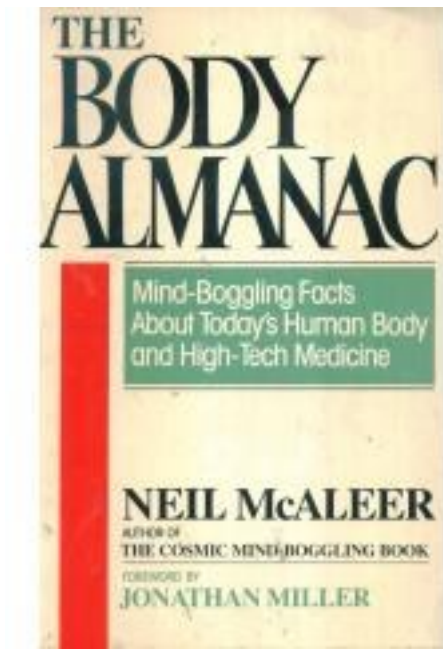


Body Almanac PA



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The largest medical library in the world, the National Library of Medicine near Washington, D.C., contains over 3.1 million items of medical information in its collection. This international resource is an ideal example of the information explosion that has overwhelmed all of us in the latter half of the twentieth century.

This book intends, in an entertaining way, to shrink this "informa-

tion overwhelm" and focus on today's human body as well as on the high-tech medical technology that helps to keep it healthy. No claim of completeness is made for obvious reasons. All medical specialties are going through constant and rapid transformation. There is no way to freeze this change, capture a topic thoroughly, and keep it completely up-to-date.

Some 24,000 medical periodicals from around the world are subscribed to by the National Library of Medicine each year; and tens of thousands of new books and other printed matter are added to the collection annually, bringing in about 18 million new pages of material. This does not include the dozens of computer data bases that provide easy access to some 5 million references, nor does it include thousands of audiovisual resources.

The total holdings of the National Library of Medicine amount to more than 1 billion pages of medical information. If they were laid end to end, these pages could encircle the planet earth at the equator about 7 times. No single human being, indeed no large professional group of scientists and doctors could possibly comprehend, retain, or fully utilize this vast depository of information. Certainly no one book or multivolume set of books can do more than scratch the surface. R. R. Bowker's *Medical Books and Serials in Print*, 1984 lists some 70,000 books and periodicals in its pages--just a healthy selection of the total in-print literature. If the amount of medical literature astounds us, it is nothing compared to how the human body itself can boggle our minds. Just as the quasar--that bewildering, superpowerful, billions-of-light-years-distant cosmic object--is at the edge of human comprehension, so too is the human body with its microcosmic mysteries and its 100 trillion

cells.

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