

VURB WELLNESS

THERAPEUTIC LIFESTYLE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

9 Lifestyle Changes to Improve Your Brain and Mind



Christine Angelica

04 Preface

Our mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. For anyone who wants to keep psychological symptoms such as anxious thoughts and low energy mild to none, this 9-part plan was designed to help you.

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PREFACE

Recent studies in neuroscience and behavioral psychology have increased our understanding of mental health disorders. For instance, it has been discovered that environmental factors and family dynamics can contribute to ADHD and that hyperactivity in the amygdala is one of the ways that trauma can stick around. Science has also given us great self-help tools like Positive Neuroplasticity where by intentionally engaging in positive experiences, such as seeing sunsets and exercising regularly, as well as doing special brain exercises, we do more than positive thinking...we engage in *positive doings* that improve our mental health.

A Positive Psychology approach

At Vurb Wellness, we take a holistic approach, looking at the needs of the whole person. Good mental health comes not from any one habit alone, but from a combination of physical, mental, and emotional care. Our approach is also based in positive psychology, in that we focus on practicing positive mental health behaviors. Many mental health conditions operate on a spectrum with symptoms ranging from mild to severe. With a focus on positive behaviors, we wake up each day and do what we know works, which keep symptoms mild to none. Because ultimately, it's our everyday habits that determine our health outcomes.

Dr. Ilardi's Depression "Cure"

Around 2013, Vurb Wellness founder Christine Angelica discovered Dr. Stephen Ilardi's book, *The Depression Cure: The 6-Step Program to Beat Depression Without Drugs*, and began recommending it to her clients. After studying populations with low rates of depression for two decades, Ilardi concluded that depression is "a disease of civilization" and in *The Depression Cure*, he shares the six lifestyle changes that can help prevent depression. With his program, Ilardi has helped more than 70% of his clients stay depression-free.

The Vurb Wellness Therapeutic Plan

Dr. Ilardi's six lifestyle changes—sleep, exercise, a healthy diet, light exposure, social support, and anti-rumination strategies—worked really well for Christine's emotional health clients, and even better when she added mindfulness to the mix. Over the years, her research into the brain and efforts to find the best tools for inner transformation led to the Vurb Wellness Therapeutic Lifestyle, a 9-part program for the management of psychological disorders such as ADHD, anxiety, and depression. With Dr. Ilardi's antidepressant plan as its foundation, the Vurb Wellness Therapeutic Lifestyle is an even more effective plan for managing stress in the digital age and promoting happiness and inner calm.



THERAPEUTIC
LIFESTYLE
for mental health



TAKE ONE SMALL STEP IN A NEW DIRECTION.

Even tiny changes in your lifestyle today can make a great difference to your mental health tomorrow. In this guide, I share the nine lifestyle habits that have proven successful in helping Vurb Wellness users have more symptom-free days from stress, ADHD, anxiety, depression, and other brain-based conditions.

Christine

Founder, Vurb Wellness
Emotional Health Coach



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THE SLEEP AND MENTAL HEALTH LINK

You've probably noticed the difference in how you feel and behave after a restful night's sleep compared to a poor night's sleep. We tend to be more focused, energetic, and functional. There is a science-based explanation for this. The brain does some important housekeeping while we sleep, such as repairing cells, restoring energy, and flushing out toxins. When our brains have had enough time to power down and complete these essential processes, we wake up feeling refreshed and energized.

If you're one of the estimated 30 percent to 50 percent of the American population who struggles with insomnia and either have a mental health disorder or are at risk for one, you want to sort out your sleep issues— and fast. Getting adequate uninterrupted sleep will ensure you're not missing out on those restorative processes that happen overnight to allow you to wake up refreshed and motivated.

Keep an eye on these indicators, as they could be symptoms of insomnia:

- Your energy level is usually low.
- You have lots of unfinished tasks.
- You find it hard to recall things you recently read or watched.
- You're emotionally reactive and often feel mentally tired.
- You regularly engage in self-pitying, rumination, and negative self-talk.
- You don't take care of yourself as well as you know you should.

“ ***The best bridge between despair and hope is a good night's sleep.*** Matthew Walker

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF SLEEP

Most health experts believe sleep to be one of the pillars of optimal health, but Matthew Walker, Professor of Neuroscience and Psychology at UC Berkeley, and Founder of the Center for Human Sleep thinks sleep is even more important than that. Walker thinks sleep is THE pillar on which all other pillars of health rest.

