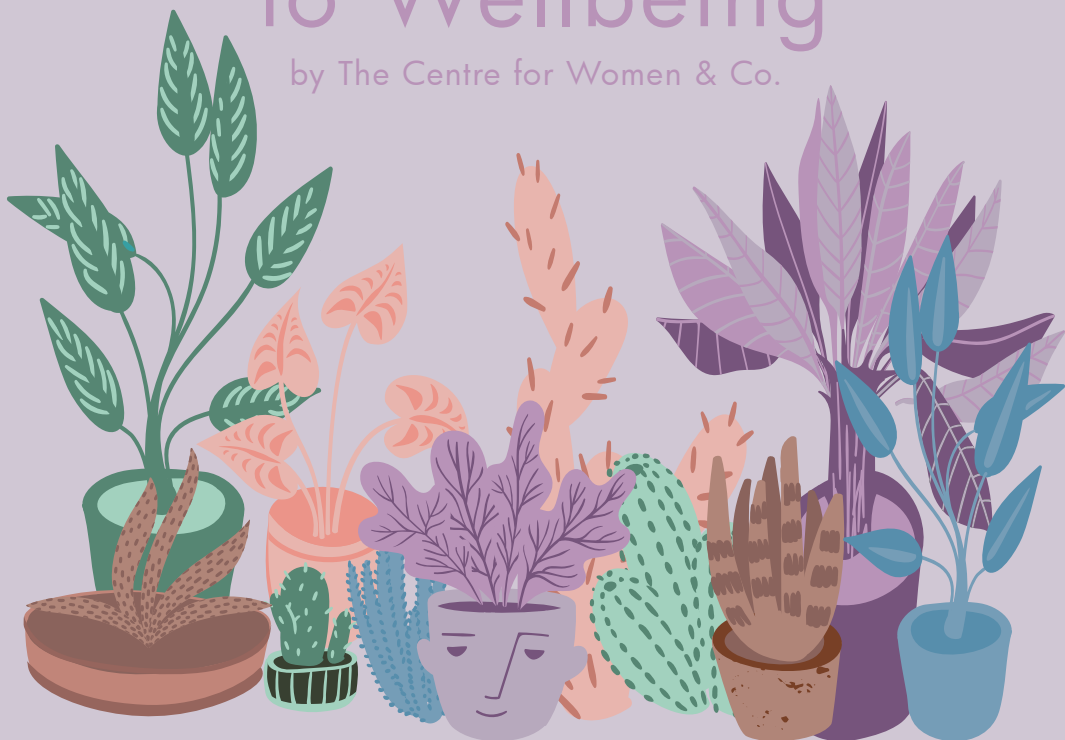


Women's Guide to Wellbeing

by The Centre for Women & Co.



Funded by Her Platform Proceeds

TABLE OF CONTENTS

We acknowledge the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We also pay sincere respect to our Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the impact of colonialism on intergenerational trauma and violence on First Nations People.

Developed on Yugambah Country.

Printed on Jagera Country.

What is wellbeing....	1-2
Elements of self-care...	3-4
Nervous system...	5-6
Flip your lid...	7-8
Neuroplasticity and trauma...	9-10
Breathing...	11
Emotions and thoughts...	12
Grounding...	13-14
Burnout...	15
Boundaries...	16
Self-compassion...	17
Living intentionally...	18
Social connection...	19
Menstruation & movement...	20
Plants...	21-22
Sleep hygiene...	23
Diet culture...	24
Assertive communication...	25
Morning mantra...	26
Anxiety...	27-28
Empathy...	29-30
Support services...	31
References...	32



Specialist
Domestic Violence
& Women's Wellbeing
Services

WELLBEING

noun.

the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.

Wellbeing is different for every person.

**BUT GENERALLY SPEAKING, WELLBEING IS HIGH
WHEN YOU FEEL CONTENT, CALM AND SAFE.**

Humans are complex creatures.
So, wellbeing requires a delicate balance of health;
physical, emotional, psychological,
social, spiritual, intellectual and financial.

