

Promoting Health and Wellbeing: Healthy Body, Healthy Mind (Louise Hall)

Most adults fully appreciate the role having a healthy body plays in encouraging a healthy mind and thus promoting individual physical and emotional wellbeing. Indeed, there is much synergy between body and mind thus understanding how to foster optimal health of the mind stems from ensuring the body is working at optimal health levels too.

While this is perhaps widely appreciated in adulthood, the younger generation are not always so aware of the importance of looking after themselves physically and emotionally, and at particular times of pressure, like all of us, their own health and wellbeing is often forgotten about when it should always be the priority.

With the exam season rapidly approaching and results being so important, it is perhaps one of the most pressured periods of time for teenagers, particularly those studying for public exams. Thus it is perhaps worth highlighting some key factors that might make a difference in promoting wellbeing and considering how parents might best help. Use the 'OPTIMISED' principles:

- O Organisation: this is crucial. Making sure that regular routine can be maintained and that time does not become all about work is really important. Encouraging and supporting some normality is one of the best ways you can support: keep things in perspective!
- P Plan, Prepare, Prioritise: for effective achievement, planning and preparation, remains key. A calm approach to establishing what needs to be done and when, prioritising accordingly, will help avoid procrastination and ensure quality, rather than quantity, is the focus of revision
- T Technology: friend or enemy? Naturally, use of technology is fundamental in education in the current day and age. However, with the majority of a young person's life now revolving fully around technological devices for music, television, film, networking and photographs also, it can be difficult to spend time away from this and indeed, many feel helpless when they are! However, constant use of technology can be one of the most detrimental things to our health and we must ensure that we have ample time without use of devices to promote wellbeing
- I Input = Output: we have all heard the saying 'you are what you eat' and although not strictly true, there is much to be said for a healthy, balanced diet. During the busy exam periods, eating regularly is important to help keep blood sugar balanced, which ultimately will help to keep the brain functioning at optimal levels. Eating the right foods is imperative though and keeping up intake of fruit, vegetables and foods with healthy fats such as nuts and seeds, in addition to ensuring a good spread of protein and carbohydrate rich foods will have great impact on concentration, memory and focus. Sugar has a huge destroying effect on our bodies and thus should be avoided or at least only included in small amounts. Keeping hydrated, preferably through water will also make a huge difference and caffeine, fizzy and energy drinks should be avoided at all costs!
- M Mindfulness: this is becoming more and more popular, and there is much to be said for the practice. In simple terms, this refers to a mental state where one focuses their awareness on the 'here and now'. Achieving a sense of mental equilibrium is difficult but if we can learn to switch off and just be able to think about the present moment, we become calmer and more able to cope with challenges. Researching this and supporting the use of mindfulness practises is a useful strategy.
- I Invigorate: helping your mind and body to feel invigorated makes a huge difference and one of the best ways to do this? Lots of fresh air, and if you love near to the beach, sea air! Staying stuck in the house or library is commonplace during revision time but there is much to be said for getting out and about, breathing in fresh air to help put yourself in a calm and relaxed state
- S Sleep: we are all programmed differently but everyone needs appropriate sleep to function properly. If we consider how sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture, we can appreciate how important it is to keep our brains, and bodies, working as they should. Sleep gives time for our brains to recover from mental stimulation and thus

should never be compromised for extra cramming time. Having regular early nights and allowing ourselves to wake naturally, rather than because of an alarm, is a useful strategy to try now and then. Quality of work remains more important than quantity and to optimise quality, we need to be in an effective mental and physical state

- E Exercise and Activity: Regular exercise and activity is crucial. It does not necessarily matter what or when, but it is important to be active often and in a format that is personalised. For some, taking part in a team or individual sport might be favoured; others may benefit from a gym workout, a physical training class or perhaps a relaxation/stretch based class

- D De-stress: taking regular breaks and allowing time to rest and relax, gives the body and mind the chance to unwind, reducing physical and mental tension and allowing recuperation of the neural pathways. It is all too easy to keep ploughing on with work, thinking that any lost time will impact negatively, but our effectiveness reduces dramatically if we do not take appropriate breaks. The option of activity used to rest and relax will depend on the person, but ensuring time away from text books, notes and computers is important, whatever else is chosen

Ultimately, everyone is individual and what works for one, won't necessarily work for another. Listening to your body is the best way to decide how to respond, but putting yourself in the best position in the first place will help your body to be as prepared as it can be, both physically and mentally.