- During sleep, the hypothalamus regulates stressors and emotions, which improves your ability to cope with stressful emotions when awake.
 - During sleep, the immune system memorizes potential threats, such as bacteria, to better defend against them in the future.
 - The amount of sleep you get affects hormone levels such as ghrelin— which influences appetite, and cortisol— which influences stress levels. Keeping these hormones regulated can improve various psychological and cognitive conditions.
- The amygdala stores your experiences during sleep, committing the most meaningful ones to memory. You fail to fully retain memories of your fantastic experiences if you're not getting good sleep.
 - During deep sleep, your body releases human growth hormone which promotes the growth of new brain cells.

CBT FOR INSOMNIA

On the next page are some strategies for improving sleep but I want to take this space to tell you about Cognitive Behavioral Techniques for Insomnia. CBT-I has emerged as the standard first-line treatment for insomnia. Techniques involve stimulus control, sleep restriction, and relaxation training. Most people who try it, notice improvements in their sleep. CBT-I is considered effective for both short-term as well as chronic insomnia.

Visit [freecbti.com](https://www.freecbti.com) for CBT-I resources and to learn more.

HACKS FOR IMPROVING SLEEP

If you're following these best practices and still not getting the rest you need, talk to your doctor to rule out a medical problem.

- Bright light exposure during the day.
- Get some exercise.
- Make your bedroom dark and quiet.
- Use a humidifier to improve breathing.
- Set room temperature to 65 degrees Fahrenheit or lower.
- Get the recommended magnesium from your diet and with OTC supplements when needed.
- Don't consume alcohol or caffeine too close to bedtime.
- Invest in a comfortable mattress.
- Stick to a consistent bedtime schedule.
- Follow a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Reduce screen time before bed.
- Leave your phone across the room.
- Practice mindfulness meditation.

FAST-ACTING SLEEP AIDS

If your stress is chronic, you might benefit from talk therapy and other emotional health tools such as exercise, art, and engaging activities. Again, regular use is important as the purpose of these tools is to help you emotionally unload *on a regular basis*. You also want to stay open to making drastic changes such as moving or cutting back your work hours, if such changes would permanently reduce your stress levels. For the sleep you're trying to get tonight, try these fast-acting sleep aids:

- Journaling or reading
- Binaural sounds
- Guided meditation
- Calm by Natural Vitality
- Weighted blankets and other sleep gadgets
- A sleep cocktail concoction of L-Theanine, Camomile, and Magnesium Threonate
- The Military Method
- Autogenic Training

ESICORCISE EXERCISE



THE EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH LINK

It's not news that we are becoming more sedentary as a species. We can thank the structure and pace of modern life for influencing this the most. The post-industrial age gave us conveniences like cars, TV dinners, and white-collar jobs; changes that helped to shift much of our daily activities indoors. Studies by Neil E. Klepeis and others published by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory found that today, Americans spend 90 percent of their time indoors or in a vehicle. The reality is, modern life trends make it harder and harder to stay physically active.

Today, in the digital age, life runs at an even more dizzying pace and poses new challenges that directly and negatively affect our brain and therefore our mental health. We're sitting in front of computer screens for hours and there are now more demands on our time, attention, and cognition. All this has the effect of stressing our nervous systems and draining our mental energy. And since the mind and body are connected, our physical energy is being drained along with our mental energy.

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Along with sleep and diet, exercise always tops the list of mental health providers' recommended lifestyle habits. And there are plenty of scientific studies to support the recommendation. A cross-sectional study of 1.2 million people which was published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* in August 2018 found that, on average, exercisers had 40 percent fewer poor mental health days per month than non-exercisers. In another study by the University of South Australia, researchers found exercise to be 1.5 times more effective than counseling or leading medications in managing depression.

“ ***Your mental and physical health are inseparable. You cannot work to strengthen one without having a positive effect on the other.*** Napoleon Hill

for mental health

THE ERA

PEUTIC

Having challenges is never fun, but they don't
need to cause us grave suffering either.

Christine Angelica

LIFESTYLE

for mental health

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Despite the busyness of our lives, fitting in exercise is possible when we take a strategic look at our responsibilities and schedules and re-work them. I hope this list of benefits inspires you to do that.

