

BUILDING EMOTIONAL FITNESS TO LEAD DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

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Disclaimer and mental health resources

- I'm not a doctor, psychologist, or licensed counselor.
- These are lessons I've learned in life and the resources cited.
- Strength is seeking help. Please take advantage of professional resources:
 - Immediate Help (Crisis): Call or text 988 for the Crisis Lifeline (24/7).
 - Mental Health Directories: [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) or the [NIMH Help for Mental Illnesses](#).
 - [NAMI \(National Alliance on Mental Illness\)](#): Free support and education.
 - [HelpGuide.org](#): Nonprofit provider of quality health information
 - Insurance & Providers: Contact your insurer to find in-network providers.
 - Low-Cost Options: [Mental Health America's Finding Help](#).



Ground Rules

- This session is for you, so please participate.
- These are tricks and tips that worked for me but might not be right for everyone or every situation. Please consult a coach or physician to find a program that is best for you.
- No animals were harmed during the creation of this presentation, and please support pet rescue groups.



This presentation is sponsored by Dumpling and Noodle

Think About How You Feel Most Workdays



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Photo by [Oladimeji Ajegbile](#) from [Pexels](#)





How do you feel most days at work?

Stress Test - How Fast Is the Image Spinning?



**It's just art,
not a real
stress test!**

Image by [Yurii Perepadia](#)



The most important factor is how you face reality and keep moving.



<https://shirt.woot.com/offers/embrace>



Activity 1: Workday Energy Audit (15 min)

- Solo (5 min): Sketch a typical week and mark the two moments you feel most drained and two moments most energized
- Group discussion (10 min): What patterns repeated?
 - Playbook Capture - Block 1: My Drains and Energizers



Leading Through Uncertainty



Photo by [Diva Plavalaguna](#)



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Emotional Fitness

Being emotionally and mentally ready for anything (well, most things)



Photo by [cottonbro](#) from [Pexels](#)



**Chance favors only the
prepared mind.
- Louis Pasteur**

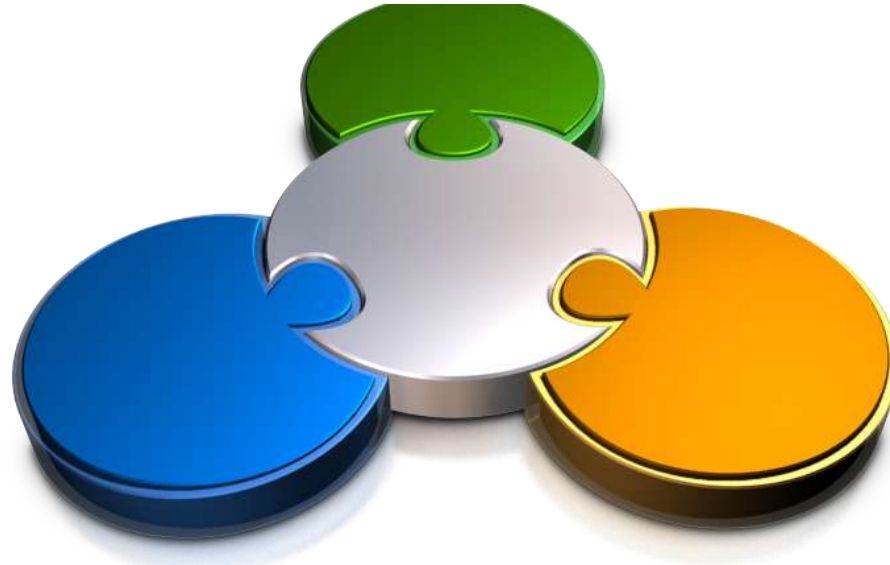
Paraphrased from *Lecture*, University of Lille (7 December 1854)



