

**Focus Time:** When we closely focus on tasks in a goal-oriented way, we take on challenges that make deep connections in the brain.

**Play Time:** When we allow ourselves to be spontaneous or creative, playfully enjoying novel experiences, we help make new connections in the brain.

**Connecting Time:** When we connect with other people, ideally in person, and when we take time to appreciate our connection to the natural world around us, we activate and reinforce the brain's relational circuitry.

**Physical Time:** When we move our bodies, aerobically if medically possible, we strengthen the brain in many ways.

# The Healthy Mind Platter



*The Healthy Mind Platter for Optimal Brain Matter*

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**Time-In:** When we quietly reflect internally, focusing on sensations, images, feelings and thoughts, we help to better integrate the brain.

**Down Time:** When we are non-focused, without any specific goal, and let our mind wander or simply relax, we help the brain recharge.

**Sleep Time:** When we give the brain the rest it needs, we consolidate learning and recover from the experiences of the day.

## Instructions:

Place this page somewhere you will notice it every day. Each day, fill out how you "filled your plate" with each of the seven daily essential mental activities.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Focus Time							
Play Time							
Connecting Time							
Physical Time							
Time-In							
Down Time							
Sleep Time							



Trying to force “balance” in your life between work, home, or whatever adds to stress and reduces life satisfaction!



Finding areas of personal meaning and being intentional about creating avenues to express those areas is a much stronger way to develop resilience (i.e. lower stress and higher life satisfaction, even when life is hard).



<https://www.lifevaluesinventory.org>

## Self-Care Tips



### **Eat. Drink. Bathe.**

Take care of your physical body. Drink a glass of water. Eat something with a little protein every 3 hours while awake. If you haven’t showered in the past day, take one now.



### **Sleep.**

Can’t sleep 7-8 hours per night? Plan a nap into your routine. The “perfect nap” is a 90-minute nap at 1:30pm, but you can train yourself to take 20 min “power naps” where you don’t fall asleep—you just enter the first phase of sleep (a dreamy wakefulness) and wake up again.

[www.samednick.com/napwheel](http://www.samednick.com/napwheel)



### **Exercise.**

Find small ways to be active. You want to have a MINIMUM of 15 minutes per day of light cardio to maintain proper brain functioning, let alone the rest of your body.



### **Small Talk.**

Give yourself permission to have fun and to talk about fun. Set boundaries on when you talk about work or school, and share other parts of your life. This reminds us to go and enjoy life rather than scroll on Facebook for another 15 min.

### **Don’t Work.**

Again—boundaries, boundaries, boundaries. Remember your Healthy Mind Platter; you need connecting time, down time, play time, and time-in. You also need screen-free time!



### **When You Must Work, Have A Community.**

Create project-centered work groups with your colleagues. Make a reading group, an article-writing group, a library group. Make them virtual if you need to! The academic world is often isolating, and in a work community you can find empathy, good questions, laughter—and more generous readers of your work.



### **Have a Non-Work Community, Too.**

Work communities are good for momentum, and academics can be exciting and absorbing—but it’s still only one aspect of your identity. Consider communities of faith, sports, activism, charity, hiking, politics, book groups, etc.



### **Self-Talk and Time-In**

Be kind to yourself. Think in terms of what is “helpful” rather than good, right, or best. Focus on what would help you most in a moment, and reject the temptation to maintain stifling beliefs about yourself and your future.





*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*  
**Health Sciences Center**  
*Student Counseling Services*

## **Self-Compassion Exercise**

### **Step One: Recognize the Task Was Very Hard**

The scale of the challenges we set ourselves are massive. Sometimes we fail, but that doesn't mean we were fools for attempting it. There is courage in trying monumental tasks and we can learn from our missteps.

### **Step Two: We Weren't Properly Equipped by Our Histories**

There are things that have happened to us, by our parents, siblings, extended family... by our friends, teachers, coworkers... by the circumstances of our lives... that have messed us all up a little bit. None of us are entirely sane and well-rounded. It is never wholly our fault.