- Exercise releases norepinephrine, which improves your motivation.
- Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) is released when you exercise, which protects and repairs the brain from degeneration.
- Dopamine is released, which improves motivation and learning.
- The hippocampus, a part of the brain concerned with learning and memory, grows in size with regular exercise.
- Endorphins are produced when you exercise, which can reduce the sensation of pain.
- Serotonin is released, which can improve mood, sleep, and more.
- Blood flow to the brain increases, delivering more oxygen and nutrients.

EXERCISES FOR SPECIFIC MENTAL GAINS

LIFTING WEIGHTS

Prefrontal cortex
complex thinking, reasoning, multitasking, problem-solving

YOGA

Frontal lobe
Insula
integrates thoughts and emotions

Amygdala
fear and anxiety

HIGH-INTENSITY INTERVALS

Hypothalamus
appetite regulation, cravings and addiction

SPORTS DRILLS

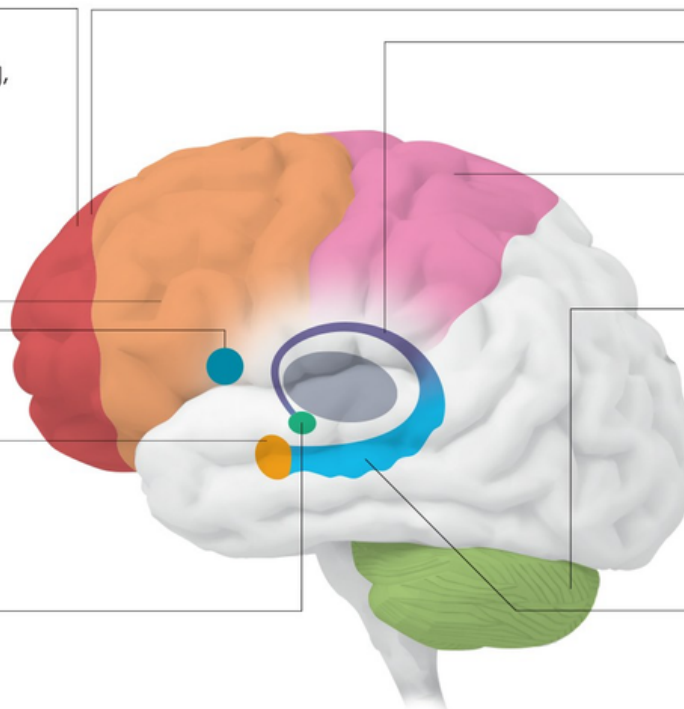
Prefrontal cortex
Basal ganglia
attention, switching between tasks, inhibition

Parietal lobe
visual-spatial processing

Cerebellum
attention

AEROBIC EXERCISE

Hippocampus
memory



4 STRATEGIES TO STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

1. Move naturally by building physical activity into your life, not just leave it for the gym. Here are some examples of how you could build one habit — walking — into your everyday routines.

- a) Instead of sitting, walk as you take some of your long phone calls.
- b) Routinely walk after meals.
- c) Do weekend hikes/meditative walks.
- d) Do annual charity walks.
- e) Take the stairs whenever you can.
- f) Walk or exercise as part of a morning routine.
- g) Use walking to clear your head.
- h) Make walking part of your mental health plan.

2. Add fun to the mix by making at least one of the physical activities you do something that you find fun!

- a) Take dance classes if you loooove music and have fun dancing.
- b) Check out VR sports if you get bored easily and like the metaverse.
- c) Join a local softball team or cycling group if you enjoy working out with others.

3. Make it easy to do. Using a gym when traveling or when the weather is lousy is for many of us, the easiest way to get in some physical activity during those occasions. Think of other ways to automate and make it easy for you to stay active. For example...

- a) Store your bicycle by the door.
- b) Get an exercise buddy or a trainer.
- c) Exercise as part of a routine.
- d) Keep flats in your handbag or car.
- e) Put a TV in front of your exercise equipment.

4. Make exercise a daily habit! Pick activities that you can do anywhere such as tracking your steps with a Fitbit or a phone app and make a daily habit of it. You want to commit to a goal that's easy to keep no matter how busy you get. If tracking your steps, a goal of one mile, half a mile, or 1,500 steps should be sustainable. Also, you want to build a routine for it:

- a) Start your day by meeting half of your goal.
- b) Check your step count twice throughout the day.
- c) By the time you do your second check-in, you should be so close to your goal that you'll WANT to reach it!



