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Why Well-Being?

We get this question a lot. So why does well-being matter and how are we measuring it?

Researchers, including those at the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, continue to investigate the factors that shape well-being. Rather than pitching a fixed scientific definition of well-being, we're constantly unearthing clues and evidence about how well-being manifests itself in the mind and body. It's not a static "thing" – but a set of skills that can be learned and cultivated over time, just like learning to play a musical instrument or riding a bike.

The Center for Healthy Minds ("the Center") researchers explored the "how" of emotional well-being in a new paper in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS).

Based on decades of research, we've identified four areas that contribute to well-being that are trainable and measurable in the lab: awareness, connection, insight, and purpose.

Let's take a deep dive into the four pillars of well-being. Our friends at Healthy Minds Innovations, the external nonprofit affiliated with the Center, also share practices below on promoting your well-being.

Awareness

What It Is: A heightened, flexible attentiveness to your environment and internal cues such as bodily sensations, thoughts and

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feelings. Training in awareness during meditation practices can increase what's called "meta-awareness" or being aware of what is happening in your mind.

What It Looks Like:

- Noticing thoughts, feelings, sensations as they arise - commonly called mindfulness
- Catching yourself from being distracted or in auto-pilot mode while doing daily tasks like cleaning or driving

The Science:

- People with higher levels of awareness have higher levels of well-being and positive emotions.
- Distraction, the main detractor from awareness, can impair executive function as well as increase stress and anxiety, ADHD symptoms, and depression.
- Some studies show that distraction and the effects of perceived stress can harm our health and produce stress responses in the body related to inflammation and aging.
- Bringing awareness to one's thoughts recruits lateral regions of the prefrontal cortex that form part of the brain's central-executive network.

Practice: Close your eyes and take 10 intentional breaths, counting each silently and noticing how each inhale and exhale feels in your body. What do you notice? Whatever arises is fine. It's the noticing that matters. Want a guided practice? Try the "Tour of the Senses: 10-Minute Sitting Practice" (<https://soundcloud.com/user-984650879/a-tour-of-the-senses-10-minute-sitting-meditation>) from Healthy Minds Innovations.

Connection

What It Is: A feeling of care and kinship toward other people, promoting supportive relationships and supportive interactions

What It Looks Like:

- Acknowledging people's differences (like politics or points of view) and trying to understand that person's unique perspective and acknowledge that, just like you, they are worthy of dignity and respect as a fellow human being
- Showing appreciation to people in your life by acknowledging them and sharing why you're grateful for them
- Focusing on a shared characteristic when you meet someone for the first time

The Science:

- Forming negative first impressions (or even neutral ones in some cases) can potentially lead to apathy, intergroup bias, and perceived social isolation.
- Social relationships are better predictors of health than some biological and economic factors.
- Making inferences about someone we perceive to be similar to ourselves activates the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is central to the perception of social safety and feelings of social connection.
- One Center study has reported that just 30 minutes of compassion meditation training per day over the course of two weeks resulted in changes in people's caring behaviors as well as resulted in measurable changes in the brain.

Practice: Make a habit of noticing the positive in other people. You do this as a sitting meditation practice by bringing a close friend or family member to mind and noticing things you admire or appreciate about them. Recall situations where they expressed these qualities and then imagine expressing your appreciation. You can then extend this to people you don't know very well and eventually even to people you find challenging. Then apply this skill in daily life by noticing the positive in the people you see and interact with and expressing your appreciation.

Try a guided practice! Listen to this “Appreciation: Sitting Practice” (<https://soundcloud.com/user-984650879/appreciation-sitting-practice>) from Healthy Minds Innovations.

Insight

What It Is: Self-knowledge concerning how our emotions, thoughts and beliefs shape our experiences and sense of self

What It Looks Like:

- Recognizing an anxious thought and being curious whether it’s coming from a fearful expectation or self-criticism
- Clarify and challenge “unchangeable” beliefs about yourself and people around you

The Science:

- Rigid and negative self beliefs can result in an increase in mental health disorders, while accepting and growth-oriented beliefs about the self are linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety and even things like improved academic performance.
- Scientific studies of the self suggest that there does not appear to be a single, unitary network associated with insight in the brain.
- Meditators with significant experience who have done insight-related deconstructive meditation appear to show enduring changes in self-related processing in the brain.

Practice: If you’ve ever found yourself already in a bad mood before even joining a meeting, that’s a moment for insight. You can question your assumptions, and notice them.

Want to try a guided practice? Listen to “Deconstructing Inner Experience” (<https://soundcloud.com/user-984650879/deconstructing-inner-experiencegratitude-sp-10-cd>) from Healthy Minds Innovations.

