



The Learning Brain

Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and self-assessment tools that will help our members to better understand the mental health continuum, and to use the resources that are available.
bcpvpa.bc.ca/thelearningbrain

Friday March 6, 2020

Self care



Self Care Tips

I challenge you to try one or all three of the next three **Self Care** tips over the next week and share with us the difference you noticed!



Exercise Daily

From easing symptoms of depression and anxiety to keeping your memory sharp, there's no shortage of mental benefits to exercise. Exercise can take many forms, such as taking the stairs whenever possible, walking up escalators, and running or biking rather than driving.

1. Help for depression and anxiety

Exercise is a scientifically proven mood booster, decreasing symptoms of both depression and anxiety. Physical activity increases endorphin levels, the body's famous "feel good" chemical produced by the brain and spinal cord that produces feelings of happiness and euphoria. Even just moderate exercise throughout the week can improve depression and anxiety, so much so that some doctors recommend trying out an exercise regimen for these conditions before turning to medication.

2. Decreased stress

Another mental benefit of exercise is reduced stress levels—something that can make us all happier. Increasing your heart rate can actually reverse stress-induced brain damage by stimulating the production of neurohormones like norepinephrine, which not only improve cognition and mood but improve thinking clouded by stressful events. Exercise also forces the body's central and sympathetic nervous systems to communicate with one another, improving the body's overall ability to respond to stress.

3. Increased self-esteem and self-confidence

From improving endurance to losing weight and increasing muscle tone, there's no shortage of physical achievements that come from regular exercise. All those achievements can add up to a whopping boost of self-esteem — and the confidence that comes with it. You may not set out for better-fitting clothes, a slimmer physique, and the ability to climb a hill without getting winded. Oftentimes it happens before you even realize it. It's just one of the many benefits of physical activity that boost your body, mind, and spirit.

4. Better sleep

If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, exercise can help with that, too. Physical activity increases body temperature, which can have calming effects on the mind, leading to less sheep-counting and more shut-eye. Exercise also helps to regulate your circadian rhythm, our bodies' built-in alarm clock that controls when we feel tired and when we feel alert. *(Although improved sleep is a psychological benefit of exercise, sleep experts recommend not exercising close to bedtime.)*

5. Brain boost

From building intelligence to strengthening memory, exercise boosts brainpower in a number of ways. Studies on mice and humans indicate that cardiovascular exercise creates new brain cells — a process called neurogenesis — and improves overall brain performance. It also prevents cognitive decline and memory loss by strengthening the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning. Studies also prove that physical activity boosts creativity and mental energy. So, if you're in need of inspiration, your big idea could be just a walk or jog away.

SOURCE:

<https://www.waldenu.edu/online-bachelors-programs/bs-in-psychology/resource/five-mental-benefits-of-exercise>

Here is a 3 minute video to motivate you to get moving!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SG7n2QiaMB8&list=RDCMUCL-IWPkXQn3JYYYsPnpGllg&index=9

Practice Relaxation

at least 2 - 3 times daily

Deep breathing, mindfulness and progressive muscle relaxation are easy, quick ways to reduce stress.

When conflicts come up between you, a family member or even a colleague, these tools can help you feel less controlled by turbulent feelings and give you the space you need to think clearly about what to do next. Practice yoga, get a massage, take a bath or walk in the woods.

Studies into our biological state of being show that we have a
physical response when we experience stress.

Muscles constrict, cortisol rises, and we become flooded by sensory input.

Did you know that there is an immediate way to stop this from getting out of control?

Breathing

Benefits of breathing:



Lowered blood pressure and heart rate



Reduced levels of stress hormones in the blood



Reduced lactic acid build-up in muscle tissue



Balanced levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood



Improved immune system



Increased physical energy



Increased feelings of calm and wellbeing



You can do calming breathing anytime with this
breathing bubble:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaQed_Xdyvw

Another breathing technique is called the

4-7-8 technique,

introduced by Dr. Andrew Weill
who believes it can help with:

- reducing anxiety
- helping a person get to sleep
- controlling or reducing anger responses

Adopt a comfortable sitting position and place the tip of the
tongue on the tissue right behind the top front teeth:

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a 'whoosh' sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a 'whoosh' sound to a count of eight. This is one breath.
- Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

