

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

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Objectives



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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

Connecting Time: Practice



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- 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



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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



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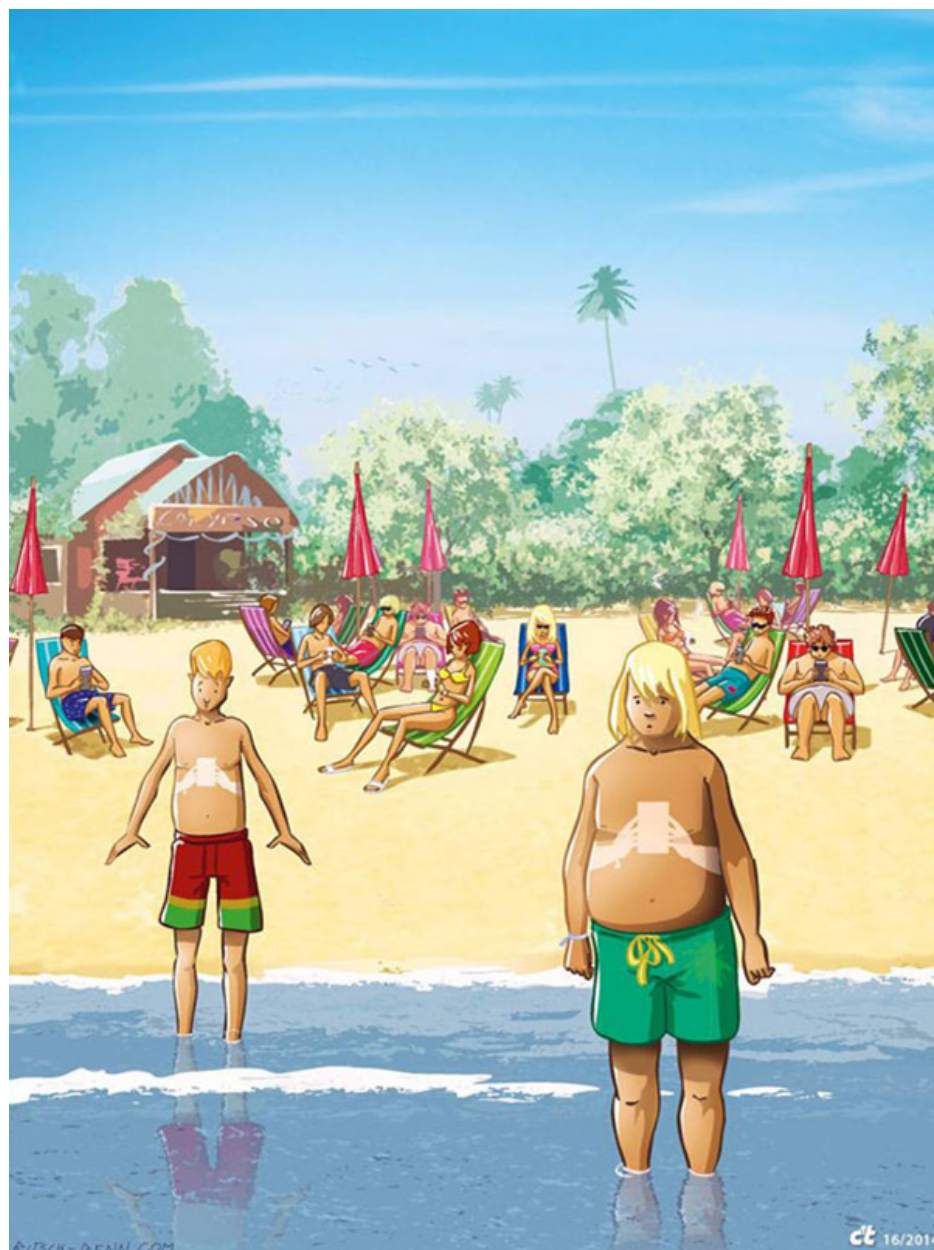
Intense focus causes 3 reactions in brain:

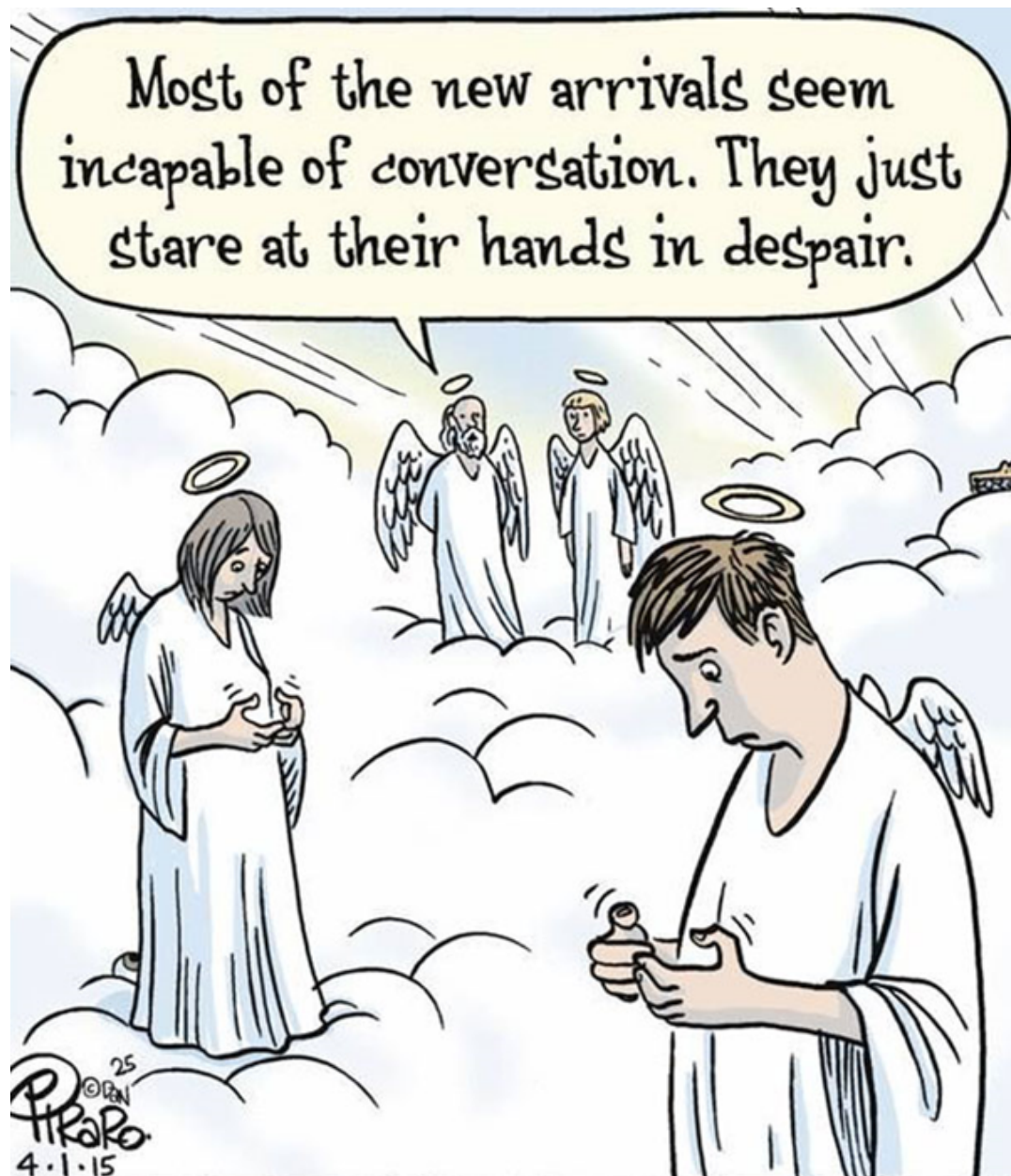
- Activation of specific circuits (fire → wire)
- Release of acetylcholine throughout brain
- Localized release of BDNF* to optimize how genes are expressed to produce proteins needed to strengthen neural connections

* Brain-derived neurotrophic factor

Focus can be learned and improved.

Watch out for “weapons of mass distraction” (electronics).







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PEOPLE NOWADAYS





"It keeps me from looking at my phone every two seconds."



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Focus Time: Practice



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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



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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



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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 \geq 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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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

Play Time



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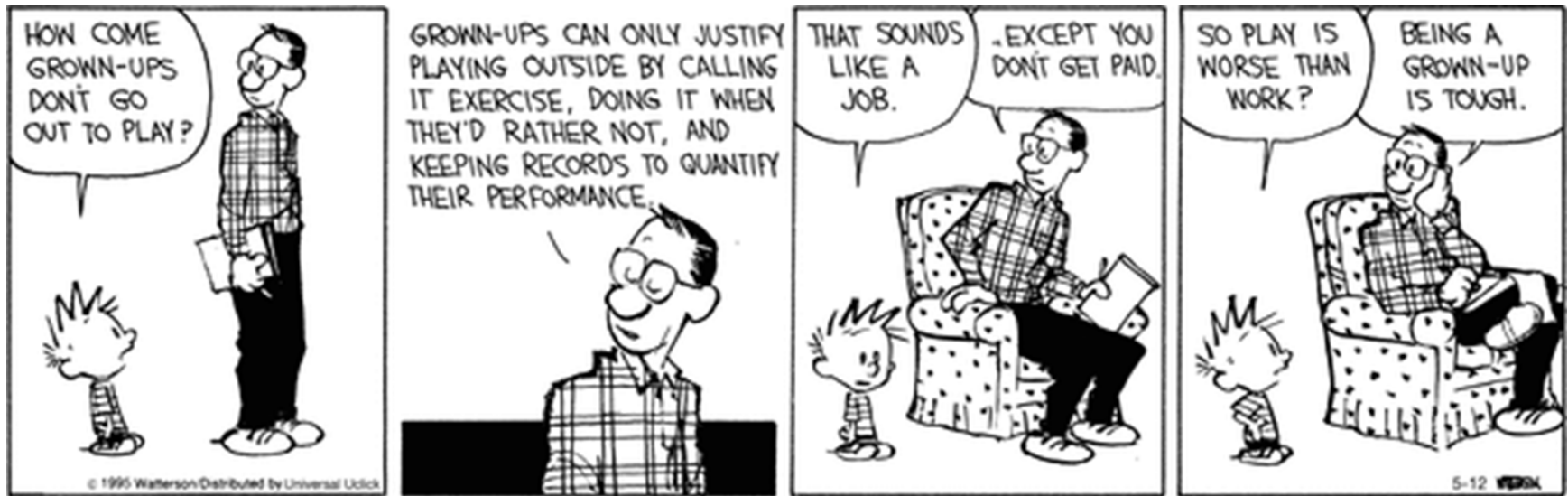
Spontaneous exploration by self or with others

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

Play Time



“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



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- 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



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My friend Chuckles

Play Time: Laughter Club



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First reaction upon hearing about Laughter Club:



“What’s so funny
about cancer?”

-- Robbie R.

Play Time: Laughter Club



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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



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- 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



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Doily Lama: Spinning Pizza Crust



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Doily Lama: Hat



Doily Lama: Loon Nest



Doily Lama: Candle Holder



Doily Lama: Birthday Cake



Doily Lama: Bridal Veil



Doily Lama: Tutu



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Doily Lama: Doily Parton!



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Your Personal Action Plan



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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!