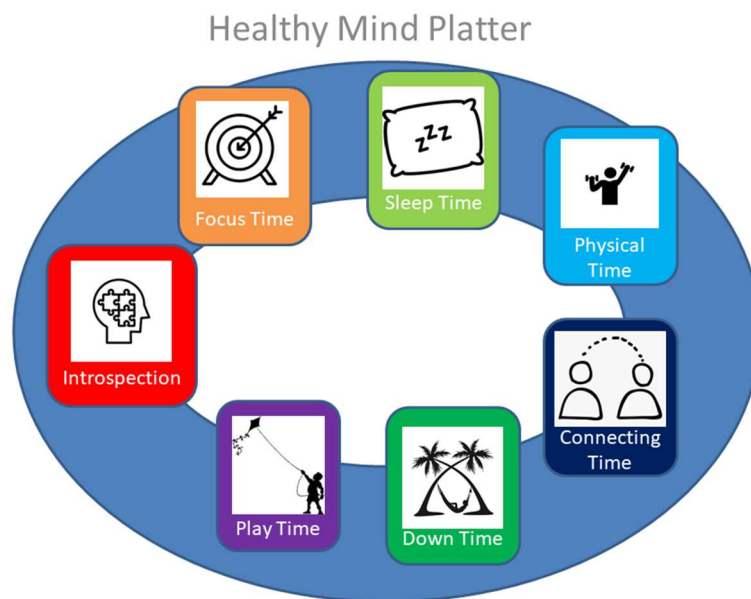


The healthy mind platter

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I find the concept of a Healthy Mind Platter very relevant during this time. I've summarized the main concepts of the research paper by David Rock, Daniel J. Siegel, Steven A.Y. Poelmans and Jessica Payne. I trust you'll find it insightful.

1 Introduction

The healthy mind platter is made up of seven activities that provide a well-balanced "mental diet" for optimal neurocognitive functioning and well-being. The costs of an unhealthy mental diet are exhaustion, burn-out, stress and loss in productivity. Following a healthy mind diet can provide us with the physical and mental well-being necessary to establish and maintain relationships with family, friends and colleagues, and efficiently realize the tasks and responsibilities at school, work, and in our communities.

2 Sleep time – Refreshing mind and body, and consolidating memory

Sleep deprivation can be more lethal than food deprivation. A study in Japan found that depression associated with long work hours is primarily a result of sleep deprivation. We know that sleep provides rest and recuperation of strength, but it is also a highly active state that is important for cognitive processes such as memory consolidation, semantic integration, learning, and the processing of emotions. Sleep restores chemical and physiological processes that have become depleted during the day. Recent studies suggest that sleep is critical for consolidating memories so that we integrate what we learn into long-term knowledge. Evidence suggests that sleep may be even more critical for the brain than for the body.

REM sleep in particular has been associated with insight and creativity. On average we need 8 hours of sleep with the bulk of individuals requiring 7 to 9 hours. If one wants the positive effects of a nap right away, a brief 10-minute nap is most effective. Napping can be learned with enough practice and diligence.

3 Playtime – The joy of experimenting with life

“Playfulness enhances the capacity to innovate, adapt, and master changing circumstances. It is not just an escape. It can help us integrate and reconcile difficult or contradictory circumstance. And, often, it can show us a way out of our problems.” Stuart Brown, National Institute for Play. The play-joy system is one of the basic emotional systems in human beings similar to rage, fear, expectancy, panic, lust and the maternal nurturance-acceptance system. Play and laughter is fundamentally a social phenomenon. Mother Nature has provided us with a naturally rewarding activity that allows us to experiment with the demands of life and practice spontaneous and novel motor and social skills that prove to be essential for survival in the concrete jungle.

4 Downtime – Disconnecting for integration and insight

Downtime is intentionally having no intention, consciously engaging in doing nothing specific. It refers to hanging out, being with one’s surroundings, being spontaneous, having no particular goal or focus, as one might do on a lazy Saturday morning with no plans. Insight is preceded and aided by disconnecting from deliberate, goal-directed, conscious thinking. Down time permits a sorting through of many disparate elements of our mental lives, permitting a process called integration – the linkage of differentiated parts – to naturally unfold. Unconscious thought produces better decisions than when people decide immediately using conscious, logical reasoning.

5 Introspection – reflection, attunement, mindfulness

Roughly 60% of doctor visits stem from stress-related complaints and illnesses. Some of the best ways to relieve stress is through reflection, attunement and mindfulness. “Time-in” is characterized by a very particular type of conscious, focused attention on the inner life of the self in the here and now. It’s a focus on intention and awareness. Mindfulness has been described as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” Mindfulness aims at becoming aware and accepting thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. The impact of mindfulness-based stress reduction may help individuals cope with pain, cancer, heart disease, depression, anxiety and stress.

6 Connecting time – the healing power of relationships

Social support has beneficial effects on aspects of the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems and has been associated with positive effects on various diseases, such as cardiovascular reactivity and blood pressure. Social integration and perceived emotional support are directly and positively related to physical and mental health, including lower mortality. From our earliest days of life our connections to others provide a source of feeling seen, safe, and secure. Our social brains require ongoing connections with close and reliable others in order to maintain the physiological and emotional balance that such relationships establish.

7 Physical time – Improving the brain’s plasticity through exercise

Exercise has the capacity to enhance learning and memory, counteract the mental decline associated with aging and aiding recovery from brain injury or disease. It also improves “executive functions” and allows us to select appropriate behavior, inhibit inappropriate behavior and focus despite distractions. Physical activity has a significant positive and global impact on mental functioning – it reduces stress, decreases anxiety and alleviates depression. Exercise can help to achieve and maintain brain health and plasticity throughout life.

8 Focus time – Attention management for performance

Time is a scarce resource and those skilled in (re)-focusing quickly and staying focused within fragments of time will thrive and be more successful. This requires the capacity to manage one's attention – to focus entirely on the person or task at hand while exerting self-control to block out interferences. The capacity to focus is dependent on a well-developed prefrontal cortex. A lack of stimulation (boredom) and overstimulation (stress) leads to impairment of executive functions, distraction, and lack of focus. For optimum focus predictability and a sense of control are necessary. The capacity to focus attention is an ongoing indicator of mental fitness. Another aspect of focus time is sustaining attention, or staying focused, which is a function of self-control. Finally, there is the capacity to re-focus following distraction or during multi-tasking. Multi-tasking impairs performance. Focus time requires full intentional focus on a task that requires a sense of mastery and completion.

9 Conclusion

One of the biggest challenges of the 21st century is improving brain health and plasticity to deal with the increasing complexity and uncertainty unfolding around us. The Healthy Mind Platter can be used as a simple visual framework to promote and increase the awareness of mental health in our daily lives.

"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."