The key ingredient for this fragile recipe is self-care.



ELEMENTS OF SELF-CARE

PHYSICAL

movement, nutrition, sleep, rest,
sexual need

EMOTIONAL

navigating emotions,
stress management, compassion,
seeking support

PERSONAL

hobbies, me-time, knowing
yourself, learning new skills

PROFESSIONAL

work boundaries, time
management, taking breaks,
professional development

SOCIAL

connection with others, support
systems, boundaries, positive
social media

SPIRITUAL

art, music, nature, beliefs,
values, connecting inwardly,
gratitude

SPACE

safety, organised space,
stimulating environment

FINANCIAL

conscious relationship
with money, goal-setting,
money management, savings

YOU HAVE TO PUT
ON YOUR OWN
OXYGEN MASK
BEFORE HELPING
OTHERS.



TUNE IN TO YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

The nervous system plays an important role in responding to our internal and external environments. It is a network that communicates messages back and forth from the brain to different parts of the body.



SYMPATHETIC

The sympathetic nervous system triggers when there is a real or perceived threat to our safety. The heart beats faster and blood flow increases to our arms and legs, to prepare us for fight, flight, freeze or fawn. Adrenaline and cortisol are released to help us act quickly.

The thinking brain goes offline because the fight or flight response encourages us to act, not think (see Flip Your Lid on the next page!).

PARASYMPATHETIC

The parasympathetic nervous system triggers to promote rest and digestion, AKA the 'chill-out' system. It helps us to feel calm, cool and connected and to manage small stressors that we come across. When it is activated, our heart rate slows down and digestion increases.

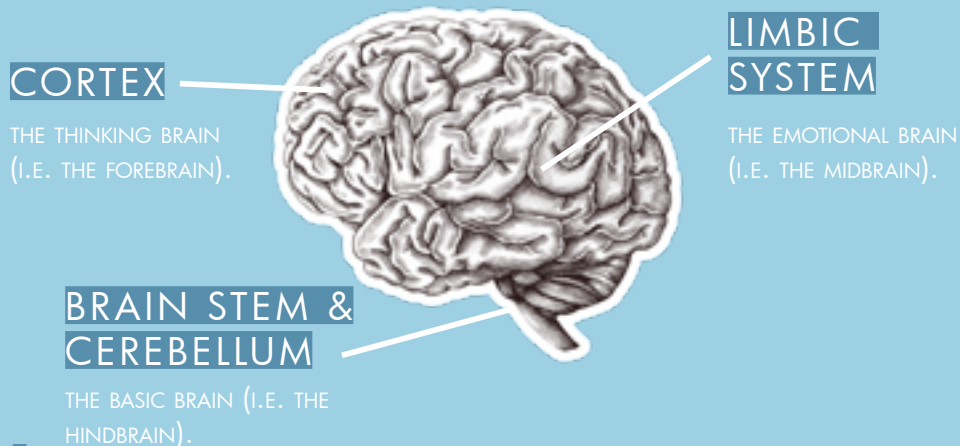
FLIP YOUR LID

Your brain has three sections:

- The hindbrain (AKA brain stem and cerebellum) is responsible for basic functions such as movement, connecting the brain to the body and breathing.
- The midbrain (AKA limbic system) is responsible for emotions and memory.
- The forebrain (AKA cortex) is responsible for complex functions like logic.

When you 'flip your lid' your limbic system flips the cortex out of the way. **TIP: PLACE YOUR THUMB OVER YOUR PALM AND THEN PLACE YOUR FOUR FINGERS OVER YOUR THUMB. YOUR LOWER PALM IS YOUR HINDBRAIN, THE THUMB IS THE LIMBIC SYSTEM AND YOUR FOUR FINGERS ARE THE CORTEX. NOW, FLIP UP YOUR FOUR FINGERS – THIS IS ESSENTIALLY WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR LIMBIC SYSTEM JUMPS INTO THE DRIVER'S SEAT.**

With the emotional brain in control, you can't think or act logically - your fear response is an auto-pilot function and you just have to go along for the ride until the threat is survived. Once you are in a calmer brain state your limbic system lets your cortex take the wheel and you can think again.



