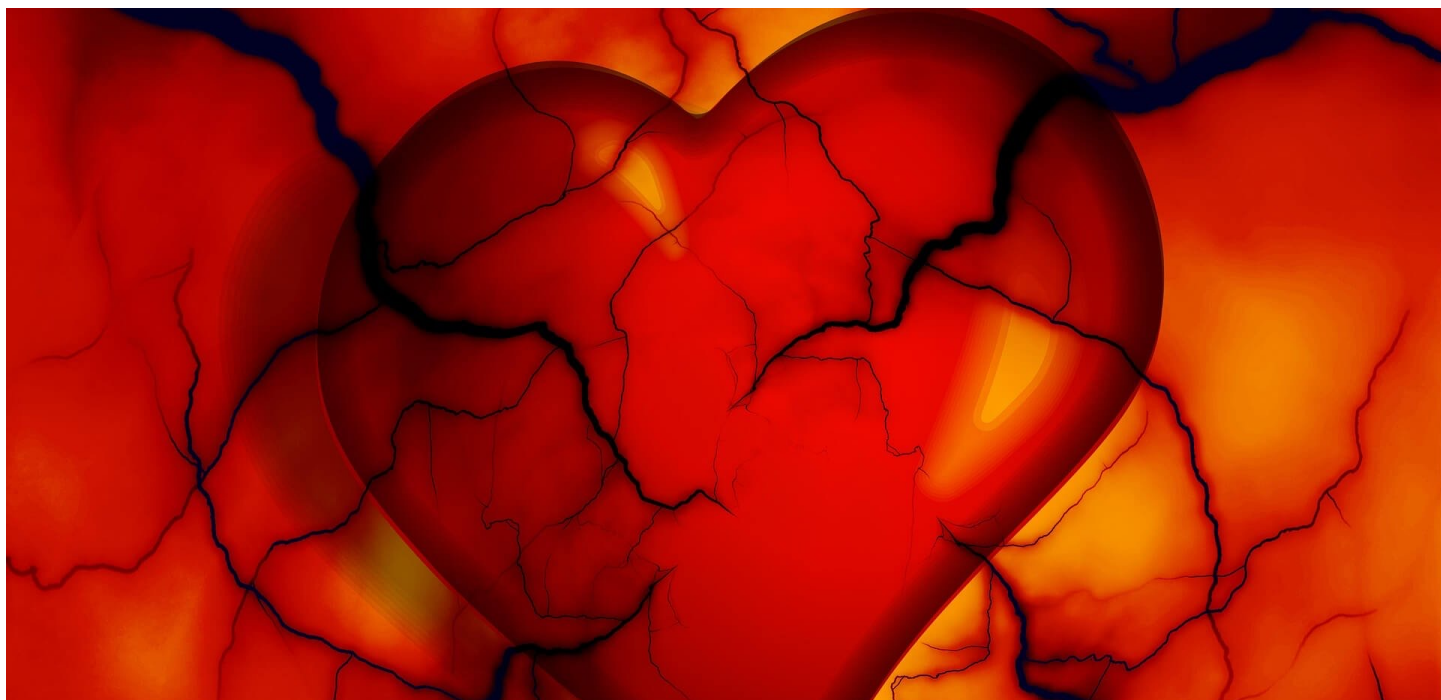


Love Quotient



The Link Between Autoimmune Disease & Love

by [chriswise](#) | [Self Love Practices](#) | [The "I Love You" Practice - The Love Quotient](#), [Test Your Love Quotient \(LQ\) - The Love Quotient](#)

John Bates was the co-founder and face of a company which had raised \$80 million in capital. In 2001, when the dot-com bubble burst the company's investors backed out leaving him and his workforce unemployed and devastated. Bates felt like a failure and carried tons of guilt and shame. Shortly thereafter he contracted Stevens-Johnson disease, an autoimmune disease that nearly destroyed his life. In this [interview](#) with John Bates he tells us how he overcame this debilitating illness and discusses the impact that meditation combined with the ['I love you' practice](#) had on his recovery. In this article we will discuss some of the most important takeaways from Bates' story and discuss the effect love, and increasing ones LQ, can have on the body and on autoimmune health in general. But first, let's look at what an autoimmune disease is...

What is an Autoimmune Disease?

An autoimmune disease is a class of medical condition (approximately eighty known diseases) in which the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells in the body. The immune system is a remarkable mechanism which senses foreign invaders such as germs or bacteria and sends out cells to rid the body of them. When a person has an autoimmune disease, the immune system mistakenly recognizes parts of one's own body, often skin and joints, as foreign; and releases autoantibodies thereby attacking healthy cells. Examples of autoimmune diseases are Type 1 Diabetes, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Psoriasis, Multiple Sclerosis, Lupus, Inflammatory Bowel Disease, Addison's Disease, Graves' Disease, Sjogren's syndrome, Hashimoto's Thyroiditis and Celiac Disease, amongst others.