Purpose

What It Is: Being clear about your core values and deeper motivation and being able to apply them in your daily life

What It Looks Like:

- Being able to link mundane activities with a meaningful value or motivation, such as doing the dishes as an act of generosity for the people you live with
- Viewing challenges and setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow, including strengthening your connection to meaningful values and goals

The Science:

- A strong sense of purpose is associated with improved health outcomes and behaviors, including increased physical activity, decreased incidence of stroke, fewer cardiovascular events, reduced

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Did You Miss Well-Being Week in Law?

If you didn’t tune in to the events of 2021 Well-Being Week in Law last month, you can catch up on everything you missed! The OAAP posted daily blog posts about the various aspects of well-being, with a different focus each day and suggestions for well-being activities to “watch,” “read,” and “do.”

- **Monday** – Stay Strong: Well-Being Week Kickoff and Physical Well-Being
- **Tuesday** – Align: Spiritual Well-Being
- **Wednesday** – Engage and Grow: Career and Intellectual Well-Being
- **Thursday** – Connect: Social Well-Being
- **Friday** – Feel Well: Emotional Well-Being

Visit our Thriving Today blog at www.oaap.org and check out the full week of blog posts – or just pick one that catches your eye. It’s never too late to focus on well-being!

risk of death, lower health care utilization, and even better financial health.

- In a sample of African Americans at high-risk for psychiatric disorders, purpose in life emerged as a key factor predicting resilience and recovery from traumatic events.

- A pioneering study found people who prioritized more transcendent values (those that extend beyond themselves) had different activity in the left and right amygdala and left anterior insula, suggesting more transcendent values may reduce defensiveness and promote openness.

Practice: In moments of hardship (like many people around the world are experiencing with the pandemic), identify what is most meaningful to you. For some whose aspirations might be to create a kinder world, how can you find actionable ways to be kind in this moment?

Guided practice: “Purpose Practice: Core Values” (<https://soundcloud.com/user-984650879/purpose-practice-core-values>) from Healthy Minds Innovations.

This article originally appeared on The Center for Healthy Minds at University of Wisconsin-Madison (<https://centerhealthyminds.org/>). Reprinted with permission.

Women’s Trauma Support Group

Starting fall 2021, the OAAP will facilitate a confidential support group for women who have experienced trauma, including volatile relationships or childhood trauma, and/or who have struggled with a loved one’s compulsive behaviors. Topics will include the process of trauma, power and abuse, grounding and self-soothing, and healthy relationships.

OAAP Attorney Counselor Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW, will be the group facilitator.

Please watch for more information in the next *inSight* or a broadcast email.

Four Surprising Ways to Get a Better Night’s Sleep

Research suggests that practicing gratitude, forgiveness, mindfulness, and self-compassion may improve our sleep during stressful times.

A lot of us are suffering from lack of sleep these days. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 35% of adult Americans regularly get less than seven hours of sleep per night, with African Americans and other minority groups sleeping even less than that.

With the pandemic still in full swing, we may have even more sleep problems than usual. Worries about our health and safety, jobs, kids’ disrupted education, and more are keeping many of us up at night, creating fatigue and stress the next day. This could also lead to more serious mental health issues, like depression and even suicide.

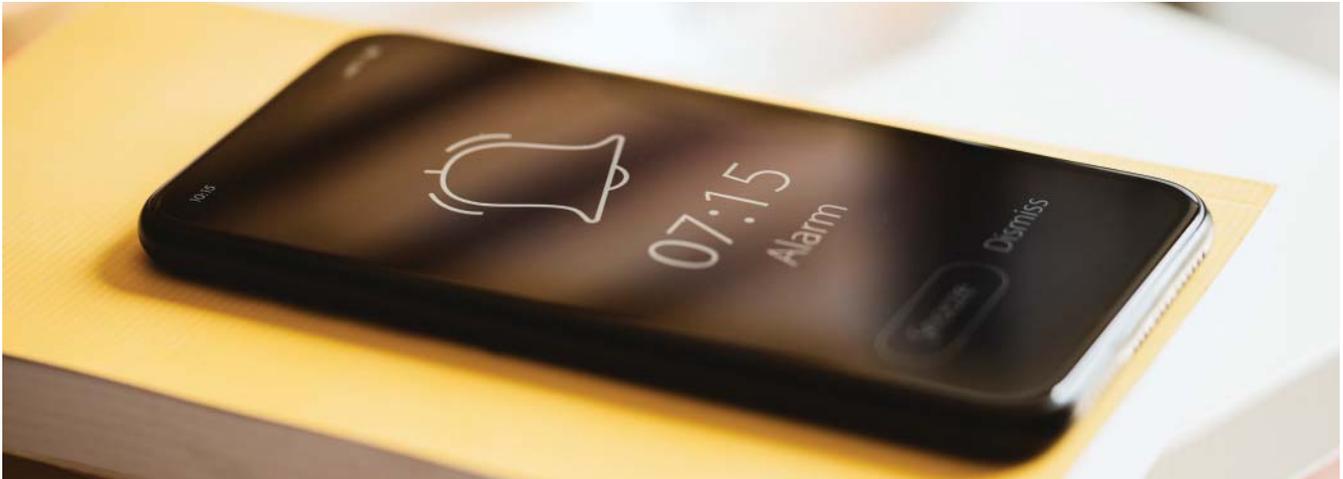
Improving “sleep hygiene” is a good remedy – including going to bed at the same time every night, making sure your room is dark and quiet at bedtime, forgoing afternoon caffeine, and creating sleep-time rituals (like putting on cozy pajamas and reading a book before bed). But many people still suffer from sleep problems even after making these adjustments. And, though turning to sleeping pills can be effective, they can also be addictive, or they can disrupt our dreaming, which leads to lower-quality sleep.