Did you know that you can activate your parasympathetic nervous system?

Now that you know a bit more about what happens when you experience anxiety, stress or fear, let's talk about how you can kick the limbic system out of the driver's seat a little quicker.

HAVE YOU HEARD OF YOUR VAGUS NERVE?

The vagus nerve is an essential part of the parasympathetic nervous system that stretches from your brain all the way down to your neck, chest and stomach.

When you activate this nerve, it signals to the brain that everything is good and triggers the parasympathetic nervous system to relax you. Singing, humming or gargling can activate the vagus nerve because of the connection to your voice box.

WHEN YOU'VE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA, IT CAN IMPACT YOU AT A NEURAL LEVEL. FORTUNATELY, SO CAN POSITIVE EXPERIENCES.

THE MORE YOU EXPERIENCE SOMETHING, THE STRONGER THE NEURAL PATHWAY BECOMES.

Imagine you are holding a long piece of string. Now, imagine holding two fingers up and wrapping the string around the two fingers. The more you wrap, the stronger it becomes. This is one way to understand neural pathways:

- As a child, your caregivers often dismissed your feelings. Every time it happened, the string did another loop. The neural pathway labelled, "My feelings are not important" got stronger with every loop of string.
- BUT, as an adult you meet new people who validate your feelings when you open up to them.
- BOOM! A brand new string appears. Every time your feelings are validated, it does a loop. This neural pathway is labelled: "My feelings DO matter."
- Eventually – after continued positive experiences of validation, this loop is stronger, thicker and more durable than the old string from your childhood.
- The old belief of "My feelings are not important" may even end up being 'pruned' (deleted from your brain's neural pathways).

JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA AND PAIN - MAYBE MORE THAN MOST PEOPLE - IT DOESN'T HAVE TO DEFINE YOU.



NEUROPLASTICITY

is your brain's ability to change in response to experiences, environments and stimuli. Your brain can re-organise, add and delete neural pathways which alter the way you think and behave.

Further Reading:
"The Brain That Changes Itself" - Norman Doidge
"The Brain's Way of Healing" - Norman Doidge

BREATHING FOR WELLBEING

Breathing actually helps the brain to produce the useful chemicals that help to grow and strengthen new brain connections. When we are stressed or anxious, our breathing can sometimes become shallow or short.

It's important to note that for breathing to be most effective it needs to be done through the nose, not the mouth. Here's one way to practise breathing:

BOX BREATHING

1. Inhale for a count of 4.
2. Hold for a count of 4.
3. Exhale for a count of 4.
4. Hold for a count of 4.
5. Repeat.



EMOTIONAL REGULATION

You are faced with hundreds of emotion-provoking stimuli each day. Emotional regulation is the ability to cope with the many emotions you go through in an adaptive and healthy way.

NAME IT TO TAME IT

Dr Daniel Siegel coined this term.

He says naming the emotion you are experiencing calms the sympathetic nervous system. For example, you might feel angry, but what are you really feeling...frustrated, disappointed...? Accurately naming emotions and feelings can help you process them.

THOUGHTS VS FACTS

You have thousands of thoughts per day - positive, negative and some that are just plain weird. Just because a negative thought pops into your head briefly, does not mean it's necessarily a fact.

Consciously asking yourself "Is there evidence to support that negative thought about myself, or is it just a fleeting thought that I can let float by?" can be a game changer for your mental health.

GROUNDING

Grounding exercises help calm anxiety, stress and intrusive thoughts. Grounding works by reminding you that you are here, right now and not re-experiencing the past or diving into the unknown future.