Why Emotional Fitness Matters

Prepares us to survive crises and everyday challenges

Gives us a competitive advantage



Reduces the risk and impact of PTSD and chronic stress



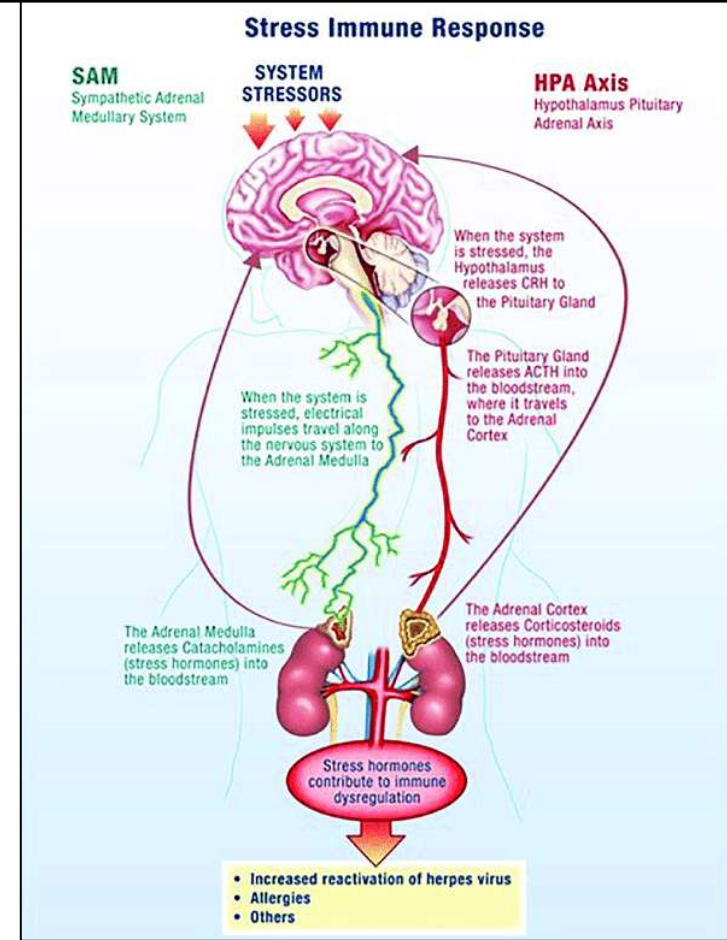
Stress Response

Short-term stress:

- “Fight or Flight” - Sympathomedullary Pathway (SAM)

Long-term stress:

- Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) system



[Herpes Virus Reactivation in Astronauts During Spaceflight and Its Application on Earth](#)

Sympathomedullary Pathway (SAM)