THE DIET AND MENTAL HEALTH LINK

A 2018 study published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* established a link between the American diet and depression. Additionally, many experts in the field of psychonutrition, including Dr. Felice Jacka, Julia Ross, Jason Pawloski, and Dr. Uma Naidoo, who have devoted their careers to researching the topic, agree there's a link between diet and mental health.

Research from nutritional psychology shows that what we eat matters—our brains function better on foods that are psychologically protective, such as those high in Omega-3 and amino acids. Once you start eating genius foods (foods your brain loves), you take another positive step in keeping mental health symptoms low and manageable.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

The Mediterranean diet is widely recommended by health experts, however, for the management of mental health disorders, I recommend the more

restrictive version of the diet, the anti-inflammatory diet. The anti-inflammatory diet which is made up of low-sugar unprocessed foods, plenty of vegetables, whole grains, and Omega-3 fatty acids, is shown to minimize gastrointestinal complaints from food allergies and intolerances such as gluten sensitivity.

With clear evidence of a link between the gut and the brain, I suggest making food choices that lead to the least gastrointestinal complaints and that supports optimal gut health.

“*The beauty of “food as medicine” is that the choice to heal and promote health can begin as soon as the next meal.* Unknown

HOW TO GRADUALLY EAT BETTER

Like so many things, eating well is a mindset...a decision. If you make the decision that you want to look and feel as good as you can and acknowledge food's role in that, you'll free your mind to do what it takes. Having a strategy helps. The one I rely on, and which DIYers can easily follow, is the gradual approach to eating better. With this strategy, you make small tweaks like these one after the other and focus on slow gradual changes. This is more sustainable than elaborate diet overhauls.

- 1. Choose the best diet** and eating styles for YOU. Eating styles that complement the anti-inflammatory diet include Intermittent fasting, ketogenesis, and taking amino acids.
- 2. Eat real foods** preferably ones that are in season.
- 3. Make it more convenient to cook your own meals.** With time-saving cooking techniques and gadgets like slow cookers and blenders, access to tasty 30-minute-or-less recipes, and lifestyle habits like meal prep and food freezing, you can make it just as convenient (even more convenient) to cook your own meals.
- 4. Identify 5-6 of your favorite herbs and spices** to perk up your dishes and improve your culinary game. Consider turmeric, sage, ginger, basil, and lemon, which are all thought to be good for your mental health.
- 5. Change your environment** to make healthy eating easier for you: Leave junk food on the supermarket shelves and keep delicious snacks like nuts on hand instead and set up your kitchen to be functional so that cooking and eating become pleasant experiences.
- 6. Convert family members and others you eat with regularly** to as many of your healthy options as you can by introducing them to tasty alternatives for food favorites such as Tacos, pizzas, and desserts.
- 7. Smarten up about nutrition** by following nutritionists like McKel Kooienga (nutritionstripped) on Instagram and by reading books like *Eat Your Vitamins* by Masha Davis. Expert resources can help strengthen your Why and over time, guide you along the path to making better and better choices.



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THE LIGHT EXPOSURE MENTAL HEALTH LINK

There's a saying that perfectly captures the link between light exposure and mental health. The saying, "*Daylight heals and night light steals*" means what you probably think it does: Daylight generally has a healing effect on the brain and is good for our health. However, overuse of electric lights at night can negatively affect it. For positive mental health, we need a healthy interplay of light and darkness.

A cross-sectional analysis of some 87,000 people conducted by Monarch University found that we're not getting enough light during the day and we're getting too much of it at night. This combination of behaviors can put us out of sync with nature and raise the risk of a circadian rhythm imbalance, i.e., sleep problems.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

Sunlight improves cognitive performance and helps to release brain chemicals that alleviate feelings of depression and anxiety and help us sleep better at night. Something else that helps us sleep better at night is dimmed lights which help our bodies produce melatonin. High amounts of light at night have been linked to a higher risk of generalized anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, PTSD, bipolar disorder, self-harm, and psychosis.

With just a few simple tweaks to our daily habits, we can return to a healthy pattern of synching up with nature and reap the benefits of light exposure on our mental health.