BAREFOOT IN THE GRASS

- Take off your shoes and socks and stand barefoot on the grass (it's nice to do this in the warmth of the sun, but be sun safe!)
 - Place your feet apart, comfortably.
- Rock backwards and forward on your feet and settle when you're ready with the weight evenly distributed.
 - You might like to close your eyes.
 - Take a few slow breaths, inhaling and exhaling.
- Notice any sensations in your feet. It's okay to notice and allow any thoughts or emotions that come up, as you become aware of sensations. Continue breathing through them.

MORE GROUNDING EXERCISES:

- Recall as many dog breeds as you can, aloud.
- Make a safety statement: "my name is... and I live in..."
 - Count back from 100 in 3's, aloud.
- Hold an ice cube or pebble and feel the sensations.
 - List sensations for each of the five senses.

RUNNING ON EMPTY

Burnout; physical and mental exhaustion due to stress or excess work.

Burnout can leave you feeling purposeless, undervalued, cynical and resentful. You may begin to resent co-workers, friends and family members if you believe they "have it easier". Burnout can impact work, friendships, relationships and family dynamics.

Basic self-care including the use of boundaries, adequate sleep, proper nutrition and taking time out is essential to prevent burnout.

REMINDER: YOU CAN GET BURNOUT FROM THINGS YOU LOVE AND ENJOY - LIKE PRIORITISING YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS OR WORK ABOVE YOUR NEEDS FOR TOO LONG.



BOUNDARIES

are the rules you create for yourself that dictate what you will, and will not tolerate. These are also rules for others. It lets them know how they can and cannot treat you. These rules then guide your response when a boundary is crossed or ignored by another person.

SOME EXAMPLES ARE:

- Turning your phone off after dinner.
- Taking a 'time-out' from certain people.
- Using your free time how you want to, not how others expect or demand you to.
- Letting go of people who cause you pain.
- Not responding to work emails after hours.
- Prioritising your mental health over other people's needs.

BOUNDARIES MUST BE COMMUNICATED. OTHERWISE, HOW WILL OTHERS KNOW HOW TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU?

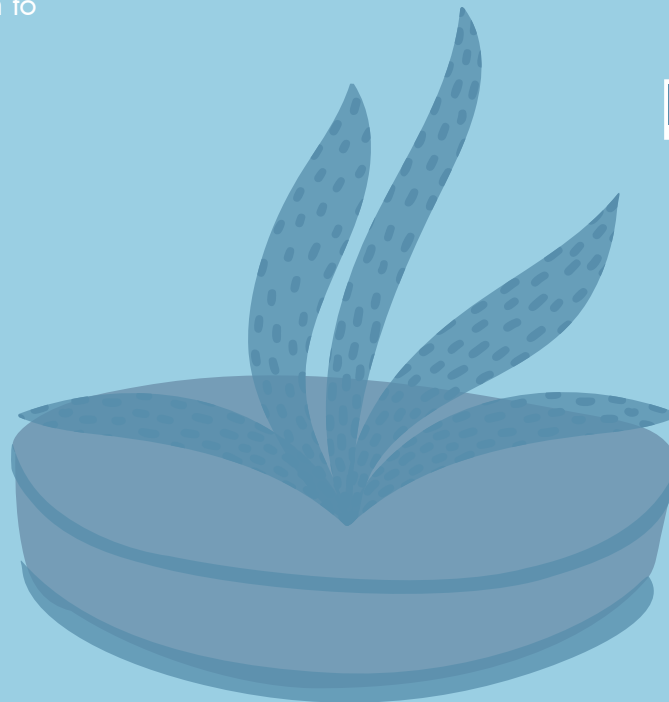
SELF-COMPASSION

is the act of extending love, acceptance and understanding to yourself.

- 1 It is the decision to accept that being imperfect is a part of being human, and we don't need to punish or isolate ourselves from the things that make us happy when we make a mistake.
- 2 It is the decision to speak gently and intentionally to ourselves, and not believe all the negative thoughts we may have about ourselves (remember – our thoughts aren't facts!).
- 3 It is the decision to mindfully observe our painful thoughts and experiences without allowing them to negatively impact, dictate or limit our future.

