The Healthy Mind Platter: “Mental Nutrients” to Nourish and Balance your Brain

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Objectives

Describe seven daily activities or “nutrients” essential for optimal mental well-being

Introduce the neuroscience supporting this “prescription”

Provide examples of how to integrate these “nutrients” into daily life
The Healthy Mind Platter

The Healthy Mind Platter, for Optimal Brain Matter

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The Healthy Mind Platter

Recommended daily “diet” of 7 activities shown to keep your body healthy, your mind strong, and your brain continuing to grow in integrative ways throughout life

Foundation = neuroplasticity: brain’s ability to change and develop in response to experience
Types of Brain Changes

**Pruning**: reduction in # of neurons and synapses
- Getting rid of what is not needed or used
- Genetically controlled, shaped by experience & intensified by stress

**Myelination**: enabling electrical flow among neurons
- Learn & grow → add new synaptic linkages
- Lay down myelin to make circuits more effective
  
  *(Neurons that fire together wire together.)*
Healthy Mind Platter Activities

**Connecting Time**: Connecting with ourselves, each other, and the natural world

**Physical Time**: Moving the body, especially aerobically

**Play Time**: Being spontaneous, playfully enjoying novel experiences

**Focus Time**: Focusing closely on tasks in a goal-oriented way without frequent distraction
Healthy Mind Platter Activities

**Down Time**: Being non-focused without any specific goal; deliberately doing nothing

**Sleep Time**: Giving the brain enough time to rest and consolidate learning

**Time In**: Being quiet and internally reflective
Connecting Time

Connecting with ourselves → increased immune function, energy, resilience, empathy

Engaging in supportive relationships → healthier, happier, live longer

Spending time in nature → feel more grounded, have more stable moods
Connecting Time: Mindsight

Ability to truly “see” or know the mind

• Innate capacity developed through everyday, attentive communication; can be intentionally modified
• Allows us to see how we’re all connected
  Mirror neurons
  Electromagnetic field of the heart

Never too late to stimulate growth of neurons that enable mindsight to flourish!

  Focus attention on mind → build specific circuits in brain → internal world becomes healthier

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Connecting Time: Practice

- Connect daily with yourself and your spirituality
- Discover connections that help you feel your best (most alive, most in touch with your true, core self)
- Practice mindful communication; learn to repair
- Rosie doll: energetic connection (*Iowa couple*)
- Read fiction to improve social skills
- Take advantage of opportunities to connect with the natural world
Focus Time

Brain is built to:

• Focus on 1 thing at a time
• Process it into more elaborate forms
• Connect it to similar items
• Consolidate all neural firing into long-term structured change

Doing one thing at a time optimizes neuroplastic changes that are the basis for learning.

Multitasking has some benefits but lessens ability to focus.
Focus Time

Intense focus causes 3 reactions in brain:
• Activation of specific circuits (fire → wire)
• Release of acetylcholine throughout brain
• Localized release of BDNF* to optimize how genes are expressed to produce proteins needed to strengthen neural connections
  * Brain-derived neurotrophic factor

Focus can be learned and improved.

Watch out for “weapons of mass distraction” (electronics).
Most of the new arrivals seem incapable of conversation. They just stare at their hands in despair.
PEOPLE NOWADAYS
“It keeps me from looking at my phone every two seconds.”
Do you mind if I strap your phone to my forehead so I can pretend you’re looking at me when I talk?
Focus Time: Practice

Focus completely on what another person is saying without thinking about or rehearsing your response.

Focus on an activity to the point that you forget where you are or what time it is (flow).

Think of a shape & color; close eyes; time how long you are able to focus only on this.
Physical Time

Moving your body grows your brain!
Physical activity supports all our learning
We remember more, grow more connections
in the brain, and solidify those connections

Moving your body is critical for mental health too!
Enhances mood; one of the most effective ways
to counteract depression.

“Sitting is the new smoking.”
Physical Time: Practice

Any movement is better than none!