The light is coming to give back everything the darkness stole. Ariana Grande

BRING LIGHT THERAPY INTO YOUR LIFE

Something that's important to note here is that too much or too little light exposure can spell problems for our mental health. To get in your recommended daily 15 minutes of daylight, you don't need to complicate how to fit it in or overdo it. There are many rich and beautiful ways to bring light therapy into your life. The best tip I can offer anyone to help them meet their light exposure needs is this: Plan great things to do outdoors and use more light features indoors.

In the Vurb Wellness Mental Health Club, we assign daily self-care activities to help members meet their therapeutic needs. Strategies like these highlight the ways you can use rich and beautiful light-specific activities to get your Vitamin D needs met and set the mood for sleep and relaxation too.

- Put up a string of Xmas or another beautiful light feature in your home.
- Open windows when you wake up.
- Take a sunrise hike to the most beautiful vista near you.
- Do your skincare routine by candlelight.
- Walk after lunch to get a treat.
- Eat your lunch outside today.
- Listen to this month's playlist under the stars.
- Sleep in a tent in the backyard.
- Sip a glass of wine while using your light therapy lamp.



Use Xmas lights to brighten your mood all year long.



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THE SOCIAL SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH LINK

For mental fitness, we all need healthy doses of social support. Because guess what? The brain thrives on connection! There are four main types of social support: emotional support, which includes affirmations of our worth and concern about our feelings; informational support, which involves sharing advice, information, or experiences; tangible support, which includes sharing material and financial resources; and belonging support, which involves spending time together and belonging to a larger community. In order to thrive, we need to get the levels of social support we need.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

When you get your social support needs met, the impact on your brain and life is positive and numerous. Getting adequate social support helps to reduce stress, regulate emotions, increase resilience, and boost motivation and self-esteem. Social support also improves cognitive functioning and is linked to better physical and mental health and better response to trauma.

It is common for trauma to damage our ability to have healthy relationships. If you're a trauma survivor, you may find it difficult to communicate your needs, advocate for yourself, and express negative emotions appropriately. And it would make sense that you prefer being alone or believe you're a loner.

More often than not, taking on the loner label is an attempt to protect ourselves. It is not what a healthy mind or your authentic self would want so I encourage you to do this work if your confidence or social skills could use a boost. If there's one thing experience has taught me, which I hope you can experience for yourself too, is that one of the most healing places for trauma survivors is inside a healthy supportive relationship.

“Spend time with people who are generally optimistic; they're better for your mental health.”

HACKS TO BOOST SOCIAL SKILLS

Putting yourself out there is not easy for anyone, yet, putting yourself out there may be necessary for your mental health. Some avenues for overcoming social hangups include the following strategies to build your social circle and social skills. As with any strategy you use—whether it's to help you eat better or to put yourself out there socially—they must feel comfortable for YOU. Remember, you don't need to be the most outgoing person to model emotionally secure behavior.

- **Work on shyness and social awkwardness.** A therapist or a relationship, emotional health, or confidence coach can help here.
- **Build your tribe!** Many people who are healthy and normal may feel embarrassed to make the first move. Get on committees, get into their DMs, and take other initiatives to connect.
- **Find your tribe through your hobbies.** If your tribe likes card games or cosplay, and you were to meet just once a month, this too would count as social support!
- **Do more interesting stuff** to give yourself content for better conversations.
- **Develop your small talk skills.** Anyone can learn to develop their small talk skills. Yes, anyone! Again, a confidence coach can help you here as well as books like Patrick King's *The Art of Witty Banter*.
- **Use community-based activities** such as Toastmasters and acting and improv classes to help you think on your feet and develop your social skills.
- **Share family-time.** If you're like many people, not having enough time is standing in your way of making social connections. Solve the problem by planning family events such as cookouts and birthday parties in your backyard or in public spaces where you feel comfortable inviting contacts from work or your yoga class.
- **Lose the chip on the shoulder.** We all prefer to be around people who are chill and generally positive. Be that!



ANTI-
RUMINATION

THE ANTI-RUMINATION MENTAL HEALTH LINK

Rumination, the tendency to chew on, brood about, and obsess over a stressful situation or problem in a repetitive manner, is normal if it only happens from time to time. However, it can become a problem if you're doing it often. At its core, rumination is a coping mechanism that we turn to when we are in a bad mood. It's the mind's way of trying to fix things for us and help us feel OK. The problem is, we're not really problem-solving...and we remain not OK when we ruminate.

