

Mental Health month: **Learn and grow**



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October is Mental Health Month in Australia and this year's theme is Learn and Grow.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), mental health is the state of well-being in which every individual with their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to their community (WHO, 2014).

Mental Health Month, is encouraging people and communities to learn more about mental health and use that knowledge to grow personally and take control of their mental wellbeing. Nearly half of all Australians (45%) will experience some form of mental illness during their lifetime, and those that don't will most likely know someone that does. But there's still a lot of stigma and confusion around the topic and that's where learning and growing comes in.

The theme encourages everyone to learn new and exciting things so this month's article is focusing on new things



we know about depression. In her 2016 book *A Mind of Your Own*, Kelly Brogan MD (Psychiatrist) discusses a new way of looking at depression.

Depression is often an inflammatory condition. The role of inflammation in mental illness has been discussed in medical literature for over 20 years. Dr Brogan explains that depression is a meaningful symptom of a mismatch biologically with lifestyle and that the body creates symptoms for a reason, it wants us to pay attention and do something about it! Inflammation is the language the body uses to let us know there is an imbalance. The symptoms could be quite diverse including digestive symptoms, feeling stressed, skin conditions, headaches or other pain.

The imbalance can be caused by many things including poor diet, stress, lack of sunlight, drugs (prescription and non-prescription), alcohol, lack of physical movement and exposure to environmental toxins. When the body speaks to us, via inflammation, it is inviting us to make changes; we usually suppress the symptoms with medication. Dr Brogan explains this is like turning off the smoke alarm when the fire is still going.

Medications, whilst they work well for some people, are by no means a cure and not always helpful. For example, many physical conditions mimic or cause psychiatric symptoms. Thyroid disease can have many psychological symptoms (anxiety, depression), blood sugar problems can cause a roller coaster in moods and in both cases these issues are not psychiatric.

Digestive issues and food sensitivities can also cause big mood changes.

Basic lifestyle interventions can facilitate the body's powerful self-healing mechanisms to improve your mood:

- You need to rule out medical conditions such as thyroid disease and blood sugar issues. You also need to identify food sensitivities and treat digestive issues.
- A healthy diet is important, when you consider that our cells which make up our body constantly get replaced, it is important that you provide the nutrients your body needs to make good functioning healthy new cells. Even your gut bacteria affects your mood so it is important to have the right environment in your gut. Some mental health symptoms can be caused by nutritional deficiencies for example, B vitamins and magnesium. It is important to eat your veggies!
- High refined carbohydrate and sugar diets are very inflammatory to the body and can be quite detrimental to your mood (think about your kids after a birthday party binge on lollies)!
- Good fats are essential; they are anti-inflammatory and are used in the body for so many important functions including making hormones and sending messages between the brain and the rest of the body. This includes cold pressed extra virgin olive oil, avocado, nuts & seeds e.g. almonds, walnuts, sunflower

seeds and pepitas, oily fish and eggs including the yolk.

- Protein and fat is also important for helping to balance your blood sugar levels and keep you satisfied until your next meal. Many body chemicals (including neurotransmitters in the brain) and body structures are made from protein so it is essential to have good quality protein at each meal. This includes eggs, fish, grass fed beef, chicken, fermented tofu, etc.
- Look at your chemical exposure and where you can reduce or avoid it. This includes cleaning products, air fresheners, perfumes, cosmetics, plastic bottles and food containers, pesticides etc.
- Our bodies are made to move and it is important to get outside each day to get some natural sunlight (which is very important for your mood) and go for a walk or do some other form of exercise that you enjoy. It also allows your body to rid itself of stress chemicals.
- Do something to relax, something fun, and something that you enjoy each day to help with stress management.

Dr Brogan encourages us to look at depression as an opportunity to see what is out of balance in our body and our lives, rather than just masking or suppressing the symptoms.

It's a chance to choose a new story, to take responsibility for a new life experience.

**Worried about your risk of dementia?
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Not sure what to eat/do to for your brain?**

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