Everyday Activities That Improve Emotional Health

*An “X” a day keeps the psychiatrist away…*

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### Agenda

1. **01** Stress and Resilience
2. **02** Our Research into Resilience
3. **03** Five things that help
4. **04** Summary
5. **05** Discussion

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**Introduction: About Stress**

1. Some stress is healthy – we need a minimum amount of stress in our lives to stay motivated, active, and to pursue goals
2. Most of us are resilient and thrive under a moderate amount of stress
3. Excessive stress can result in strain, exhaustion, and burnout
4. Pandemics/disasters trigger excessive stress

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**Stress**

**Definition**

Stress is our response to physical or psychological demands (e.g., work, exercise, illness)
Excessive Stress

1. Some stress is healthy – we need a minimum amount of stress in our lives to stay motivated, active, and to pursue goals
2. Most of us are resilient and thrive under a moderate amount of stress
3. Excessive stress can result in strain, exhaustion, and burnout
4. Pandemics/disasters trigger excessive stress
5. Excessive stress makes it harder to stay resilient ...

Symptoms of Excessive Stress

1. **Body**: Tension; Fatigue; Headaches; Eating more/less; Sleeping more/less
2. **Mind**: Fear; Worry; Sadness; Guilt; Confusion; Anger; Difficulty Concentrating; Overwhelmed
3. **Actions**: Avoiding people; Clinginess; Agitation/Outbursts; Substance Use

Introduction: About Resilience

1. People are naturally resilient
2. People who are resilient:
   a) Accept life is not always fair or easy
   b) Stay calm when things are stressful
   c) Are flexible and adaptive
   d) Stay true to their values, even when times are tough
   e) Remain (realistically) optimistic
3. Most of us want to be resilient!

Resilience

Definition

*Resilience is our ability to tolerate and bounce back from adversity (stress)*

Resilience: Through the Ages
Resilience Models: Summary

1. Resilience is something we all agree is important
2. It has been of interest across history
3. Lots of ‘scientific’ models
4. Often share common themes (e.g., social connections, activity, problem solving, physical health)
5. How do you apply these (to keep the psychiatrist away?). Most models:
   - Don’t tell you what works and for whom
   - Don’t tell you how often you should do it

What Keeps the Psychiatrist Away?

Question

• How do we build our own mental wellbeing/resilience?
• What can we do each day, to stay well?

Our Research

• At MindSpot, our overall aim is to support people to develop and then to maintain emotional health and resilience
• We have been conducting studies in this area for several years … an example …

The Things You Do Project

• We developed a list of 100 everyday behaviours or activities, and asked people who often they did these each week (Things You Do Questionnaire; TYDQ)
• This TYDQ was based on a review of the literature, psychiatric diagnostic systems, and clinical observations.
• In 2018 we tested the TYDQ in an online survey with a large community sample (n > 3000). We also measured emotional wellbeing (e.g., anxiety, depression and satisfaction with life).
• In 2020 we re-ran the TYDQ survey (n > 3000) to test the reliability of results (COVID-19)

Examples of Items

1. I went to bed and woke up at a regular time (Routine)
2. I spent time doing things I believed in (Activities)
3. I set realistic goals (Goals)
4. I had an alcohol-free day (Habits)
5. I did something to improve my spiritual wellbeing (Spiritual)
6. I did something kind for someone else (Kindness)
7. I had a meaningful conversation with someone (Social Connections)
8. I reflected on what I was grateful for (Gratitude)
Results (Preliminary)

- We conducted analyses to identify the things that mattered most.
- Five key ‘groups of activities’ were strongly associated with emotional wellbeing.
- These were important irrespective of gender, age, employment status, and other factors.
- Other things were also important, but not as important.
- The same things were important in the 2018 and 2020 survey.

Survey Results: Summary

- Five key groups of activities were strongly associated with emotional wellbeing:
  1. Rewarding Activities
  2. Clear Thinking
  3. Healthy Routines
  4. Plans/Goals
  5. Social Contacts
- Another key message was to do each ≥ 3 times/week.
- Actions such as ‘doing things for others’, ‘practicing solitude’, and ‘practicing gratitude’, may assist move from ‘healthy’ to ‘thriving’ (TBC).

Clinical Trial

- But, do these five groups of things really matter?
- Would they change during treatment?
  - We recently conducted a study with >400 people who received psychological treatment (CBT).
  - During treatment we regularly measured symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- We also measured the frequency of the five groups of activities:
  1. Rewarding activities
  2. Clear thinking
  3. Healthy routines
  4. Plans/goals
  5. Social connections
  6. (and, we measured other things …)
Summary, so far ...

- The things that we do each day, and how we think is really important
- The difference between people with symptoms of depression/anxiety and those without was not massive
- Doing things 25-40% more than usual was linked to:
  - Reductions in symptoms of depression
  - Reductions in symptoms of anxiety
  - Increases in satisfaction with life

1. Healthy routines
2. Clear thinking
3. Rewarding activities
4. Plans/goals
5. Social connections

What Keeps the Psychiatrist Away?

How do we apply this knowledge?

How Do We Apply This Knowledge?

Based on this and other information, we will probably all benefit from applying the five domains in our daily lives:

1. Clear thinking
2. Meaningful activities
3. Healthy routines
4. Social engagement
5. Goals and plans

What are some examples?
1. Meaningful Activities

1. Stay engaged with meaningful/fun activities
   • What do you find satisfying and fun?
   • What makes you laugh?
   • What can you look forward to?

2. Clear Thinking

1. Be respectful to yourself, but don’t get stuck
2. Give yourself permission not to be perfect
3. Keep a realistic perspective
4. Challenge negative and unrealistic thinking
5. Clear your thinking by turning off the news and the noise

3. Healthy Routines

1. Keep your healthy routines; waking, cleaning, eating, exercise, bedtime, etc
2. Recognise the need for rest and recovery
   • Monitor fatigue/burnout
   • Schedule regular breaks
3. Moderate substance use
   • Substitute/reduce/avoid ‘Octsober’

4. Social Connections

1. Stay socially engaged
   • Who will you talk to and when?
   • Who will you reach out to and when?
2. At work
   • Practice switching on/off
   • Professional development
   • Lean in and support others
5. Goals/Plans

1. Maintain hope
2. Have something to look forward to each day
3. What can/will you do to improve your life?
   1. Set small, realistic goals
   2. Keep your long-term goals
4. Remember to keep looking forward

Summary

1. Some stress is healthy, but not too much!
2. Keep the psychiatrist away by doing the following 3-4 times each week:
   1. Be kind to yourself and stay calm
   2. Keep your thinking clear
   3. Keep doing things you enjoy
   4. Stay engaged with good people
   5. Keep your healthy routines
   6. Keep looking forward

Your List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group/Activity</th>
<th>How often are you doing these?</th>
<th>What will you do and when?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Clear Thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Realistic perspective</td>
<td>- Stop unhelpful thoughts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Less than perfect</td>
<td>- Treat yourself with respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Rewarding Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do something enjoyable</td>
<td>- Look forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do something satisfying</td>
<td>- Have a good laugh</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Social Contacts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Talk about your day</td>
<td>- Meaningful conversation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Healthy Routines</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Regular sleep habits</td>
<td>- Prepare and eat well</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Plans/Goals</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work towards your goals</td>
<td>- Make and stick to plans</td>
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</tbody>
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Discussion
Want to find out more?

Contact Professor Nick Titov at nick.titov@mq.edu.au.

To download our Tip sheets, or for more information, visit our website.

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