Rumination can prolong or worsen a bad mood and can trigger sadness and unhealthy behaviors such as overeating and alcohol abuse. We know that rumination turns on the stress and anxiety engines in our brains which is not a good outcome. As the saying goes, neurons that fire together, wire together. By continuing to ruminate, you're strengthening the neural pathway for that behavior in your brain and risk depression and other mental health disorders if you continue doing it.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

Anti-rumination strategies such as meditation, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques, breathing exercises, and engaging in creative pursuits work by redirecting your thoughts. Practicing them regularly can create positive neuroplastic changes in the brain. They activate the prefrontal cortex and reduce amygdala hyperactivity which can lead to panic attacks, difficulty concentrating and sleeping. They can do more than improve your mood in the moment. With continued use, anti-rumination strategies can increase your resilience, self-compassion, and baseline happiness.

“ ***You don't have to control your thoughts. You just have to stop letting them control you.***

Dan Millman

CBT TECHNIQUES & ANTI-RUMINATION STRATEGIES

As anyone with a rumination habit knows, the cure for intrusive thoughts and overthinking isn't willing yourself to "Think positive!" The best way to stop ruminating (or to ruminate less) is to disrupt your negative thoughts with a prompt or action such as getting up and moving or pulling out one of your anti-rumination strategies. There are literally hundreds of anti-rumination strategies for you to choose from. The best ones for YOU are those you field-test and know will work for you. Experiment with a few and keep a variety of them in your back pocket to give yourself options when you need them as not all strategies will work for every mood.

Also, keep in mind that it can take a little while before you become adept at switching off these runaway thoughts. With continued use, however, you will shorten the time it takes for you to act and shut down those thoughts. Something else to keep in mind is that rumination is a learned habit and as such, it CAN be unlearned.

ANTI-RUMINATION STRATEGIES TO TRY

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Play the Script Until the End
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Cognitive Defusion Technique
- Relaxed Breathing
- Change your location
- Go outside for a walk or run
- Come up with a list of 3 things that are going right in your life
- Get creative on your phone with an app like Design Home
- Call someone who uplifts you
- Repeat your favorite mantra or affirmation a few times...slowly.
- Listen to your favorite podcast
- Brainstorm to problem-solve
- Schedule 'worrying' for later or another day
- Set a 15-minute timer and stop ruminating when the time is up
- Organize a cupboard or shelf
- Use a CBT deck
- Turn on your favorite YouTube learning channel



SEEKING MINDFULNESS

MIND

THE MINDFULNESS MENTAL HEALTH LINK

Our perpetual busyness is making us loopy and nowhere is this more obvious than in our work life. In response to the productivity demands of our jobs, almost all of us do something that study after study has shown doesn't work well: we multitask. Multitasking has its benefits and life would be impossibly hard without it, but there are limits to the benefits and many disadvantages when you overuse it as we've become wired to do.

Multitasking is stressful and slows down our brains, making us less productive. For example, when we task switch, it takes extra time for the brain to fully switch attention and cognition. Multitasking also makes us less effective as it keeps us from shining and doing deep work. Deep work which allows us to focus without distraction is shown to produce better results in less time and leads to greater rewards, self-esteem, and career advancement...all things that are good for our mental health and well-being.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

The benefits of mindfulness are both well-established and wide-ranging. Mindful habits such as active listening can improve our relationships with others. It can also improve attention and focus, making it helpful for individuals with ADHD. Practicing mindfulness on and off the mat can help to heal our nervous systems, restore our ability to focus, improve creativity and executive functioning, and according to one study, increase our resilience to stress by 40 percent.

“ ***Mindfulness is a mental activity that in due course eliminates all suffering.*** Ayya Khema

HACKING MINDFULNESS

It's important that we find a healthy balance between being busy and being productive, as well as between work and leisure. Some ways we can do this are by silencing notifications, using time-saving routines, and taking breaks. Practicing mindfulness at work can improve your productivity without sacrificing your sanity.

You may not be able to cut out multitasking altogether, nor would you ever want to, but there are ways to train yourself to be more present when it matters. A simple way to retrain yourself is to practice being mindful while doing everyday home-based tasks such as those shared here *plus* a single work activity such as reading emails.

Your ability to be more present at work will be honed by a combination of practicing at work and at home. Start with low-hanging fruits like showering as they are easy to remember to do. With practice, it's you, not just your behavior that mindfulness changes.



Everyday tasks to practice being present...

