

Julies Top Tips for Healthy Mental Health

When you go to bed each night try to think of 3 things that went well during that day: you're not looking to find a cure for cancer or reinventing the wheel but 3 simple things that made your day a little bit better (if your struggling to get past 2, your 3rd could be: you didn't burn the dinner tonight, a smile from someone on the tube, you didn't get wet on the way home from work...)

Laughter is the best medicine, especially when school can be such a challenging and stressful place at times; go to a comedy club, watch a funny film or just arrange to see the friend that makes you laugh the most.

The act of planning a break and having something to look forward to can boost your overall happiness for up to 8 weeks! Always have something in the diary every half term to look forward to, even if you can't get away, spend the day with a friend, do something different or step out of your comfort zone (I recently did the London zip wire – as someone who is terrified of heights it frightened me to death but it distracted me from the everyday worries and stresses of life and I still laugh at myself when I recall how pathetic I was before I jumped!).

Show some love and affection to someone in your life. Close, quality relationships are key for a happy, healthy life, we all presume that those who have been in our lives for a long time know how we feel about them but take the time to tell them, you will be surprised at how good you both feel.

Start living in the moment and not for social media, embrace fun and experience it 100% not through a lens.

Sleep is so important; make sure your bedroom is not too hot, try to leave a window open a little to circulate fresh air, have the room as dark as possible; turn off all electricals – even from standby mode. If you have worries going round and round on a loop; get them out of your head – write them on a piece of paper next to your bed: the worries are never ending while they are going around on a loop but you will find there are probably less than 5 issues when written down.

When your confidence is a little knocked, do something you're good at to remind you of your strengths. Build your self-confidence, then tackle a tougher task.

Go off the grid! Leave your mobile at home for a day and disconnect from constant emails, social media alerts and other interruptions. If you panic about being out of touch to close family etc. then buy a really cheap Nokia phone that doesn't have Wi-Fi.

Dance around while you do your housework. Not only will you get chores done, but dancing reduces levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and increases endorphins (the body's "feel-good" chemicals).

If something has been bothering you, let it all out...on paper. Writing about upsetting experiences can reduce symptoms of depression. Don't hold on to anger or bitterness – that can stay with you even after the person has left your life. You could write a letter to the person responsible for your stress, don't send the letter but tear it up into tiny pieces or burn it.

Do a life audit: keep the good friends and phase out the bad ones, keep all the 'Thank you teacher' cards and special messages and throw away all your old insurance policies, phone bills, reminders etc. etc.

Try to control your 'self-talk' it can be very damaging. Those negative messages that you have been carrying around since childhood need to be ditched! They are most probably not even true!!

Try prepping your lunches or picking out your clothes for the week. You'll save some time in the mornings and have a sense of control over your time.

Relax in a warm bath once a week. Try adding Epsom salts to soothe aches and pains and help boost magnesium levels, which can be depleted by stress (as someone who doesn't check weights properly when ordering I have mountains of Epsom salts at home so let me know if you want to try before you buy!).

Go ahead and yawn. Studies suggest that yawning helps cool the brain and improves alertness and mental efficiency.

Smile! It may not be the easiest thing to do when you're stressed but smiling can help to lower your heart rate and calm you down.

Work some omega-3 fatty acids into your diet: they are linked to decreased rates of depression among their many benefits. Fish oil supplements work, but eating your omega-3s in foods like salmon, flaxseeds or walnuts also helps the bacteria in your gut. (Ms. Sharma is a great advocate of walnuts!).

Send a thank you note - not for a material item, but to let someone know why you appreciate them. Written expressions of gratitude are linked to increased happiness.

During the winter we get to school in the dark and often leave in the dark, Do your best to enjoy 15 minutes of sunshine / daylight. Sunlight synthesizes Vitamin D, which experts believe could really lift your mood.

Think of something in your life you want to improve, and figure out what you can do to take a step in the right direction, one step at a time.....

Go back to your childhood and draw, make an airfix model or paint, even if you are like me and not very good!

Make Happy Memories – wherever, whenever and with whomever.

Spend some time with a furry friend. Time with animals lowers the stress hormone - cortisol, and boosts oxytocin - which stimulates feelings of happiness.

None of us are superhuman, we can all get overwhelmed or feel down but if things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, reach out; your family or friends may be able to offer practical help or a listening ear. Otherwise make an appointment to see your GP. I have also uploaded a comprehensive list of helplines and organisations so never feel as though you have to face anything alone.