

Emotionally Surviving COVID-19:

An informational and self help guide provided by your Lighthouse Telehealth EAP team.

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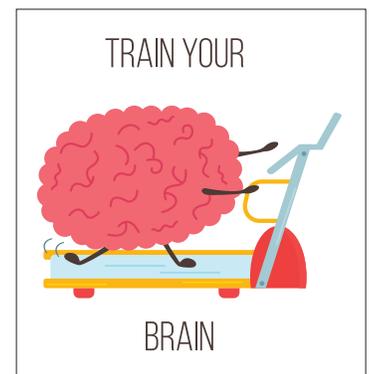
Finally Summer is almost here! For many of us, it is a time to regenerate and regain focus on our overall health and wellness. There are many benefits that come with summer that help us do just that, including more opportunities for physical exercise and connection with nature, as well as an increase in fresh air, Vitamin D, and access to fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables. In this edition of the Lighthouse EAP newsletter we are focusing on brain health: things we can do that not only improve our emotional health and well-being but actually strengthen our mind and help us build resiliency to life's frequent challenges.

Surviving and Thriving in an Ever Changing Work World

In today's work world it can seem like the only constant is change. How do we as employees continually adapt to such demands? Any change, whether good or bad, can bring on stress and anxiety and force us to work harder to adapt to the change. And let's face it, we all at times enjoy being lazy. Our minds are constantly flooded with new information more than ever before so it can feel good to work on "autopilot". The Autopilot brain requires very little conscious effort. How many of us have driven home after a stressful day at work with little awareness of doing so? Kind of scary huh? The less evolved parts of the brain choose the path of least resistance but doing the same things over and over not only leave us feeling unfulfilled, drained, and complacent but can actually be harmful. The old saying "use it or lose it" holds true when it comes to taking care of our most complex organ, the brain. In his book *Train the Brain: Use it or Lose It*, author Dr. Gareth Moore considers the brain a muscle that needs adequate nutrition, rest and exercise in order to maintain optimum brain functions such as memory, attention and processing speed. Without proper exercise the

brain begins to lose function, memory decreases, and processing thoughts and reaction times slow. According to Psychology Today, there is an impressive decrease in cognitive performance that

comes with retirement, which researchers suggest is because when we stop engaging in cognitively complex tasks, the brain is no longer challenged enough to maintain cognitive function. Yikes-sounds like a good reason to not only adapt to change but to actively seek out change. We often think about our diet, or need to exercise, or need to get the oil changed in our car, but how often do we think about taking care of our brains? The good news is that there are many things we can do to help build our resiliency when it comes to change and to strengthen our brain at the same time.



Here are just a few ways to avoid getting stuck on "Autopilot":

1. **Meditation** – helps draw your focus into the present. Research shows that meditation has an abundance of emotional, physical, and mental benefits that can help one become more resilient to change. These benefits include decreased anxiety, increased energy, better control over emotions, reduced blood pressure, improved immunity, and even increased creativity and improved learning ability. Challenge yourself to 5-10 minutes per day for the next month and see if you notice any changes. See homework assignment below for guidance on meditation.



2. **Change things up** – to purposely create newness and adventure in your life (i.e. take a different route to work, practice writing with your non-dominant hand, stop on the way home and register for that yoga class you have been thinking about, etc.). Motivational speaker David Goggins says, "Do something that sucks every single day of your life. That is how you grow". What can you do differently today?

3. **Take action and commit!** – We often have to push ourselves out of our comfort zone, that place where we feel most at ease and in control. That place however can become enabling and prevent us from personal growth. So when you know you need to do something or want to do something, do it! It's important we pay attention to those thoughts and ignore the part of the brain talking us out of taking action. Author of "6 Months to 6 Figures", Peter Voogd, states, "don't wait until you feel like doing something...act. Feel later. If you wait until you feel like doing something, you're never going to do it." So choose 1 small step towards one of your goals, and make yourself act on it today despite what you are feeling.

Resources:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-third-age/201405/use-it-or-lose-it>

6 Months to 6 Figures by Peter Voogd, December 3rd 2014 by Game Changers INC

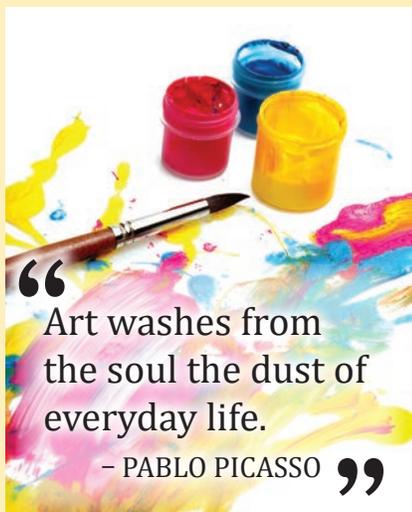
The Brain Workout: Use It or Lose It by Dr. Gareth Moore, September 2009 Penguin Publishing Group