Increased heart rate



Increased breathing rate and bronchial dilation



Decreased digestive activity



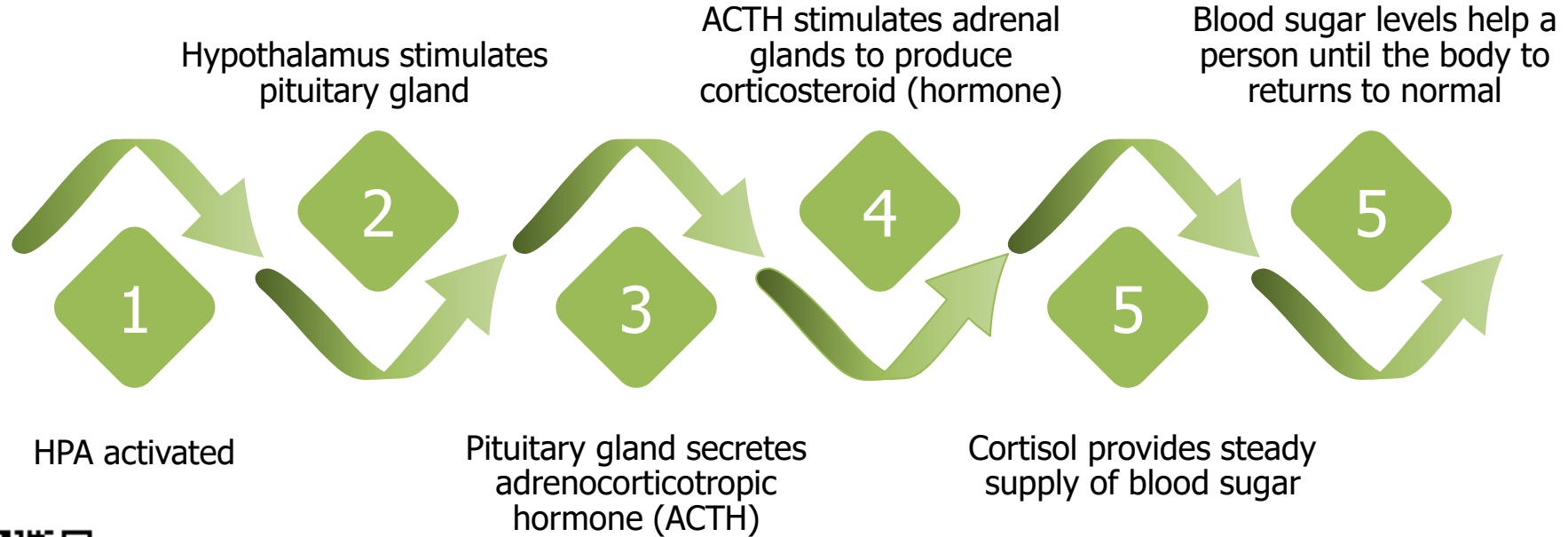
Released glucose from liver for energy





How many times per week does your "Fight or Flight " SAM kick in?

Hypothalamic Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA)



Consequences of Long-term Stress

- Mental health: depression, anxiety, and personality disorders
- Cardiovascular: heart disease, high blood pressure, heart attacks, stroke
- Obesity and eating disorders
- Menstrual problems
- Sexual dysfunction
- Skin and hair problems: acne, psoriasis, eczema, and permanent hair loss
- Gastrointestinal: GERD, gastritis, ulcerative colitis, and irritable colon
- Muscles in the body stay in a tense state of guardedness
- Increased immune system activation: chronic fatigue, metabolic disorders, depression, and immune disorders
- Changes in gut bacteria which influence mood
- Weakening of the intestinal barrier allowing bacteria to enter the body
- Repeated triggering of physical reactions wears out the body
- Increased inflammation



[What are the consequences of long-term stress?; Stress Symptoms](#)

[Stress effects on the body](#)



Are you experiencing long-term stress (HPA)?

Activity 2: Map Your Stress Signature (15 min)

- Solo (5 min): List your earliest physical, emotional, and behavioral stress signals. These are the ones that show up before you notice you are stressed.
- Whole room (10 min): Volunteers share one early-warning signal.
 - Playbook Capture - Block 2: My Early Warning Signals and Triggers



Mindfulness

Focused **awareness** and **acceptance**

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Mood
- Body



Photo by [cottonbro](#) from [Pexels](#)



Mindfulness



Activity 3: Applying Mindfulness to common triggers (15 min)

- Guided practice - Common triggers (5 min): For each trigger mentioned, record your Thoughts, Feelings, Mood, and Body reaction
 - Thoughts
 - Feelings
 - Mood
 - Body
- Guided practice - Acceptance (10 min): Review each reaction. Imagine the trigger is OK and you'll be fine. Try to accept the trigger as true but harmless.
- Playbook capture - Block 3: My 3-Minute Reset: For each awareness area, how can I accept and neutralize my reaction?



Emotional Validation

Tolerating and accepting emotional discomfort

“Negative feelings, no matter how intense, can’t actually hurt us.”

- Nick Wignall, NickWignall.com



[Emotional Fitness: 3 Essential Habits for Better Mental Health](#)



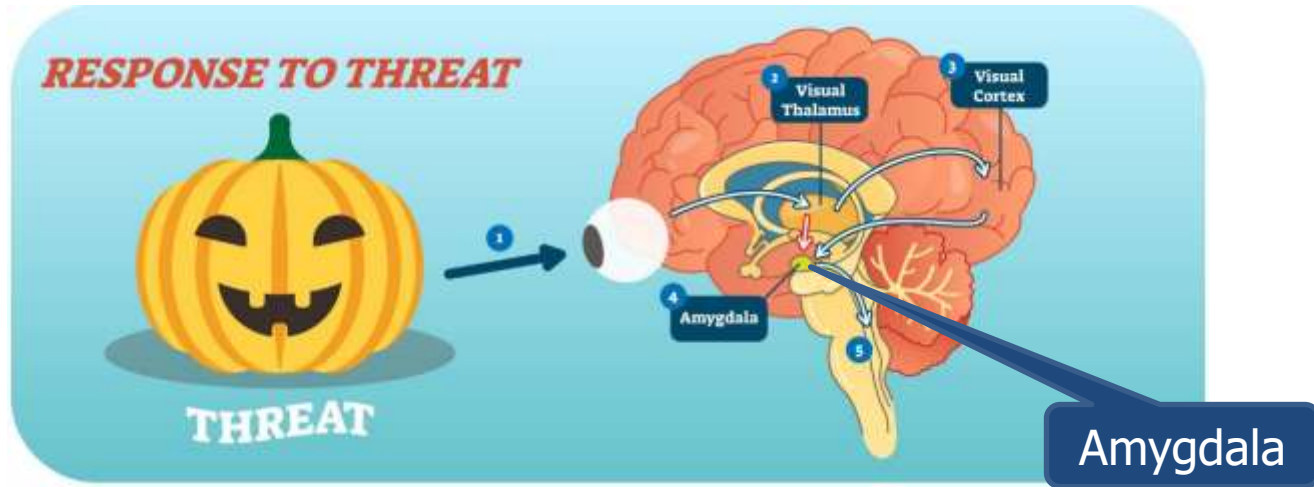
Activity 4: Name It to Tame It (15 min)