### **Step Three: Failure is Not Unique**

The reality is that undramatic, quiet failure is the norm. We must fail many more times than we succeed; this is a statistical truth, and also a philosophical one, in order to grow into the person we want to be. Most people have average lives most of the time, with moments of greatness and moments of awfulness.

### **Step Four: Luck is REAL**

Tough, self-critical people don't allow themselves to believe in luck and they take responsibility for everything. They believe winners make their own luck, but this is simply not true. Random chance plays a huge rule in our lives and being flexible, focusing on the present reality without judgment, is the best way to move forward.

### **Step Five: Your Whole Worth is Not Dependent on External Things**

Status and material success are one aspect of you, but they are not who you are alone. Rehearse the memories of those who have been kind to you and shown you love independent of achievement, for just being you. If you don't know that anyone has done this, seek it out. Talk to a counselor. It's true, I promise.

### **Step Six: This Too Shall Pass**

Take each new hour as it comes. Take time to rest. Things always change—that is what it means to be alive. This doesn't mean be passive, but it does mean you do not have to take it upon yourself to MAKE something change, nor do you have to be trapped in a storm forever.

# Everything Is Awful and I'm Not Okay: questions to ask before giving up

## **Are you hydrated?**

If not, have a glass of water.

## **Have you eaten in the past three hours?**

If not, get some food — something with protein, not just simple carbs. Perhaps some nuts or hummus?

## **Have you showered in the past day?**

If not, take a shower right now.

## **Have you stretched your legs in the past day?**

If not, do so right now. If you don't have the energy for a run or trip to the gym, just walk around the block, then keep walking as long as you please. If the weather's crap, drive to a big box store (e.g. Target) and go on a brisk walk through the aisles you normally skip.

## **Have you said something nice to someone in the past day?**

Do so, whether online or in person. Make it genuine; wait until you see something really wonderful about someone, and tell them about it.

## **Have you moved your body to music in the past day?**

If not, jog for the length of an EDM song at your favorite tempo, or just dance around the room for the length of an upbeat song.

## **Have you cuddled a living being in the past two days?**

If not, do so. Don't be afraid to ask for hugs from friends or friends' pets. Most of them will enjoy the cuddles too; you're not imposing on them.

## **Have you seen a therapist in the past few days?**

If not, hang on until your next therapy visit and talk through things then.

## **Have you changed any of your medications in the past couple of weeks, including skipped doses or a change in generic prescription brand?**

That may be screwing with your head. Give things a few days, then talk to your doctor if it doesn't settle down.

## **If daytime: are you dressed?**

If not, put on clean clothes that aren't pajamas. Give yourself permission to wear something special, whether it's a funny t-shirt or a pretty dress.

## **If nighttime: are you sleepy and fatigued but resisting going to sleep?**

Put on pajamas, make yourself cozy in bed with a teddy bear and the sound of falling rain, and close your eyes for fifteen minutes — no electronic screens allowed. If you're still awake after that, you can get up again; no pressure.

## **Do you feel ineffective?**

Pause right now and get something small completed, whether it's responding to an e-mail, loading up the dishwasher, or packing your gym bag for your next trip. Good job!

## **Do you feel unattractive?**

Take a goddamn selfie. Your friends will remind you how great you look, and you'll help fight society's restrictions on what beauty can look like.

## **Do you feel paralyzed by indecision?**

Give yourself ten minutes to sit back and figure out a game plan for the day. If a particular decision or problem is still being a roadblock, simply set it aside for now, and pick something else that seems doable. Right now, the important part is to break through that stasis, even if it means doing something trivial.

## **Have you over-exerted yourself lately — physically, emotionally, socially, or intellectually?**

That can take a toll that lingers for days. Give yourself a break in that area, whether it's physical rest, taking time alone, or relaxing with some silly entertainment.

## **Have you waited a week?**

Sometimes our perception of life is skewed, and we can't even tell that we're not thinking clearly, and there's no obvious external cause. It happens. Keep yourself going for a full week, whatever it takes, and see if you still feel the same way then.

You've made it this far, and you will make it through. **You are stronger than you think.**