Ideas:

• Dance! (Line dance: Miss Jody’s Thang)
• Go walking (connect with self or others)
• Take the stairs if you can
• Get up and move > every hour
• Play with pets, kids
Down Time

No plans, no goals

Not the same as unintentional mind wandering

Needed to enable mind to unwind and brain to sort itself out and recharge batteries
**Down Time: Practice**

Ideas:

- Get up early to silently enjoy cup of coffee/tea
- Turn off all electronics when you get home
- Sit and enjoy your favorite room at home
- Soak in the tub
- Watch a sunrise/sunset

May need to actively give self permission.
Sleep Time

Adequate sleep needed for optimal:

- Brain growth
- Memory consolidation
- Insulin function and good metabolism
- Immune function
- Response to stress
- Mental functioning (think, remember, problem solve, handle emotions, connect with others)

Driving sleep-deprived is as dangerous as driving while intoxicated.
Sleep Time: Practice

Amount of sleep needed
Food and drink
Electronics (turn off at least 60 min before sleep)
Lighting
Temperature
Use of bedroom
Regularity of schedule
Time In

Get quiet, turn inward, reflect on inner state

Regular practice stimulates growth of brain fibers, especially those that help regulate attention, emotion, and thinking; also improves empathy and compassion (essential in developing Mindsight)

Increases levels of enzyme telomerase (repairs and maintains ends of chromosomes that help keep individual cells alive and healthy)

Supports immune function, energy, resilience
Time In: Practice

Any reflective practice that is meaningful to you

Mindfulness meditation (still or walking)

HeartMath® Quick Coherence®

1) Heart Focus
2) Heart-Centered Breathing
3) Heart Feeling

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Play Time

Spontaneous exploration by self or with others

Engaging, pleasurable, nonjudgmental

Time and permission to create new and unexpected ways of being, doing, saying, interacting

Allows brain to become active in new and unpredictable ways → grows and solidifies new neural connections
“We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”

-- George Bernard Shaw
Play Time: Practice

Enjoy hearty laughter as often as possible!

Let’s try it!
Play Time: Humor & Laughter

• Helps make physical and emotional suffering more bearable
• Empowers us to cope with losses, setbacks, disappointments, illness, etc.
• Offers us perspective
  
  Carol Burnett: “Comedy = Tragedy + Time”
• Keeps us more balanced
• Makes life more pleasurable and less stressful
Play Time: Humor & Laughter

- Releases endorphins (ease pain, elevate mood)
- Benefits the cardiovascular system
- Sends more oxygen to the brain
- Boosts the immune system
- Relaxes muscles
- Connects people; strengthens relationships
- Reconnects us with our true nature that loves to play and have fun!
Play Time: Permission to Play

My friend Chuckles
Play Time: Laughter Club

First reaction upon hearing about Laughter Club:

“What’s so funny about cancer?”

-- Robbie R.
After attending Laughter Club:

“I discovered it’s OK to have fun, even when you’re dealing with something as awful as cancer. Laughter changes your whole perspective on how you choose to go about living – for the better.”

-- Robbie R.
Play Time: Building it in

- Smile!
- See funny
- Create a file of things that crack you up
- Keep fun/funny things in your surroundings
- Notice who/what makes you laugh → get more
- Watch/play with pets, young kids
- Be authentic & willing to laugh at yourself
- Escape Adulthood (www.escapeadulthood.com)
- Doily Lama
Doily Lama: Bib
Doily Lama: Bleacher Cushion
Doily Lama:
Spinning Pizza Crust
Doily Lama: Hat
Doily Lama: Loon Nest
Doily Lama: Candle Holder
Doily Lama: Birthday Cake
Doily Lama: Bridal Veil
Doily Lama: Tutu
Doily Lama: Doily Parton!
Your Personal Action Plan

How can you incorporate the ingredients of the Healthy Mind Platter to create a sustainable, personal wellness practice?

• Treat yourself with kindness
• Combine ingredients (e.g., play time & physical time; physical time & connecting time; connecting time & time in)
• Together we’re better!
• Enjoy yourself!