

Optimizing Mental Health through Therapeutic Life Changes

A Call to Action (from the work of Roger Walsh, M.D., Ph.D., DHL)



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Modern civilization has brought enormous benefits but drastically altered lifestyles. Most of us live walled indoors, divorced from nature and under artificial light. We drive rather than walk and we consume large amounts of unhealthy food. We live busy, even frantic lives and face new kinds of stress. We live among millions of people and many of us see more people in a day than our ancestors saw in an entire lifetime. Yet though we walk through crowds and fight our way through traffic, we can easily feel isolated and alone.

*Clearly, we not only benefit
from modern civilization, we also suffer from it.*



Unhealthy lifestyle can foster or worsen all sorts of psychological problems, including loneliness and depression, anxiety and agitation, troubles with attention and concentration, difficulties performing at school or work, loss of intellectual sharpness, and even dementias, such as Alzheimers and diseases such as Parkinson's. It is a contributing factor in the encephalopathy in chemical dependency.

Addiction is surely a lifestyle disease. Other psychiatric complaints can also be created by or increased by lifestyle choices. And, in general, optimizing mental health is for everyone.



Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes

- ▲ Can reduce psychological symptoms and suffering
- ▲ More than relieving symptoms, they can make you happier, mentally clearer, intellectually sharper
- ▲ Increase energy
- ▲ Enhance performance and sense of wellbeing.
- ▲ Increase in longevity
- ▲ Increase in aspects of anti-aging (telomeres)
- ▲ Increase in feelings of gratitude
- ▲ Increase in awareness of the natural world and ecology



Evidence shows that TLCs can help prevent and treat many psychological disorders and can enhance wellbeing in everyone.

They can be just as powerful as drugs for preventing and treating some mental health disorders and enhancing wellbeing.



Yet the importance of lifestyle for mental health is little appreciated and only a small minority of mental health practitioners emphasize TLCs.

Typical brain-based issues in chemically dependent people and those with other psychiatric illnesses are:

- ▲ Poor tolerance for stress
- ▲ Poor impulse control
- ▲ Poor judgment
- ▲ Brain fog



The 8 Ways to Well Being







Nature

Research indicates that 90 minutes of walking in nature – lowers the risk of depression by decreasing activity in the region of the brain associated with key factors in depression. There were marked changes in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, the brain region active during rumination.

Accessible natural areas may be vital for mental health (Stanford University's Emmett Interdisciplinary Program for Environment and Resources)

50% of the world's population are city dwellers, rising to 70% in a few decades. Urbanization and disconnection from nature have grown, as has depression.

People born and raised in cities are more likely to develop schizophrenia.



Nutrition

Feel better by changing your diet.

For most of human history, finding enough food on a daily basis was a big concern.

Our modern diets (especially in the West) that emphasize lots of sugar, fat, calories and processed foods take their toll on body and brain with growing epidemics of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. But, the mind suffers, too.

An unhealthy diet takes its toll on mood and mental acuity, eventually resulting in greater rates of depression and even dementia. Healthy diet enhances mental function and reduces rates of depression and dementia, and lowers the loss of mental acuity that can occur with aging.

What is a healthy diet for optimal mind and brain?



Exercise

Exercise is a key to mental health. Our bodies are mechanical miracles that enable us to walk, run, lift and play. As we use them, our bodies adapt and flourish. Our muscles grow stronger, our bones tougher, our hearts more powerful. Health improves as we become leaner and fitter and less likely to develop chronic diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure or cancer.

Exercise benefits the brain and mind. We know that the brain is amazingly responsive and can even increase in size when stimulated by exercise or meditation, or when fed a healthy diet. When we walk or work out, more blood and oxygen flow to the brain and over time, new blood vessels form so that the increased blood flow becomes permanent.

Any kind is good, but vigorous exercise for 30 minutes regularly is especially helpful.



Relaxation

Using relaxation for stress management is important for mental health. Stress and challenges are inevitable parts of life. Stress can even be good when it pushes us to learn new skills, stretch our limits or encourage us to reach new levels of mastery and success.

When it is severe or chronic, it can exact a toll on both body and mind. Mentally, we can feel anxious and tense, and can become overwhelmed and exhausted. Over time, large amounts of stress can lead to depression, exhaustion, and anxiety.

Meditation, tai chi, qi gong, mindfulness, reading for pleasure and other TLCs can be relaxing.



Giving Back

We do not live for ourselves alone. Service and an altruistic spirit are not necessarily sacrifice, but rather can benefit both giver and receiver.

Service aids the giver by reducing painful unhealthy mind states, such as greed, jealousy, and egocentricity, while strengthening pleasant, healthy mind-states such as happiness and generosity. Psychologist's research shows that people who volunteer more are happier, healthier, and even live longer.

Society benefits when people are generous. Generosity leads to more generosity and those who witness kind, caring behavior, are more likely to be kind and caring themselves. The evidence is clear that generosity and service to others improves psychological, physical and brain wellbeing.



Relationships

Relationships are an essential element of a happy life. Philosophers, psychologists and scientists agree that the quality of our relationships is one of the most important of all lifestyle factors in determining the quality of our lives. Rich relationships lower the risk of diseases ranging from the common cold to heart disease and strokes, and from psychological disorders such as depression.

Social neuroscience shows that we are hard-wired for empathy and intimacy. Our brains resonate with one another like tuning forks, picking up subtle emotional and social cues, enabling us to empathize with others.



Recreation

Recreation, humor and play not only feel good, but also do us good. Playfulness is built into our biology, as can be seen in youngsters of many species, from cats and dogs, to monkeys and chimpanzees ... humans, too.

Children playing is more than having fun. It is a way of experimenting, expanding limits, training muscles, and developing minds. Play is a way of learning to live together, learning how to compete and cooperate, to make friends and acquire social skills. Its fun, but also an integral part of learning and growing.

For adults, playing is beneficial as we recreate, refresh and revitalize ourselves. We speed our recovery from work, stress, reduce painful emotions and foster feelings of happiness and joy.

It is a fact that laughter is good medicine!



Spirituality

Religion and spirituality are vitally important to most people. Some 90% of the world's population engages in religious and spiritual practices. For most of these people, religion and spirituality are especially important in coping with stress and illness.

However, the kind of religious involvement makes a big difference. In general, people tend to feel better and psychologically healthier when they are involved in religious communities that emphasize qualities such as love and forgiveness, rather than focusing on themes of guilt, sin and punishment.

Research shows both physical and mental health benefits. People with religious or spiritual practices are less likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, as well as alcoholism and drug addiction. People who attend religious services weekly tend to live 7 years longer than the those who don't.



It appears that at any given time, about 1 billion people worldwide are suffering from a mental health issue. That means that in the United States alone, about 60 million people are suffering from mental health issues.

In the U.S.A, about 1 in 5 women over the age of twenty is taking an antidepressant. There are approximately 30,000 suicides per year in the U.S.A , many due to depression.



Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLCs)

Evidence shows that Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes can help prevent and treat many psychological disorders, including anxiety, chemical dependency and depression and age-related cognitive losses. They can enhance wellbeing in everyone! TLCs can be just as powerful as drugs for preventing and treating some mental health disorders and for enhancing wellbeing.

Spread the word!



Thank-you



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