So often, people can find it easier to show compassion to their loved ones than to themselves.

**IF YOUR LOVED ONES -
WHO UNDOUBTEDLY MAKE
MISTAKES IN LIFE - ARE
WORTHY OF COMPASSION,
WHY AREN'T YOU?**



LIVING INTENTIONALLY

means to make conscious decisions aligned with your values.

LIVING INTENTIONALLY ALLOWS YOU TO FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH BIG AND LITTLE DECISIONS, CHOOSE AND IMPLEMENT BOUNDARIES AND FEEL PURPOSEFUL.

TO LIVE INTENTIONALLY:

- Identify your core values &
- Allow them to guide your decisions.

IDENTIFYING CORE VALUES

1. What matters most to you?
2. Now choose the FIVE most important ones.
3. These are your CORE values.
4. Remember these when making decisions, big and small.

CONNECTION IS VITAL TO SURVIVAL

- It lessens intensity of anxiety and depression.
- It allows space to regulate emotions.
- It boosts self-esteem and empathy.

IT IS NOT ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL.

You've probably heard the terms 'extrovert' and 'introvert'. People can be one or the other, or a mix of both. Essentially, extroversion and introversion are labels for how you need to recharge your battery.

Extroverts feel energised after big social gatherings and thrive off social interactions. On the other hand, introverts may feel the need for much more alone time or smaller social gatherings to feel energised.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Knowing where you sit on the introversion to extroversion scale can help you with your self-care and relationships. Extroverts can feel low in emotional energy when they don't meet their 'social quota'. Introverts can feel pressure to 'keep up' with their extroverted loved ones and may sacrifice their self-care needs to be a 'good friend'. This can lead to resentment and problems within the relationship. Open and honest communication allows relationships between introverts and extroverts to thrive and self-care to be prioritised.

MENSTRUATION & MOVEMENT

UNDERSTANDING HOW YOUR MENSTRUAL CYCLE AFFECTS YOUR BODY CAN HELP YOU UTILISE EXERCISE IN YOUR SELF-CARE ROUTINE.

WEEK 1

Oestrogen and progesterone are low and carbohydrate utilisation is higher. This means you may actually have more energy during your period and can do more high intensity exercise.

WEEK 2

Oestrogen begins to rise and progesterone is still dropping. It's muscle time! Try to do a strength-based workout with weights or lift heavier if you already go to the gym regularly.

WEEK 3

At this time, fat utilisation is highest so endurance training and cardio are aligned with your cycle. Cardio could include cycling or going for a run.

WEEK 4

For the first few days, progesterone is high but in the last 2-3 days before your period, it drops quickly. You may feel quite tired and experience cramps here. Try gentle movement like walking, yoga, stretching or swimming.



PLANTS & WELLBEING

IMPROVE AIR QUALITY.

The bigger the plant and the more plants you have, the better the air quality in your environment. For example, Peace Lillies release oxygen at night, so pop one in your bedroom!

PROMOTE RELAXATION.