- *washing dishes*
- *doing your skincare routine*
- *showering*
- *driving*
- *eating*
- *spending time with kids*
- *doing something creative like arranging flowers*
- *cooking*



ESOP

THE PURPOSE AND MENTAL HEALTH LINK

All living beings are wired to want to survive. But for us humans, life means more than mere survival. Built into our DNA is a desire to matter, to be all we can be, and to be remembered when our life is no more. Let's just say we have egos...and a healthy ego is a good thing. People with mental health disorders are often missing a sense of purpose and without one, find themselves faced with an existential crisis where a perpetual sense of dread or loss of identity can present.

The fact is, we all feel more grounded and connected when we can articulate our own individual purpose in life. Feeling purposeless can drag down your self-esteem and cause you to withdraw. For some, lack of purpose leads to stress, fear of the future, a general unease with life, and a lot of internal noise. It can also affect us when we feel like we're the only ones among our friends and colleagues who aren't living their best lives due to a lack of purpose.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

According to research, individuals who have a strong sense of purpose and meaning in their lives tend to have better mental health. They're deeply connected to their true selves, sleep better, have lower stress levels, and have better cognitive functioning. Having a purpose gives us drive and a general enthusiasm for life. It's having a North Star, or a meaningful goal to work toward, which can add weight to the importance of what we do day in and day out.

“ *The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.* Dostoyevsky

TIPS TO HELP YOU FIND A PURPOSE

The investment manager Stephen Duneier manages billions of dollars of portfolio assets in his day job, but he's best known for his yarnbombing, a “passion” he developed after picking it up in 2012 as part of his resolution to learn 12 new skills that year. Today, he creates large-scale installation art in the mountains of Santa Barbara, California continuing what has become a mission for him: *"A mission to bring people back to nature while building a global community of kind and creative people."*, according to his website.

Duneier's story illustrates one of the best ways for anyone to find their purpose— by setting goals like he did. His story also illustrates that our purpose doesn't have to be a super serious endeavor such as changing the world or curing cancer. Your purpose doesn't need to be a making-money pursuit, or last a lifetime. The type of purpose most likely to improve our mental health are those that change the lives of other people or a single person, such as the purpose to be a great parent.

Don't know where to start your search for a purpose? Try these suggestions:

- **Imagine your best possible self** and the skills you might need, for example, public speaking or writing.
- **Identify the causes you care about** and how you would like to support them.
- **Start with your values.** Identify your top three values and think of ways to express and experience them.
- **Try volunteer work;** it can be a great way to gain experience, meet leaders in your community, and do some good.
- **Learn something new** by setting goals the way Duneier did. Learn to code, learn the history of fashion, a new language, etc.
- **Work on your inner self.** By working on your healing or personal growth.
- **Read biographies** of people who fascinate or inspire you.
- **Develop your strengths** by working to get better at what you're naturally good at.



ENVIRONMENTAL

WELLNES

THE ENVIRONMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH LINK

A 2019 study found that our zip codes can predict health outcomes like obesity and mental illness better than our genes. And in cities across the United States, certain neighborhoods have a life expectancy 10-30 years shorter than neighborhoods just a few miles away. Our environment, in the context of mental health, extends beyond the trees and the natural world. It includes the homes we live in, the people we share our homes with, where we work, the company culture, and the many ways work impacts our health. It includes even the policies and rules that govern our lives, as well as technology. Environmental wellness is a healthy habit with far-reaching implications for our mental health.

I'm excited about environmental wellness as a tool for mental health because it doesn't require much if any willpower to stick to and the changes are mostly easy and intuitive. If your street and neighborhood lack trees, you can make up for it by having houseplants.

THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS

Some of the therapeutic benefits of environmental wellness include:

- Increased productivity, creativity, and focus.
- Deeper workplace engagement, employee satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.
- Improved physical health by enhancing air quality, and promoting ergonomics.
- Reduced stress which leads to less anxiety and depression, and improved cognition.
- Greater self-esteem as our surroundings, much like our wardrobe, is a reflection of us.

“What we are seeing, hearing, and experiencing at any moment is changing not only our mood, but how our nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are working.”

IMPROVING YOUR ENVIRONMENTS

It will be easier to do certain things right away, such as zenifying your home, than to do others, such as quitting your job or relocating, but I want to bring your awareness to the broad and significant ways in which your environment could be impacting your mental health just the same. Develop environmental awareness by paying attention to how you feel in different environments, situations, and social groups.