Fortunately, there may be other things worth trying to help us sleep that have more to do with our minds than our bodies. Recent research suggests that many of the well-being practices we can do to be happier also have a positive effect on sleep. Here are some of those practices.

Mindfulness meditation

A recent analysis of several high-quality studies (randomized controlled trials) concluded that mindfulness meditation programs help people fall asleep more easily and experience better-quality sleep overall.

One study conducted in Wuhan, China, actually looked at how mindfulness might be useful for



sleeping better during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the study, people spent 10 days using an app that either guided them through mindfulness meditation or induced mind-wandering (unfocused attention). They then reported how mindful they were and how much sleep they got the next day.

After taking into account other factors influencing sleep (like how much caffeine people drank, their age, or prior anxiety levels), the researchers analyzed how long people slept as the virus spread and deaths proliferated in their community. Those who practiced mindfulness and became more mindful didn't lose as much sleep as those in the other group, likely because mindfulness protected them some from worry and rumination. Mindfulness helps people recognize and accept negative thoughts and feelings without fighting them, reducing their intensity and preventing them from spiraling out of control.

If you've not already tried mindfulness meditation, you can find many online resources to give it a go – including apps, which seem to be at least somewhat effective. You can also go to Greater Good in Action and try their practices – including a body scan, mindful breathing, or common humanity meditation. These exercises, besides potentially helping with sleep, have been found to reduce stress and depression and increase happiness and satisfaction with life, too.

Self-compassion

Self-compassion is something all of us could use right now, especially as lockdowns drag on and

we find ourselves feeling more tired, unhappy, and unproductive than usual. Getting down on ourselves for perceived mistakes and flaws could exacerbate low-grade depression, which many of us already feel.

Self-compassion helps us to be kinder to ourselves as we go through the ups and downs of life. According to researcher Kristin Neff, self-compassion involves paying attention to our internal and external experiences (mindfulness), recognizing when we are suffering and sending kind messages to ourselves, and keeping in mind our common humanity – that we are not alone in our imperfections or suffering.

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Developing Healthy Boundaries

Starting fall 2021, the OAAP will offer a free and confidential workshop designed to help you create healthy boundaries in your personal and professional lives.

OAAP Attorney Counselor Doug Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I, will be the workshop facilitator.

Please watch for more information in the next *inSight* or a broadcast email.

Studies have found that more self-compassionate people have better sleep, including less trouble falling asleep after a stressful day. In that study, people who were more self-compassionate were also in a better mood and felt more alert upon awakening than those with little self-compassion.

Self-compassion can be strengthened with practice, and that improves sleep, too. In one study, participants were asked to think about personal mistakes they'd made before going to bed and assigned to do a self-compassion meditation, a self-compassion writing exercise, or neither of those (as a comparison). Based on their reports the next morning, those who did a self-compassion exercise slept significantly better and ruminated less than those who didn't try self-compassion. These practices even helped people who started out more depressed, which is good to know, given how many of us are ruminating more these days.

A new paper analyzing the results of several studies found there was “a significant association between self-compassion and self-reported sleep quality.” Though more rigorous studies could be done to confirm this, we can always benefit from practices like writing ourselves a self-compassion letter or taking a self-compassion break.

Gratitude

Feeling grateful is a good way to feel happier and strengthen our relationships. Now, it appears to help with sleep, too.