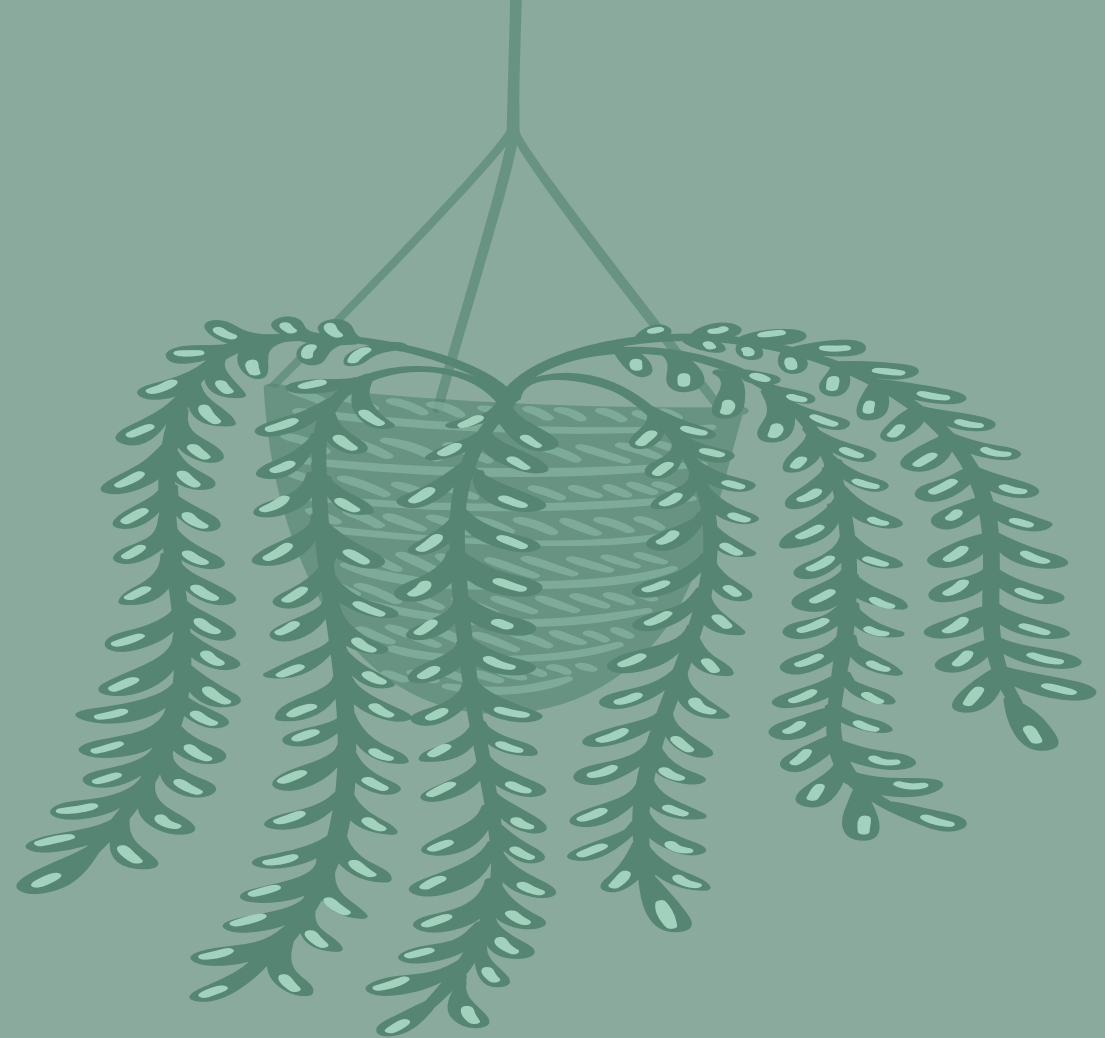
Throughout human history, the mind evolved in nature's sensory-rich environment. Even in our technology-driven world we still feel the pull to water plants, sit amongst flowers and trees or tend to a veggie garden.

HELP YOU FEEL NEEDED.

We all like to feel needed from time to time. Plants need water, regular re-potting and time.

CALM YOUR BODY SYSTEMS.

It can slow the heart rate, relax the muscles and boost your mood. Sometimes tending to plants is used in counselling as a grounding activity.



Easy indoor plants include Peace Lillies, Rubber Trees and Snake Plants.

For a veggie patch you could try snow peas, green beans and zucchini.

SLEEP HYGIENE

to help you sleep well.

- Consistent bedtime.
- Don't fight the sleepiness.
- Bedroom is for sleep not for working or scrolling on your phone.
- Try to avoid napping during the day.
- Have a ritual before bed e.g. warm shower, journal and sleep.
- Don't watch the clock.
- Exercise during the day - not too close to bedtime though.
- Ensure the room has good airflow.
- Avoid scary movies!
- Listen to your body.