Treatment of Autoimmune Disease

Treatment consists of medication to manage symptoms and doctors often recommend changes in diet, exercise programs and the introduction of stress management techniques. Unfortunately, in many cases the onset of an autoimmune disease results in a drastic change in the quality of life of the patient and sadly, sometimes the best one can hope to achieve is management of symptoms. Sufferers are advised to be patient through periods of increased symptoms AKA flare-ups. In some cases, the condition can be life threatening or render a patient more susceptible to developing other life-threatening conditions.

Attitudes towards Autoimmune Disease

Autoimmune diseases are not well understood and many times sufferers are stigmatized at work, at home and amongst friends and acquaintances. In the past, even medical professionals unknowingly expressed bias and a lack of sympathy towards sufferers of autoimmune diseases. We have, in recent times, begun to see a shift in attitude towards autoimmune diseases. One reason for this could be that they are becoming far more common. Autoimmune disease has been described as an epidemic. Those impacted most frequently by autoimmune conditions reside in the developed world, with a higher incidence amongst women than men. Dr. [Donna Jackson](#), an autoimmune specialist at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland says "The numbers are staggering: one in twelve Americans—and one in nine women—will develop an autoimmune disorder."

Exploring the Mind-Body Connection – The Impact the Mind has on Sickness

The medical community has been working towards expanding their understanding of autoimmune disease and exploring a new area of study called psychoneuroimmunology i.e. the mind-body connection. Evidence suggests that autoimmune diseases are linked to stress and that the onset of an autoimmune disease often follows a traumatic event such as the death of a loved one, miscarriage, divorce or unemployment. A study titled; [Stress as a trigger of autoimmune disease](#) states "many retrospective studies found that a high proportion (up to 80%) of patients reported uncommon emotional stress before disease onset. Unfortunately, not only does stress cause disease, but the disease itself also causes significant stress in the patients, creating a vicious cycle." In our interview with Bates he mentions a lack of sleep as one the major contributing factors leading up to his illness. For years he had been sleeping three to five hours per night and that had finally taken a toll on his health. The stress of losing his company had been another contributing factor. Later, after much reflection and study he realized that the residual emotion of letting his employees down had a great impact on how he felt about himself. Bates describes his employees as the "six hundred people I cared the most about on the whole planet". Those relationships all ended abruptly with the closure of his business and he never got a chance to say goodbye or to say that he was sorry. This left him feeling angry, depressed, sad and embarrassed and for a long time he beat himself up over the

company's closure. "I hated myself" he explains. At some point he realized that his self-loathing was directly related to his becoming ill "anybody that has an autoimmune disease, essentially their own body is attacking them". "It's not like I did something wrong, or like I didn't care, or like I didn't give it my all. It just failed, but I made that all about me and me being a failure and I hated myself and I think that all that anger and shame and frustration and embarrassment, I turned it all inwards on myself and beat myself up just mercilessly and that is what I think triggered and fueled that autoimmune disease." "One of the ways out of this for me was when it dawned on me, that wow auto immune, that's me attacking myself with my own immune system and then I saw the parallel in my mind... where I had just been beating myself up so hard... maybe how I was being with myself had something to do with what was going on with me." In Bates' case there is a direct link between hating himself and the onset of an autoimmune disease. On the subject he says "Fundamentally it is, I believe the mind that triggers all this stuff. That it not to say that it's all in your head... the pain, the symptoms, the lesions were real, they were not just in my mind... however I believe that that's where it all originated. To go back to the source where it all originated and to love that and heal that, I believe can have a massive ripple effect back into the physical body again in terms of mitigating those symptoms."

The Positive Impact of Love

Bates was at a stage where, if he did not get ten to twelve hours of sleep each day, he would slide right back into his disease. He experienced panic attacks if he didn't think he would get enough sleep. It was around this time when he received coaching which led to his journey back to loving and accepting himself. His coach said to him "I want you to live in the listening of the people who love you, because who you are is not who you think you are, who you are is who they think you are because that's how you actually show up in the world." He says "I thought about the people that really loved me, like when I walk in the room and they light up, they're not faking that but I was listening to the monkey mind, I was listening to the negative chatter.". Bates says it was hard for him to let that in but as he started to let it in he realized that he wanted to be a safe space for people "It hit me like a ton of bricks in that moment that if I couldn't be that for myself there was no way I was going to be ever be able to actually give that to other people." Bates started meditating and says "I spent twenty minutes a day meditating for several years and a big part of my meditation was just letting myself be ok, loving myself, letting go of whatever I thought I did wrong, all the beating myself up, forgiving myself, acknowledging myself and getting to a point where I could actually give myself some credit".

