



Self Care Shorts Digital Magazine 003



Welcome to the third edition of the Self Care Shorts digital magazine.

I sit writing this with the afternoon sun streaming in through the window. And while I'm certain the winter chill is nowhere near behind us that sun reminds me that spring is on its way and that summer will surely follow.

I would think that we are all, in one way or another, looking forward to this summer with great enthusiasm especially if it heralds a return to the new version of normal – whatever that is.

But I hope we don't lose some of what we have learned from lockdown. While it has been without doubt a tough time beyond measure for many, I hope we don't lose some of the positives that could come out of it.

Can we continue to work from home keeping many cars off the roads? Can we continue to take things a little slower? Can we take time to learn new hobbies and keep developing the ones we have acquired in lockdown? Can we foster more time with family?

I don't know whether the positives of what we have been through could ever outweigh the negatives but there have been some. **Let's see if we can take something from this difficult year into our futures.**

Nutrition



The scientific evidence suggests that the best diet is one often referred to as the Mediterranean Diet. Here's what that diet is:

Eat: Vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, potatoes, whole grains, breads, herbs, spices, fish, seafood and extra virgin olive oil.

Eat in moderation: Poultry, eggs, cheese and yogurt.

Eat only rarely: Red meat.

Don't eat: Sugar-sweetened beverages, added sugars processed meat, refined grains, refined oils and other highly processed foods.

But... I reckon you knew that already really.



The ‘SMILES’ trial

Or to give it its snappier title! *A randomised controlled trial of dietary improvement for adults with major depression*

This Australian study set out to explore the link between what we eat and our mental health or more specifically if, by enhancing someone’s diet and therefore improving the diversity and ‘quality’ of their gut biome (the microbes in your gut), the persons mood could be enhanced.

They took a group of people who were all diagnosed as suffering from depression and also were taking in a clinically poor diet. They split the people into two groups. The first group were provided with a befriending service as we know that social contact can also help with depression and the other group were asked to eat a modified Mediterranean style diet.

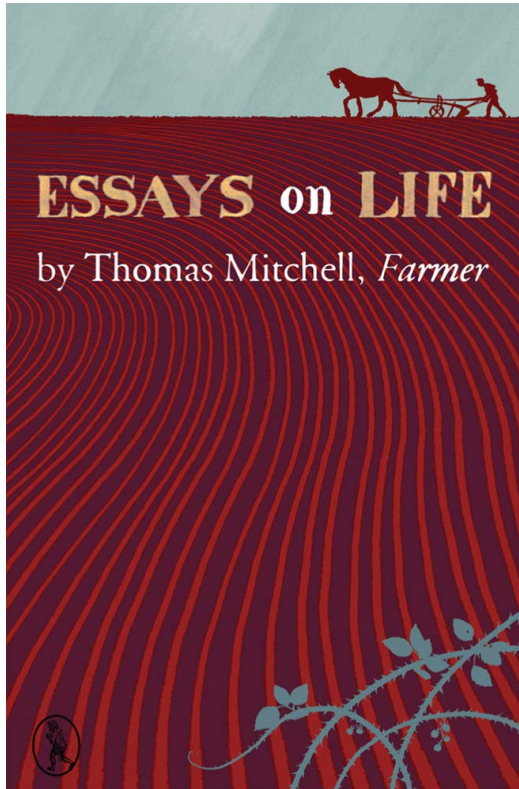
The group who had received the modified diet showed significantly greater improvement in their depression compared to the befriended group with. In fact, one third of the ‘diet’ group found their depression went into ‘remission’ after 3 months. The research seems to indicate that such a change in diet would be beneficial across the general population and as an alternative treatment for clinical depression. Interestingly they noted that depressive symptoms were improved independent of weight loss which is often a reason for a dietary change.

They also wanted to explore the concern often expressed that healthy diets are more expensive. They found that the diet they recommended was on average AU\$26 cheaper than the diets that the participants had previously engaged in per week.

Why might this be? The brain and gut are directly connected by the Vagus Nerve. The Vagus nerve connects to only major organs, one of which is the gut, and constantly receives signals from the gut to see ‘how things are going out there’. If the Gut Microbiome is not in good order then the signals are not good ones. An improved diet that improves the Gut Biome changes this but also a good diet reduces inflammation throughout the body which is considered a likely culprit that leads to depression.

Jacka et al. BMC Medicine (2017) 15:23





Must Have Books

I came across this book referenced in another book and then did a little digging to find out more about *Thomas Mitchell, Farmer*. Because his book 'Essays on Life' written in the early part of the 20th Century is a little gem - full of words of wisdom.