THE CIRCADIAN RHYTHM

Our bodies are naturally synced to sunrise and sunset. We naturally wake close to dawn when light begins to creep in and we feel sleepy when the sun begins to set.

Life circumstances and demands can cause us to become dysregulated with this natural sleep-wake cycle. If you feel like this may have happened to you, try and adjust your sleep-wake times to be closer to dawn and dusk and see how you go.

LACK OF SLEEP CONTRIBUTES TO SEVERAL NEGATIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES INCLUDING OBESITY, CARDIOVASCULAR ISSUES, DIABETES AND SHORTENED LIFE EXPECTANCY. THIS IS WHY YOU FEEL SO BAD WHEN YOU MISS CRUCIAL SLEEP... YOUR BODY IS TRYING TO TELL YOU WHAT IT NEEDS!

REJECT DIET CULTURE.

The culture that values thinness and appearance above physical health and mental

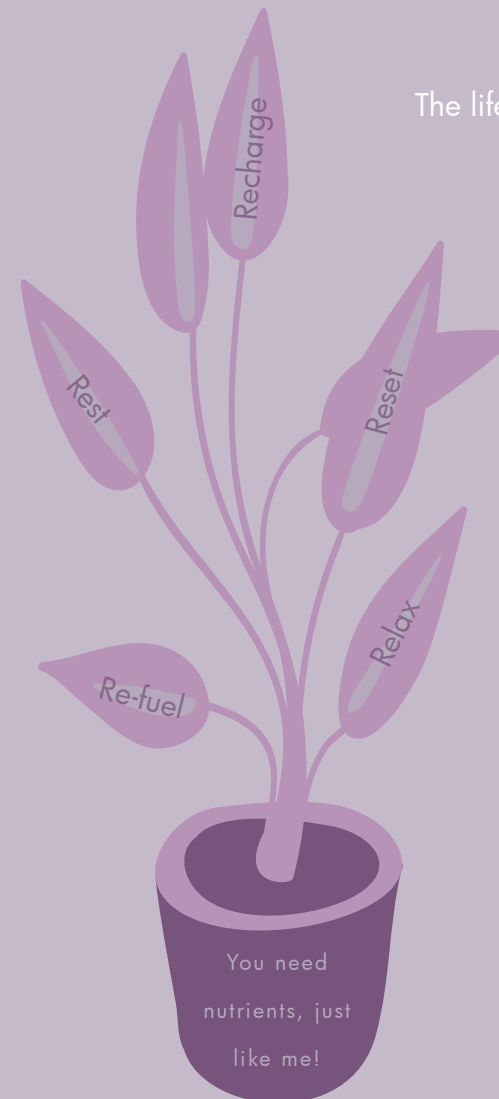
EMBRACE INTUITIVE EATING.

The lifestyle that allows you to eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full.

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU NEED AROUND 8000KJ PER DAY? YEP! BREATHING, BLINKING AND OTHER VITAL FUNCTIONS REQUIRE THIS MUCH AT A MINIMUM.

INTUITIVE EATING PRINCIPLES:

- Emotional hunger vs. physical/real hunger.
- Honour your hunger and respect your fullness.
- Balanced diet lessens bingeing (thanks to the satisfaction factor).
- Fuel your body rather than punish it.
- No foods are 'bad' or restricted - moderation is key.



ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

is clear and direct expression that considers your point of view and the other's point of view without being aggressive or passive. It's essential for explaining boundaries, resolving conflict and maintaining respect, understanding and empathy at home, at work and online.

USE "I" LANGUAGE.

Instead of saying "you made me feel _____" you could say "I felt _____ when _____."

BE EXPLANATORY.

Instead of saying "I'm annoyed", say "I feel annoyed because..."

LISTEN.