The Impact of the 'I love you' practice on Bates' Recovery

Bates learned about the 'I love you' practice and this resonated deeply with him. He had been practising something very similar when he began to incorporate 'I love you' he says "I spent a lot of time with my hand on my heart, talking to my inner child, that one who cares so much and is not always so capable and is scared... telling that inner child of mine 'I love you'" "It's fabulous," he says "to go in there and reinforce that with an 'I love you' from the big me now, to have me love myself all the way through, from now all the way back to the beginning and everything in between, to acknowledge that I've been doing my best the whole time." We asked Bates what impact the 'I love you' practice had on him and not surprisingly he answered "My symptoms mitigated dramatically. I went from being scared if I didn't sleep ten hours a night to being fine sleeping eight. I can get away with less for a little while if I need to but I got two hours a day back in my life... not being afraid if I don't get ten hours a day is game-changing... to be able to live a normal life without being scared that I'm going to go over the edge and die." "I personally believe that my body was attacking itself because of that residual stuff that was very negative, very plaintively anti-me... something physically changed in my brain... as it reverberated into my body my symptoms decreased." *"One of the most significant things someone can do is the 'I love you' practice"* says Bates. Because an autoimmune disease is essentially the body attacking itself, an active self-love practice such as the 'I love you' practice can be beneficial in helping individuals who are going through difficulties to unravel

negative emotions and avert self-blame before the tipping point where self-loathing turns into disease is reached. Meditation and self-love can also be used to help those afflicted with autoimmune conditions to alleviate stress and thereby symptoms and to aid such individuals on their path to recovery. Bates focused a lot on letting go of the thoughts, ideas and judgement that did not serve his well-being "If it was in the way of 'I love you' landing for me I waded through it and let it go. To clear that stuff out made a physical difference for me. As you infuse your body with love, it allows you to feel safer in your own body and that helps to still the mind so that you can meditate more effectively. Bates encourages other sufferers of autoimmune diseases to incorporate meditation together with self-love as part of their treatment regimen. "People with a meditation practice, their bodies are putting out very different hormones and different secretions... so I think bringing 'I love you' to that is even better." Based on Bates' story, the stories of other autoimmune sufferers and a review of published studies on the mind-body connection, it is possible that there is a link between increasing one's LQ and reducing the impact of an autoimmune disease. We do not in any way suggest that one should abandon available treatment options or stop taking prescribed medication, however an active self-love practice can be incorporated as a means of coping with the difficulty of illness and it may even address the underlying cause of the illness.

What other experts say about the effects of love on the body

The impact of meditation on health is well documented and there are numerous studies highlighting the many beneficial effects of loving kindness on health and wellness. Below we summarize a few of the key findings from the more well-known studies. *Negative self-talk or a lack of love towards ourselves can lead to illness* Golan Shahar PhD is the author of *Erosion: The Psychopathology of Self Criticism*. In a *Psychology Today* [article](#) he says "research suggests that self-criticism is highly likely to involve a quality of self-bashing, and when it does, its adverse effects on our physical and mental health are formidable." *Thoughts have power* In an inspiring [TED Talk from 2014](#) Dr. Habib Sadeghi talks about overcoming testicular cancer and the impact of emotions on health. He discusses his own recovery placing much emphasis on self love as a means of reversing the effects of disease. "Thoughts have power" he says "how do I know that? As I was going through the process of checking my blood for tumor markers and doing my routine every month of CAT scan with contrast and without contrast I had them look for cortisol. My cortisol levels started dropping... As cortisol was dropping I was producing a higher level of immunity, the natural killer cells were going up, as I was producing less cortisol the adrenal glands were producing more testosterone, so all this atrophied muscle that I had lost because I had less testosterone being produced by the one missing testicle, it was as if I was shifting and changing and sculpting my body, mindfully." *Loving kindness reduces the symptoms of illness* A 2008 [study](#) by social

psychologist Barbara Fredrickson found that the symptoms of illness decreased through regular loving kindness meditation. The study, titled *Open Hearts Build Lives* also found that people who experienced positive emotions daily because of a meditation experienced an increase in life satisfaction. Loving kindness begins with loving oneself and extends from there to individuals we revere or respect, then onwards to someone we may have negative feelings towards and on and on until our loving kindness extends to all of mankind. Extending one's love outwards towards the universe is a wonderfully powerful practice. Loving kindness is, in some respects similar to the "[I love you](#)" practice. When we spend time each day connecting with our inner child, we direct our love inwards, towards ourselves and soon begin to find ourselves directing our love outwards, towards others. Meditative practices such as loving kindness meditation can be empowered through the 'I love you' practice. When we have loved ourselves fully and deeply, we stop loving from a deficit and instead love from a place of abundance. A general improvement in our relationships shows up naturally as a result of loving ourselves often, deeply and completely. Self love, loving kindness or meditation need not be a complicated affair. In Matt Khan's most recent [video](#) podcast he says; "*Just taking one breath in and out is the activity of love. To breathe with yourself is to love yourself*".