Become aware of how the world around you affects you, for example, how the news affects you. As I write this, there are wars raging in Israel and in the Ukraine. I know myself well enough not to click on these news stories and to instead, try to keep hope in my heart for everyone involved. Over the years, I've developed strict rules for using my cell phone when I'm working and have made other adjustments that initially felt restrictive but now, I wouldn't change. The point is that while your environment might not be ideal, there are adjustments you make that can improve the situation.

ZENIFY YOUR HOME

We can do things to adjust for what's missing in our environment and to make conditions more agreeable to our well-being. I suggest starting in your home.

- Flip through decorating magazines and TV shows for furniture arrangement inspiration.
- Adopt routines and systems for keeping clutter under control.
- Bring in plants and
- Do what you can to lessen outside noise that intrudes on your peace.
- Adjust for urbanization with Zen practices such as less TV and more candlelight and board games in the evenings, for example.

IS YOUR JOB TOXIC TO YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

You might be among the nearly 60% of US workers who find their job or workplace stressful. Alleviating some of that stress is directly within your control. Other things might require buy-in from your boss and co-workers. And there will be things that are just outside anyone's control that you'll have to decide how you're going to deal with-- by changing your perspective or the situation itself. Let these suggestions get you started in formulating strategies and tools for making work less stressful.

- Take control of your email. Decide when and how often to check email, and how you manage and file messages after reading.
- Set aside Makers' time to do focused work.
- Don't use the "I hate my job" excuse to slack off; doing the bare minimum can be just as bad for your mental health as overworking.
- Work with co-workers to make the office healthier with the choice of office snacks and their commitment to "walking meetings" when feasible.
- Develop work relationships by enjoying coffee breaks and social time with co-workers.
- Get a mentor or identify the "smart people" you can tap when you need help to brainstorm and move challenging projects along.
- Make your workspace stimulating with quotes, inspiring photos, and soothing music.
- Don't just work hard, be intelligently focused.

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

10 Recommend Books/Audiobooks

Why We Sleep by Matthew Walker

Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain by John J. Ratey

Eat Your Vitamins by Mascha Davis

Anti-Inflammatory Cookbook for Beginners... by Rosa Barker

The Art of Witty Banter: Be Clever, Quick, & Magnetic by Patrick King

The Six Conversations: Pathways to Connecting in an Age of Isolation and Incivility by Heather Holleman

Learned Optimism by Martin Seligman

Finding Your Purpose: Living “On Purpose” Rather Than On Accident by Lynda Sunshine West

Introduction to Internal Family Systems by Richard Schwartz

Finding Your Purpose: Living 'On Purpose' Rather Than On Accident by Lynda Sunshine West

The Happy Inbox by Maura Nevel Thomas

Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World by Cal Newport

It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle by Mark Wolynn

Thriving with Anxiety: 9 Tools to Make Your Anxiety Work for You by David H. Rosmarin

The Depression Cure: The 6-Step Program to Beat Depression without Drugs by Stephen Ilardi

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Take time to deliberate but when the time for action arises, stop thinking, and go.

With the strategies I shared in this guide, I've attempted to make something clear: knowing what to do and actually doing it, takes thought and planning. We don't just exercise and eat better in a single step. It takes multiple steps and is process as I'm sure you know.

Habits are formed through triggers, repetition and reward and there are no magic or universal number of "hits" to establish a healthy new habit, no matter what you've heard. Habits are created slowly, at for each of us, at our own pace. That pace may be influenced by your resources, your executive functioning, how many other things you're juggling, and a number of variables.

The emotion-driven nature of stress and mental health disorders makes sticking to our good intentions challenging for everyone, not just you. I encourage you to try and put together a team to help you. Your team.

JOIN THE VURB WELLNESS MENTAL HEALTH CLUB

If you need help forming and sticking to our nine lifestyle changes, I invite you to join the Vurb Wellness Mental Health Club *designed for the practice of forming these habits*. Our all-inclusive monthly membership includes:

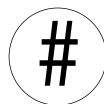
Classes to relieve stress and improve brain function including meditation and self-hypnosis.

Nutritional support with video clips and blog posts.

Weekly "joy commitments" and Daily self-care.

Challenges ranging from bedtime makeovers to sugar detoxes.

Online community that meets on Zoom and WhatsApp primarily.



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A way to live that keep
symptoms mild to none



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