- Solo (5 min): Write one recent work moment where you pushed a feeling aside.
- Tables (5 min): Practice validating language. No advice and no fixing allowed.
 - Name the trigger.
 - Explain why it's OK to react that way and that your reaction is valid.
 - Take a deep breath and say "I'm perfectly justified to feel BLANK in these situations."
- Discussion (5 min): What changed when the feeling was named instead of argued with?



Playbook capture - Block 4: My Validation Phrases

Processing stimuli - meet your amygdala



The amygdala is a primary part of our emotional response to stimuli, decision-making, and formation of memories.

["Amygdala: The powerhouse of emotions", Jessica Taylor, February 9, 2018](#)

Trigger a happier amygdala

"It gives people a place to park their mental worries," says Sue Varma, M.D., a board certified psychiatrist in New York City. 'The rhythmic sensation of any motion is a form of self soothing – like tapping your feet or shaking your leg.'"

– [Forbes Health, 2022](#)

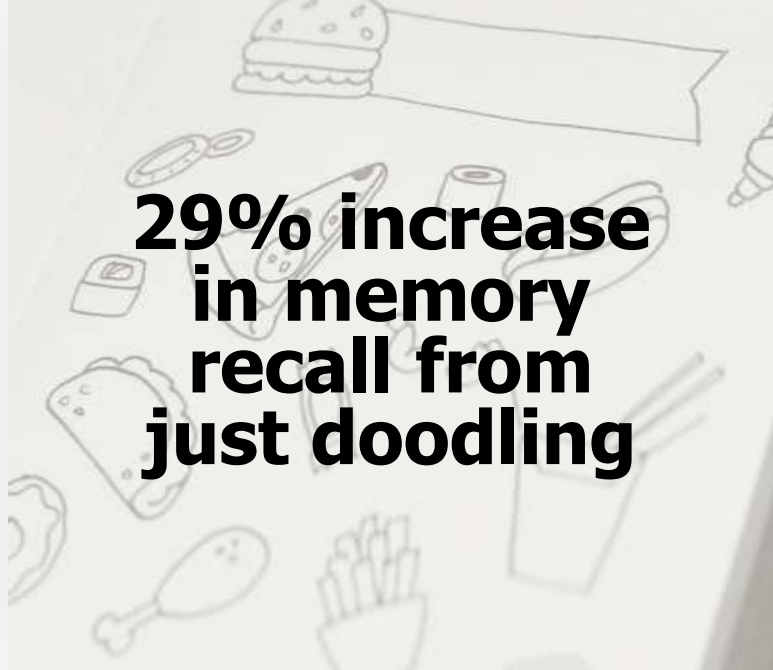


Fidgeting creates kinesthetic stimuli that help us focus and pay attention for longer periods of time.



Toys improve performance

- Stimulates the brain with movement
- Relieves anxiety
- Improves focus for ADHD
- Reduces PTSD impact



**29% increase
in memory
recall from
just doodling**

[Journal of At-Risk Issues, 2006](#)

[Applied Cognitive Psychology, 2010](#)





1

Determine which fidgeting motions soothe you.



2

Find toys that provide the right stimulus.



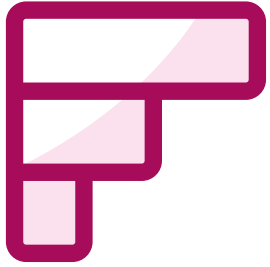
3

Vary your toys and fidgeting to keep the input fresh and relaxing.