In one study, 119 young women were randomly selected to write about people and things they were grateful for each day, things that happened each day, or nothing at all. After two weeks, people's sleep quality improved significantly in the gratitude group, and this helped improve their well-being and optimism and reduce blood pressure, too. In a recent review of gratitude exercises and their effects on physical health, researchers found that one of the strongest impacts of gratitude was on sleep quality.

One reason gratitude may affect sleep is that a grateful mindset seems to help us embrace more positive thoughts and let go of more negative ones

before we go to bed. This means that it doesn't take as long for us to fall asleep at night.

To try gratitude practices yourself, you might consider keeping a gratitude journal (or use the GGSC's Thnx4 online journal) or writing a gratitude letter. These are designed to increase your positive thoughts and feelings, which may be key to better sleep.

Forgiveness

For some people, forgiving others is hard – especially if you equate forgiveness with letting someone “off the hook” and condoning their harmful actions. But those who study forgiveness consider it to be not necessarily about healing relationships between people, but mostly important for ourselves, helping us to let go of grudges that decrease our personal well-being.

If what's keeping you up at night is holding on to grudges – pandemic-related or not – it could be worth considering practicing forgiveness. Though there is little or no direct research on how forgiving someone affects sleep directly, there is at least one study that found forgiving types were more likely to sleep better at night than others. Additionally, those who were more self-forgiving in the study also slept better because they were able to let go of mistakes they'd made more easily.

Forgiving someone can make us feel happier, more hopeful, less depressed and anxious, and less vulnerable to stress. And it can improve our relationships with others, especially our closest ones, which is important when so many of us have limited ability to interact with others right now. Each of these benefits is also tied to better sleep, which is all the more reason to try practicing forgiveness.

The nice thing about all of these practices is that they can be used alone or in tandem, and they don't have undesirable side effects. Not only that, practicing these keys to happiness can have the desirable side effect of helping you become a happier, healthier person. That's something we can all cheer about in these dark times. Just don't try cheering right before you want to fall asleep!

This article originally appeared on Greater Good, the online magazine of the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley. Read more at greatergood.berkeley.edu. Reprinted with permission.

The Online Life: How Much Is Too Much?

During the pandemic, some people have tried to minimize infection risk through online shopping, telemedicine, and virtual events. But spending too much time online can compromise your mental well-being.

Many people use social platforms to reach out to others. However, if you find chat time on social media leaves you feeling lonely, isolated, sad, or dissatisfied, it might help to decrease or avoid screen time – especially if you experience cyber-bullying. If you're turning to social media to relieve anxiety or depression, try to determine if this outlet is helping you.

Fear of missing out can lead you to respond compulsively to every alert, which can cause distraction, missed sleep, and increased anxiety. Consider checking your alerts only at specific times of the day, and turn off your electronic device before bedtime instead of being on call 24/7.

Many online activities are designed to continuously ensnare your attention, which can lead to addiction. Being consumed with your virtual presence could leave insufficient time for self-care and in-person relationships. Disabling notifications or removing apps can lessen compulsive checking.

This article originally appeared in Personal Best Hope Health Newsletter, February 2021. Reprinted with permission.



More Resources

“Technology and Mental Health: How Lawyers Are Affected by Devices and Social Media and What to Do About It” – *inSight* (December 2019)

The OAAP is here to help you through any personal or professional issue – confidentially and free of charge.

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FINDING MEANINGFUL WORK

The OAAP holds a periodic 6-session networking and support group for lawyers making job or career transitions called “Finding Meaningful Work.” The sessions assist lawyers in creating a personalized job search plan; developing a mission statement and elevator speech; learning and practicing networking skills; and honing job search skills. Presently, sessions meet virtually through videoconference. To participate or for more information about the next group, please contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Bryan Welch, JD, CADC I, at 503.226.1057, ext. 19, or at bryanw@oaap.org.

CAREER SELF-ASSESSMENT

The OAAP attorney counselors can help you assess your career path and career opportunities. If you would like information about self-assessment, contact OAAP Attorney Counselors Doug Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I, at 503.226.1057, ext. 12, or at douglasq@oaap.org; or Kyra Hazilla, JD, LCSW, at 503.226.1057, ext. 13, or at kyrah@oaap.org; or Bryan Welch, JD, CADC I, at 503.226.1057, ext. 19, or at bryanw@oaap.org.

LAWYERS IN TRANSITION PRESENTATION CALENDAR

A “Lawyers in Transition” guest speaker is featured in conjunction with the Finding Meaningful Work group (see above). Usually, the speaker shares their experience transitioning to a new job or career. You do not need to be a member of the 6-session group to attend the speaking engagement. Speakers will present via videoconference. For current information on upcoming Lawyers in Transition speakers and topics, please visit the OAAP website at www.oaap.org and click on Events.