To learn more and watch a video on this technique click here:

www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/

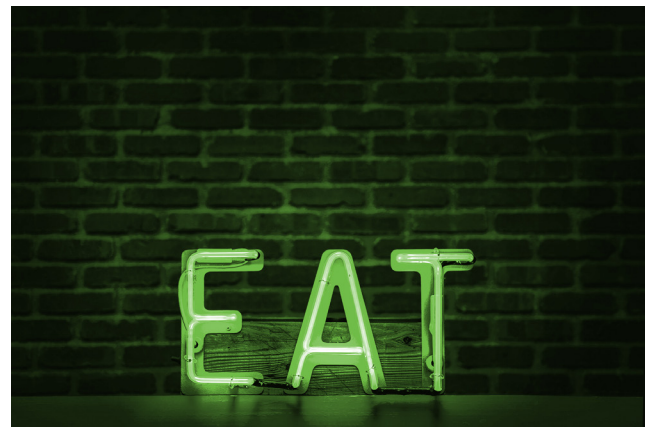
Eat Well

www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/foods-linked-to-better-brainpower

Follow a healthy dietary pattern that includes a lot of fruits,
vegetables, legumes, and whole grains.

Try to get protein from plant sources and fish and choose
healthy fats, such as olive oil or canola, rather than
saturated fats. *And do you know what is great?*

The best brain foods are the same ones that
protect your heart and blood vessels!



Green, leafy vegetables.

Leafy greens such as kale, spinach, collards, and broccoli are rich in brain-healthy
nutrients like vitamin K, lutein, folate, and beta carotene. Research suggests these
plant-based foods may help slow cognitive decline.

Fatty fish.

Fatty fish are abundant sources of omega-3 fatty acids, healthy unsaturated fats that have been linked to
lower blood levels of beta-amyloid, the protein that forms damaging clumps in the brains of people with
Alzheimer's disease. Try to eat fish at least twice a week, but choose varieties that are low in mercury, such
as salmon, cod, canned light tuna, and pollack. If you're not a fan of fish, ask your doctor about taking an
omega-3 supplement, or choose terrestrial omega-3 sources such as flaxseeds, avocados, and walnuts.

Berries.

Research shows that flavonoids, the natural plant pigments that give berries their brilliant hues, also help to improve memory. In a 2012 study published in *Annals of Neurology*, researchers at Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital found that women who consumed two or more servings of strawberries and blueberries each week delayed memory decline by up to two-and-a-half years.

Tea and coffee.

The caffeine in your morning cup of coffee or tea might offer more than just a short-term concentration boost. In a 2014 study published in *The Journal of Nutrition*, participants with higher caffeine consumption scored better on tests of mental function. Caffeine might also help solidify new memories, according to other research. Investigators at Johns Hopkins University asked participants to study a series of images and then take either a placebo or a 200-milligram caffeine tablet. More members of the caffeine group were able to correctly identify the images on the following day.

Walnuts.

Nuts are excellent sources of protein and healthy fats, and one type of nut in particular might also improve memory. A 2015 study from UCLA linked higher walnut consumption to improved cognitive test scores. Walnuts are high in a type of omega-3 fatty acid called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), which helps lower blood pressure and protects arteries. That's good for both the heart and brain.



Other Self Care Tips

Get enough sleep

Adults generally need between seven and nine hours of sleep. A brief nap — up to 30 minutes — can help you feel alert again during the day. Even 15 minutes of daytime sleep is helpful. To make your nighttime sleep count more, practice good 'sleep hygiene', like avoiding using computers, TV and smartphones before bed.

Avoid alcohol and drugs

They do not actually reduce stress, and often worsen it.

Connect socially

See friends to build your sense of belonging. Consider joining a support group to make new friends.

Encourage daily joy

Try to do something you enjoy every day. That might mean dancing, watching a favorite TV show, working in the garden, painting or reading.

Check out this longer list of self care ideas and find something that you can commit to trying!

www.youthab.ca/articles/30-ways-to-practice-self-care-take-care-of-yourself

So: what's your tried-and-true self care regime?



We'll be posing that question on Twitter and Instagram this week
Follow **@bcpvpa** to read, engage, share and comment!

Next week

Chilling Out!