Replenishing in Challenging Times

You can't pour from an empty cup.

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Clinical Psychologist | Meditation Teacher

St. Lawrence College

September 2, 2021
The Secret Life of Your Brain (30 minutes)

*How it Works “Behind the Scenes” in Self-care*
  - Bio-Psycho-Social Lens of Mental Health
  - Brain Bias & Effects
  - The Cool Bits
  - Emotions: Purpose & How They are Made

Brain Care (40 minutes)
  - Boosting Your Serotonin & Dopamine
  - Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind
  - Self-care Strategies - Lessons from Neuroscience:
    - **Listening:** HALT - Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired
    - **Shifting:** HEAL & 3 Minute Responsive Breathing
    - **Re-wiring:** Wise Mind

Self Care Plan: Living Intentionally (10 minutes)
  - 8 Elements of Positive Mental Health
  - Creating the Plan: Not “carving” but “creating” the time to take care of yourself.
Our mental health and wellbeing depends on...

...the things that happen to us,

how we make sense of those events

and how we respond to them.

Dr. Peter Kinderman
Professor @ Liverpool University
The Secret Life of Your Brain

Bio-Psycho-Social Lens
Negativity Bias
Confirmation Bias
Priming Effect
The Cool Bits
Emotions
Mental Health Bio-Psycho-Social Lens of Mental Health & Wellbeing

**Psychological**
- Personal Identity: Self-Esteem, Self-Acceptance, Personality Temperament, Culture/Gender/Sexual
- Developmental Level (Neurobiological)
- Emotional Health (Regulation/Tolerance)
- Cognitive Factors: Memory, Thinking, Perceptions, Beliefs, Attitudes and Expectations
- Behavioral Factors: motivation
- Coping Skills/Strategies: Stress Management, Social Skills, Emotion Regulation, Mental Health Literacy, Mindfulness, Resiliency
- Sense of Purpose: meaning, spiritual

**Biological**
- Neurochemistry
- Genetic predisposition
- Epigenetics
- Medication Side-effects
- HPA Axis (Stress Response)
- Fight-Flight Response (Safety)
- Gut-Brain Axis (Biome)
- Somatic Illness/Disorder
- Sleep Disturbance
- Substance Use/Misuse
- Chronic Pain
- Developmental Level (Physical)
- Physical Exercise & Nutrition

**Mental Health**

**Social**
- Culture/Ethnicity
- Spiritual/Religious Beliefs
- Physical Safety
- Cultural Safety/Racism
- Socioeconomic Status
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Disability
- Social Support
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Family Background (Trauma)
- Access to Psychological/ Medical Care
- Employment Status
- Environmental Events
Negativity Bias

It is Teflon for the positive ...
... and Velcro for the negative.

Negativity Bias: The negativity bias, also known as the negativity effect, is the notion that, even when of equal intensity, things of a more negative nature (e.g. unpleasant thoughts, emotions, or social interactions; harmful/traumatic events) have a greater effect on one's psychological state and processes than neutral or positive.
Confirmation Bias: Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values.
Neurons that fire together
...wire together

**Priming Effect:** In psychology, priming is a technique in which the introduction of one stimulus influences how people respond to a subsequent stimulus. Priming works by activating an association or representation in memory just before another stimulus or task is introduced.
9 Functions
Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)

1. Empathy
2. Emotion Regulation
3. Fear Modulation
4. Response Flexibility
5. Body Regulation
6. Insight
7. Morality
8. Intuition
9. Attuned Communication
Amygdala Hijack

If the amygdala perceives a match to the **stimulus**, i.e., if the record of experiences in the **hippocampus** tells the **amygdala** that it is a **fight, flight or freeze** situation, then the amygdala triggers the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) axis and hijacks the rational brain.
PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM
“rest and digest” response

- Constricts pupils
- Increases saliva production
- Decreases heart rate
- Indirectly dilates blood vessels
- Constricts bronchi
- Decreases blood flow to skeletal muscles
- Increases stomach and intestine motility, increases blood flow to GI tract, and increases digestive enzyme secretion

SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM
“fight or flight” response

- Dilates pupils to enhance far vision
- Decreases saliva production
- Increases heart rate
- Constricts blood vessels, increases blood pressure
- Dilates bronchi to allow more air into lungs
- Increases blood flow to skeletal muscles
- Reduces stomach and intestine motility, diverts blood flow away from GI tract, and reduces digestive enzyme secretion
Interoception: Sense of the Internal Body State

Primary Emotions & Associated Physiological reactions:
(Anger, Fear, Sad, Happy, Excitement & Disgust).