When emotions are high, sometimes we can struggle to listen. Remember, give the other person uninterrupted listening as well as having your time to talk.

NAME YOUR INTENTION.

Sometimes the best of intentions can be misinterpreted. It helps to say "My intention behind this conversation/action is/was to..."

MORNING MANTRA

I have value.

I am enough.

Time alone is necessary.

I am allowed boundaries.

Pain is a part of life.

I can say "no" whenever I need.

Change is okay.

I continue to bloom.

Feelings are always valid.

I am grateful for today.

EMPATHY

noun.

The ability to understand another's feelings.

WITHOUT EMPATHY WE WOULD KNOW NO MORE ABOUT OURSELVES AND OTHERS IN OUR LIVES THAN WE WOULD ABOUT SOMEONE WE PASS IN THE STREET.

EMPATHY IS LEARNED.

We are all born with the capacity to be empathetic, but it is a learned behaviour. It's often learned in infancy and childhood through interactions with caregivers. But, if this isn't displayed, it won't have been learned (yet!). But it can be learned at any age. So healthy relationships that display empathy in adulthood are just as impactful and helpful for learning and growing empathy.

IT VARIES BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS.

The degree to which you understand your own feelings and can name them and consciously let them influence your thinking and actions - is the extent to which you can be empathetic. The more connected you are to yourself, the more empathetic you can be.

EMPATHY ISN'T SYMPATHY.

Sympathy allows you to connect with someone's situation. Empathy connects you to a person on an emotional level and continues to build on that connection.

Take your
wellbeing...

one

step

at

a

time.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

MENTAL HEALTH

- Logan Central Community Mental Health Centre 1300 64 22 55
- Mental Health Access Line 1300 642 255
- Headspace 1800 650 890

WELLBEING & COUNSELLING

- The Centre for Women & Co. 07 3050 3060
- Harmony Place 07 3412 8282
- Women's Health Qld 07 3216 0976
- QLife (LGBTIQ+) 1800 184 527

24 HOUR SUPPORT

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636
- Kid's Helpline (<25 years old) 1800 55 1800
- Emergency 000
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467



REFERENCES

American Psychological Association. (2020). APA dictionary of psychology: neural plasticity. APA. www.dictionary.apa.org/neural-plasticity.

Attachment and Trauma Treatment Centre for Healing. (n.d.) Professional resources. Attachment and Trauma Treatment Centre for Healing. www.attachment-and-trauma-treatment-centre-for-healing.com/uploads/4/0/5/4/4054065/flipping_lid_infographic.pdf.

Britannica. (n.d.). The autonomic nervous system. Britannica. www.britannica.com/science/human-nervous-system/The-autonomic-nervous-system.

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2019). The importance of human connection. CMHA. www.cmha.ca/blogs/the-importance-of-human-connection/.

Ragen Chastain. (2019). Recognising and resisting diet culture. National Eating Disorders Association. www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/blog/recognizing-and-resisting-diet-culture.

Office on Women's Health. (2018). Physical activity and your menstrual cycle. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. www.womenshealth.gov/getting-active/physical-activity-menstrual-cycle.

Pathways to Resilience. (n.d.). Resources. Pathways to Resilience. www.pathwaystoresilience.org/resources.

Plant Life Balance. (2020). The simple science. Plant Life Balance. www.plantlifebalance.com.au/the-science/.

The Empowerment Dynamic. (n.d.). Name it to tame it. The Empowerment Dynamic. www.powerofted.com/name-it-and-tame-it.

FUNDED BY HER PLATFORM

Her Platform is the social enterprise of The Centre for Women & Co. It exists to provide funding support to the organisation's domestic and family violence and wellbeing services across Logan and the Redlands.

By purchasing products from Her Platform (like this guide) or hiring a space at Her Space in Underwood, you are directly funding primary prevention work by the team that aims to break the cycle of violence and de-stigmatise mental health issues.

Thank you for your support.

We couldn't make an impact without you.