[From:
<https://thomasmitchellfarmer.wordpress.com/>]
Just before the First World War destroyed a generation and divided Europe for almost a century, a farmer in a remote part of Scotland sat down at the age of 43 to write his thoughts on how to live a good life. He records the values of his time and his own take on them. His is now a voice from the past that demands our attention, not necessarily to emulate it but to encourage us to consider what we have lost and gained.

He was Thomas Mitchell.

In the first essay in the book he illuminates us on the Art of Living. Because it is an art! I feel, and always have, that we are creative animals. Art is unique to us as a species and packed full of meaning for life. And life is embodied in art. Artistic endeavour and its output tells us so much about who we are. *So there is an art to living.*

Usefulness

Mitchell suggests that there are some key things. The first is usefulness. He says that we all have a purpose - something useful we can do that contributes not only towards our livelihood but also to our fellow 'man'. Even when we do not choose the work we do he suggests we must do it to the best of our ability. If we carry the spirit of usefulness into daily work this lends a dignity to work that imparts pleasure.

Happiness

The second element to the art of living is happiness. This is something of a current theme for me as I feel happiness in a particular form is liberating and forms the heart of a well lived life. But happiness is not to be found in things or in the excitement of 'this or that' but rather in the steady metre of life. The living of a good life day by day is one that resonates with values of humility, common good, and the joy of the current moment. There is a desperation that we cling onto that we hope will bring us happiness in living for future events rather than living now. Mitchell suggests that the secret of a happy life is *'the art of extracting comfort and sweetness from every circumstance. The world is to*

us', he says, *'is pretty much what we make it.'* Are we a person of things rather than experiences? Are we a person of 'it will be better tomorrow, it will be better when I've.....' or are we a person of 'what can I make of this moment.'

Character

Mitchell goes on to suggest that character, the distinctive mark that gives you your personality, is crucial. We are influenced he says by what we inherit but this only gives us a tendency towards a way of being and doesn't define us. Our infancy and childhood shape us and the habits we form throughout life shape our essence. One element of character he points to is the ability to speak for yourself and think for yourself. Not to simply be buffeted around by the opinions of others. We should be tolerant of the opinions of others and reflect on them but ultimately make up our own minds on the right course of action. I am led back here to the roots we establish in the world by virtue of our values. They will give us our compass.

Self-Control

The penultimate principle of his Art of Living is self-control. Mastery of self and particularly of the emotional self I have always felt is crucial. This is something I talk about a lot and is Daniel Goleman's idea that we can be competent and effective 'pilots of our lives' if we are emotionally intelligent and therefore exhibiting self-control. Every pleasure, Mitchell observes, that is pursued to excess becomes harmful. And here we are in an age of far-reaching mental unrest because, I feel, we can indulge ourselves in all manner of things thrown at us in the name of capitalism and consumerism. Pleasures, he goes on to say, are essential but if we exercise no self-control towards them, they may produce *'ill-health, misery, and weakness, in body or mind'*. How true.

Self-Respect

The final element is self-respect. This to me taps into the foundation of self-care. You must have respect for yourself so that you want to take care of yourself. It is of little value if you show your respect for others and neglect your respect for yourself as, eventually, you will not be available to the other people, either physically or emotionally, to show them the respect they also deserve. This starts with self-respect not with respect for others - that comes second. Mitchell notes that self-respect is a regard for your own name and reputation. If we are to maintain our reputation we have to strive to do things at work, at home, or with friends, (or anywhere!) as well as we can and that starts with being ready for the task ***and being ready for the task starts with self-care.***



Dehydration and Stress



You've probably heard this before.... Up to 60% of the human adult body is water. The brain and heart are composed of 73% water, and the lungs are about 83% water. The skin contains 64% water, muscles and kidneys are 79% water. Even your 'solid' bones are 31% water.