- Immune cells (all over body)
- Breathing
- Hunger/fullness
- Touch
- Calf = "2nd heart" to pump blood
- Sensory Processing
- Vestibular/Balance
- Thirst
- Heart Rate
- Nausea
- Kidneys
- Bladder Awareness
- Sexual Arousal
- Hormones all over body
- Skin Sensors (Itch, Pain, Pressure, Temperature)
- Bones

Interoception:
- Heart
- Kidneys
- Bladder
- Intestines
- Lungs
- Stomach
- Bone
- Immune cells
How Emotions are Made

- **Emotions** Help Us **Survive**, Thrive and Avoid Danger
- **When we experience fear, we are more likely to flee the threat.**
- **Emotions** serve an adaptive role in our lives by motivating us to act quickly and take actions that will maximize our chances of survival and success.
Brain Care

Boosting Your Serotonin & Dopamine
Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind
HALT
HEAL & 3 Minute Responsive Breathing
Wise Mind
10 Ways to Boost Your Serotonin & Dopamine

1. EXERCISE
2. SPENDING TIME IN NATURE
3. NUTRITION
4. MEDITATION
5. GRATITUDE
6. ESSENTIAL OILS
7. GOAL ATTAINMENT
8. HAPPY MEMORIES
9. NEW EXPERIENCES
10. PSYCHOTHERAPY
The Wandering Mind

...is an unhappy mind.

“Unlike other animals, human beings spend a lot of time thinking about what is not going on around them, contemplating events that happened in the past, might happen in the future, or will never happen at all”.

Matthew A. Killingsworth* and Daniel T. Gilbert

The default mode network. The DMN is a large-scale brain network involved that is particularly active when the brain is in a state of wakeful rest.

H·A·L·T
Am I
Hungry
Angry
Lonely
Tired?
“By taking a few extra seconds to stay with a positive experience, you will help turn a passing mental state into a lasting neural trait”

Dr. Rick Hanson

Neuropsychologist
Make Positive Thoughts Stick with You

“The human brain has a tendency to act like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones, a trait that can, over time, lead to anxiety, irritability and self-esteem issues”.

Dr. Rick Hanson

“Taking in the good, can literally rewire our brains”
Mindfulness Meditation
3 Minute Breathing Space

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally”

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn
Molecular Biologist

1. **Breath**: Focus on the sensations of breathing.
2. **Body**: Focus on the sensations in your body.
3. **Open Awareness**: Noticing all *thoughts, emotions* and *body sensations*. 
Wise Mind

The 3 States of Minds

What I Feel

SADNESS
Anger
Fear
Stress

What I Know to be True

Mindful thinking
Intuition
Balance
Past experience

Reasonable Mind

Research
Logic
Stats

Self Care Plan

8 Elements of Positive Mental Health

Creating the Plan:

Not “carving” but “creating” the time to take care of yourself.
8 Elements
Positive Mental Health

1. Emotional well-being
2. Life satisfaction
3. Optimism and Hope
4. Self-esteem
5. Resilience and Coping
6. Spirituality
7. Social functioning
8. Emotional intelligence

### Self-Care September 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Find time for self-care, it’s not selfish, it’s essential!</td>
<td>2. Notice the things you do well, however small</td>
<td>3. Let go of self-criticism and speak to yourself kindly</td>
<td>4. Plan a fun or relaxing activity and make time for it</td>
<td>5. Forgive yourself when things go wrong. Everyone makes mistakes</td>
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<td>6. Focus on the basics: eat well, exercise and go to bed on time</td>
<td>7. Give yourself permission to say ‘no’</td>
<td>8. Be willing to share how you feel and ask for help when needed</td>
<td>9. Aim to be good enough, rather than perfect</td>
<td>10. When you find things hard, remember it’s okay not to be okay</td>
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<td>11. Make time to do something you really enjoy</td>
<td>12. Get active outside and give your mind and body a natural boost</td>
<td>13. Be as kind to yourself as you would to a loved one</td>
<td>14. If you’re busy, allow yourself to pause and take a break</td>
<td>15. Find a caring, calming phrase to use when you feel low</td>
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<td>16. Leave positive messages for yourself to see regularly</td>
<td>17. Notice what you are feeling, without any judgment</td>
<td>18. Ask a trusted friend to tell you what strengths they see in you</td>
<td>19. No plans day. Make time to slow down and be kind to yourself</td>
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<td>20. Enjoy photos from a time with happy memories</td>
<td>21. Don’t compare how you feel inside to how others appear outside</td>
<td>22. Take your time. Make space to just breathe and be still</td>
<td>23. Let go of other people’s expectations of you</td>
<td>24. Accept yourself and remember that you are worthy of love</td>
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<td>25. Find a new way for you to see all of your strengths or talents</td>
<td>26. Avoid saying ‘I should’ and make time to do nothing</td>
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**Action for Happiness**

**Happier · Kinder · Together**

www.actionforhappiness.org
Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.

- Anne Lamott -
Dr. Heather Drummond, C.Psych.
Clinical Psychologist

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THANK YOU FOR FILLING MY CUP
TedTalks

• The Brain Changing Benefits of Exercise (Dr. Wendy Suzuki)
• Hardwiring Happiness | Book (Dr. Rick Hansen)

Podcasts

• Hidden Brain (NPR)
• Radio Headspace (by Headspace)
• The Science of Happiness (The Greater Good Centre, Berkeley U)

Apps

• Calm
• Insight Timer
• Headspace
References


- This is how your brain becomes addicted to caffeine. (2013, August 9). Retrieved from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/this-is-how-your-brain-becomes-addicted-to-caffeine-26861037/