Some foods that are proven good for the brain:

- fatty fish (high in omega-3 fatty acids)
- blueberries
- turmeric
- broccoli
- dark chocolate
- seeds and nuts
- green tea
- eggs
- avocado
- olive and coconut oil
- most fruits and vegetables

Challenge yourself by substituting a processed food item with at least one of these items for every meal. For example, instead of having eggs and toast for breakfast have eggs with a side of spinach sprinkled with a dash of turmeric or instead of chips with that sandwich have a half of avocado and a few carrot sticks. Notice if you start to feel any physical or mental changes, like reduced body aches or less mental fog.

Inspirational Quotes



“Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life.”
- PABLO PICASSO ”

“We must be learning if we are to feel fully alive, and when life, or love, becomes too predictable and it seems like there is little left to learn, we become restless - a protest, perhaps, of the plastic brain when it can no longer perform its essential task.”

- NORMAN DOIDGE,
The Brain that Changes Itself

“There is no innovation and creativity without failure. Period.”
- BRENE BROWN ”

Meditation Exercises:



As previously mentioned in the article above, there are so many benefits to meditation, however meditation is not an easy practice to learn. It takes time and effort and for some this can cause frustration and stress. We don't want to create more stress so start by practicing for just a few minutes per day and don't get frustrated with yourself if you have trouble shutting

off your restless mind. The mind naturally will keep trying to wander so this is normal. Just keep bringing your attention back to your practice. As I am sure you know there are many guided meditation apps and videos that can help you learn proper meditation technique. I encourage you to experiment a bit with these, as there are many different types of mediation, including focused, transcendental, mindfulness, open heart, and quiet mind. There are documented benefits to all of these types of meditation however I would suggest first testing out a more basic form of mediation such as Focused Meditation.

1. Find a comfortable place and sit in a relaxed but alert position. Keep the back straight (we don't want to be so relaxed we nod off). You can keep your eyes slightly open or keep them closed. Fold your hands one over the other with thumbs slightly touching (see picture). Sit up with pride. Again we don't want to fall asleep and this should take some mental and physical effort.



2. Start to focus on your breath. Breath in a relaxed natural fashion. Pay attention to your belly expanding and contracting or focus on the air moving through your nostrils. If your eyes are open focus on a small object in the room and keep your attention on that object.

3. Gently and quietly count each breath, on each exhale counting up a number. Continue counting breaths until you get to 10 and then start over. When your mind wanders (like to other objects in the room or the to-do list in your mind) just shift your focus back to your breathing.

4. There are many tips to help you stay focused and intensify this experience but start with the basics for now. One tip would however be to leave your phone in another room or silence it. It is sometimes helpful to set a timer however for 3-5 minutes so you know when you are done versus focusing on a clock. Just make sure it's a gentle soft timer like a meditation bell.

Creativity Exercises:

There is an abundance of research on the health benefits of creativity but for many of us we just don't exercise our abilities in this area. There are many possible reasons for this including:

1. Many of us did not enjoy art class as children because of the wide range of ability in this area and feeling like we just weren't good at it.
2. Criticism at a young age for something we created may have led us to quickly shy away from art.
3. Creativity might leave us feeling vulnerable and exposed.
4. Curiosity and imagination were not always welcomed by others in school or in the work place.

But did you know art and creativity can lead to stress reduction, creative problem solving skills, increased self-esteem, improved brain function, improved health and immunity, and a better mood! Sounds like it might be time to get out those paint brushes!

Choose a Creative Activity:

- Color/Draw/Paint/Sculpt/Craft something out of wood like a birdhouse
- Knit a scarf
- Go garage sale hunting and find a piece of furniture to repurpose or makeover
- Play "Cake Boss" and make a unique cake
- Go to a local metropark and practice photography (take pictures of nature or wildlife)
- Write a poem
- Paint your nails with a creative design
- Plant/Garden/Learn to compost
- Rearrange your living room
- The possibilities are endless so feel free to come up with your own idea: _____

Brain Exercises:

Instead of filling downtime with mind numbing activities like surfing on your phone, watching hours of television, or one of my mind numbing activities, playing Candy Crush, use some of that time to do something that strengthens rather than harms the brain.

Choose a brain strengthening activity:

- Work on a puzzle
- Play a board game
- Write a short story
- Read a book
- Play Sudoku or practice math equations (yes this can be fun!)
- Learn 5 phrases in another language
- Learn to play an instrument



Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact [419-475-5338](tel:419-475-5338) to schedule an appointment.

Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.