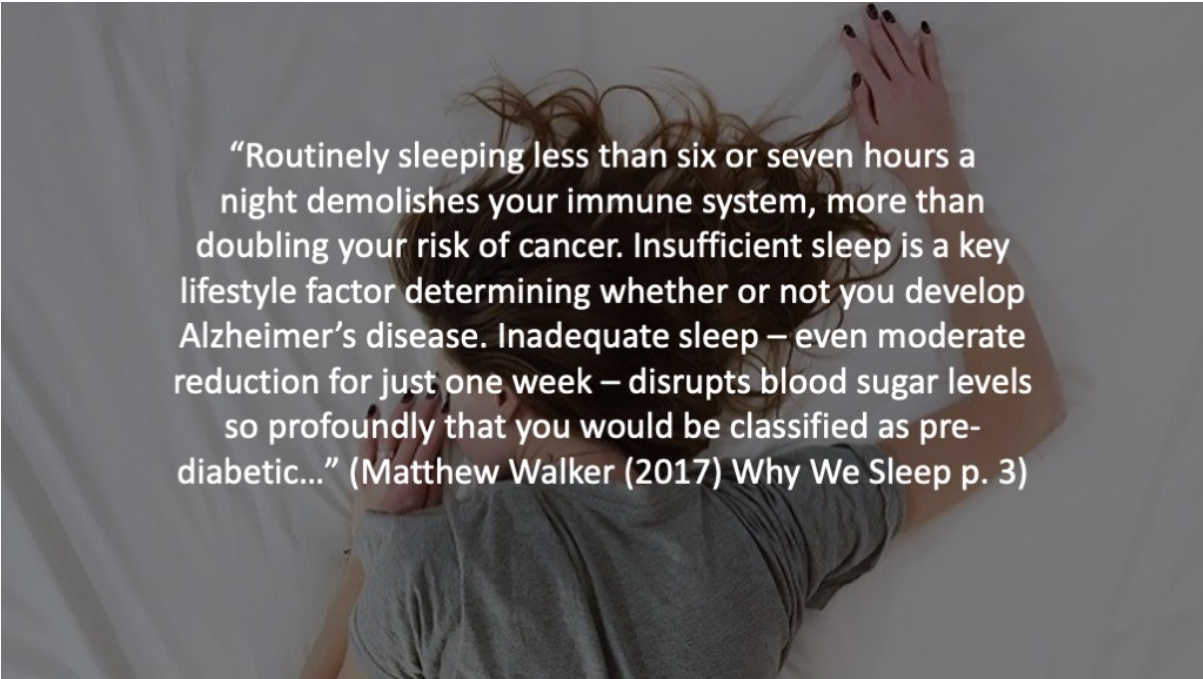
Turns out there is a two-way relationship between stress and dehydration. Being dehydrated can cause an increase in cortisol levels. It makes sense really as being dehydrated is putting your body under physical stress and stress is multi-faceted – physical, emotional, mental. We only have one response to stress no matter where it's coming from. Our body becomes flooded with adrenaline and cortisol to prepare us to combat whatever is causing us the stress.

*And then you are also more likely to become dehydrated when stressed because of elevated heart rate, blood pressure, and heavier breathing. **So, it's a vicious cycle. Dehydration leads to stress and stress leads to dehydration.***

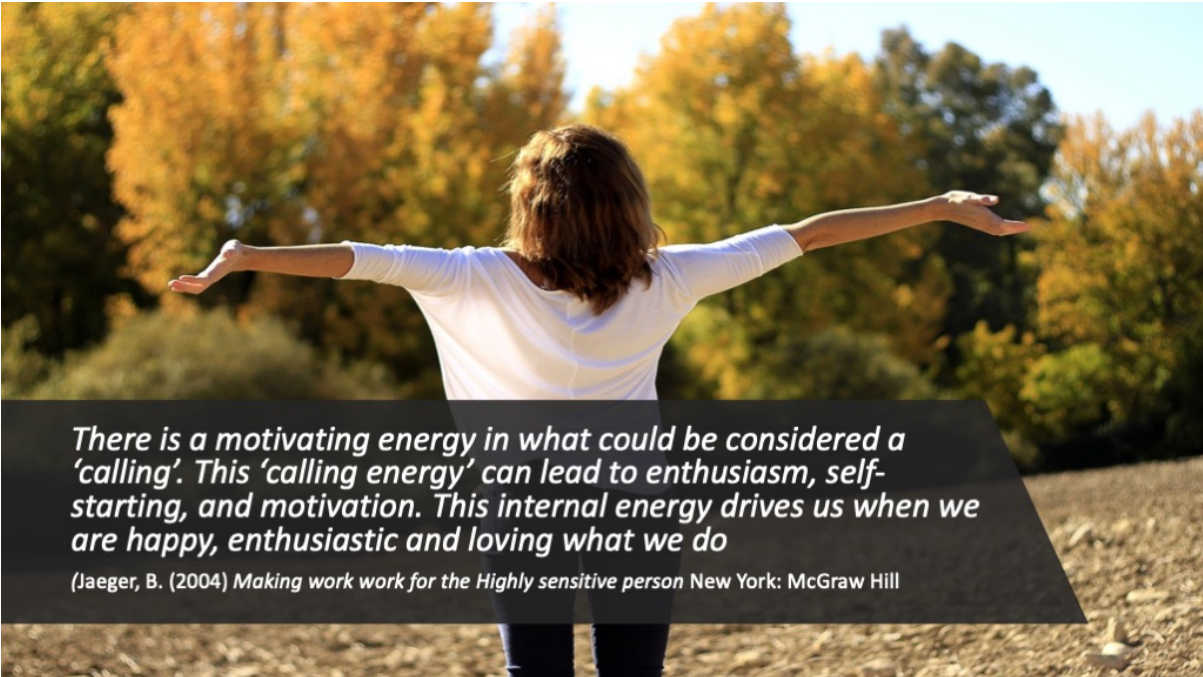
So how much water should you drink? The NHS recommend drinking 1.2 litres per day while other advice suggests nearly 2 litres. You'll need to increase this if you live and work in a warm environment and are taking exercise. You also need to take into account your size and weight.