Activity 5: Fidget Lab (10 min)

- Round-robin (5 min): Try different fidget types to see what you like.
- Discussion (5 min):
 - Which motions settle you?
 - Which ones are a distraction?
 - How often do you change or rotate?
- Playbook capture - Block 5: My Focus Tools, plus a rotation plan to keep the input fresh.





Which fidget types work the best for you?

Perception: Who has an ideal, healthy body?

1



2



3



Photos from [Pexels](#)





Who has the ideal, healthy body?

Battle bias with Cognitive Restructuring

- Interrupting and redirecting destructive and self-defeating thought patterns that create a distorted or unhealthy view of reality



They are all the same model.

Photos by Jake Ryan from [Pexels](#)



Cognitive Restructuring - Techniques

Self-monitoring

**Questioning
your
assumptions**

**Generating
alternatives**

**Gathering
evidence**

**Performing a
cost-benefit
analysis**



[How to Change Negative Thinking with Cognitive Restructuring](#)



Activity 6: Cognitive Restructuring Role-Playing (15 min)

- Solo (5 min): Write one recurring self-defeating thought from work, such as “I will be blamed for the delay”.
- Role-Playing (10 min): Run the five techniques on each thought:
 - Self-monitor
 - Question Assumptions
 - Gather Evidence
 - Weigh Costs and Benefits
 - Generate Alternatives
- Playbook capture - Block 6: My Reframes (top distortion and the replacement thought).



Leading Through Uncertainty



Photo by [Diva Plavalaguna](#)



Photo by [SHVETS production](#)



Volume Isn't Reality



Photos by [Pixabay](#) from [Pexels](#)



Escape the Echo Chamber

Confirmation Bias



Unplug from News and Social Media



Photo by [Pixabay](#) from [Pexels](#)

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Serenity Poem Applied

*Grant me the serenity to Accept
the things I cannot Change,*

*Courage to Change the things I can,
and Wisdom to know the Difference.*



Be Prepared to Reduce Stress and Fear



Photo by [Anna Shvets](#) from [Pexels](#)



Photo by [Yaroslav Danylchenko](#) from [Pexels](#)



Two Techniques For Better Preparation

Rehearsal and Role-Playing

- Talk through the challenge or confrontation you are dreading.
- Play the conversation from the perspective of different participants.
- Repeat the conversation until you feel comfortable with each angle.

Outcome Based Visualization

- Visualize what success would look like.
- How would you know if things had changed?
- What would need to happen to get there?



Activity 7: Rehearse the Conversation You Are Dreading (15 min)

- Solo (5 min):
 - Choose a real upcoming conversation. E.G., *a slipped date, a scope pushback, a performance discussion.*
 - Outcome-based visualization: What will success look like? How will you know you got there?
 - Mentally role-play the conversation, taking a deep breath between iterations.
- Role-playing (10 min):
 - Share your scenario and planned audience.
 - Role-play with another person or with your table.
 - Rotate to the next person.
- Playbook capture - Block 8: My Rehearsal Script and Success Visualization



Use Breathing to Center Yourself

- Slowly inhale a deep breath for 4 seconds.
- Hold the breath in for 4 seconds.
- Slowly exhale the breath out for 4 seconds.
- Hold the empty breath for 4 seconds.
- Repeat until your breathing is under control.



Photo by [Cliff Booth](#) from [Pexels](#)



If you are mentally and emotionally prepared, you will outperform others and be better positioned to lead and succeed.

- Hans Eckman



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Emotional Fitness Playbook

1. Workday Energy Audit

Two moments that drain me / two that energize me:

2. My Stress Signature

Body, mood, and behavior signs + the triggers that set them off:

3. Applying Mindfulness to Common Triggers

For each awareness area, how can I accept and neutralize my reaction:

Thoughts:

Feelings:

Mood:

Body:

4. Name It to Tame It

What I say to myself and others instead of pushing a feeling away:



Emotional Fitness Playbook

5. My Focus Tools

Fidget or movement input that settles me + rotation plan:

6. Cognitive Restructuring

Distorted thought -> evidence -> replacement thought:

7. My Rehearsal Script

My Rehearsal Script and Success Visualization:



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Learn More
about your brain
and fidgeting

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