My suggestion is drink little and often until you find your level. After all we are all different. The colour of your urine can be a good indicator. It should be light yellow, almost clear. It's useful to start the day with a glass of water and end the day with one. Always drink during and after exercise. And remember even just sat at your desk can be dehydrating you, given its relationship with stress. So, keep sipping!





“Routinely sleeping less than six or seven hours a night demolishes your immune system, more than doubling your risk of cancer. Insufficient sleep is a key lifestyle factor determining whether or not you develop Alzheimer’s disease. Inadequate sleep – even moderate reduction for just one week – disrupts blood sugar levels so profoundly that you would be classified as pre-diabetic...” (Matthew Walker (2017) Why We Sleep p. 3)



There is a motivating energy in what could be considered a ‘calling’. This ‘calling energy’ can lead to enthusiasm, self-starting, and motivation. This internal energy drives us when we are happy, enthusiastic and loving what we do

(Jaeger, B. (2004) Making work work for the Highly sensitive person New York: McGraw Hill

Read more at www.selfcareshorts.com





from the How to Thrive in Professional Practice (Mordue, Watson, Hunter, 2020, p.133)

Optimism and the growth mindset



Optimism is the feeling that everything is likely to turn out alright despite setbacks, problems and disappointment (Goleman 1996). The

Persian adage ‘this too will pass’ is a strong mantra for me when things aren’t going well, or I am feeling overwhelmed. Goleman (1996) recalls the thoughts of some of the greatest minds in this area. Martin Seligman, a renowned psychologist at University of Pennsylvania, says that optimism is about how people explain their successes and failures to themselves. Optimists see failure as a consequence of something they could change, which could be better next time around. Pessimists see such events as outside of their control and unchangeable. Optimists respond to problems with hope and action while pessimists do nothing because, well, there’s nothing they can do, is there. Albert Bandura, he of the Bobo Doll experiment and Social Learning Theory, and a psychologist at Stanford University, says that people’s beliefs in their abilities have a significant impact on their actual abilities. “People who have a sense of self efficacy bounce back from failures; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong” (Bandura (1988), in Goleman 1996). There’s a link here to mastery that we’ve already looked at.



Dweck (2017) refers to this ability to see opportunities to change as having a growth mindset. She tells us

that there are two sorts of people generally. Those who have a fixed mindset and those who have a growth mindset. People with a fixed mindset see that their skills and abilities are fixed. They have what they have, and they are not going to get anymore.

People with a growth mindset see that they can use what they have to improve and develop.

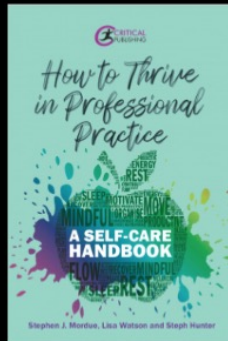
When a challenge presents itself they consider how they can use and develop their skills to reach the heights of skill, knowledge and ability that the task requires rather than thinking the task is simply unachievable for ‘someone like them’. This growth mindset is a great motivating force. Nelson Mandela is reported to have said, ‘I never lose. I either win or learn’. It’s important not to be afraid of failure. We need to try new things to stretch ourselves, not only at work but also outside of work. I like to turn the mantra ‘failure is not an option’ on its head and say that ‘failure is always an option’. We shouldn’t be afraid of that. We should try a new sport, or try to cook a new recipe, or give meditation a go. If it goes wrong, we learn from it and move forward.

Dweck, C. (2017) *Mindset* Robinson: Great Britain

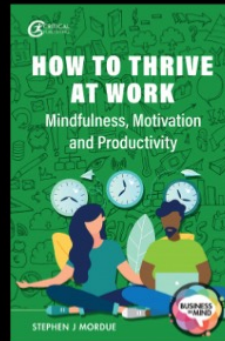
Goleman, D. (1996) *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* Bloomsbury Publishing: London



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