

Supporting Mental Wellness to Thrive in Work and Life

Developed by Alexis C. Smith, PA-C

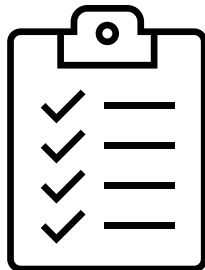


Alexis C. Smith, PA-C

- NCCPA Board-Certified Physician Assistant (PA-C)
- Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from Michigan State University
- Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training from Michigan State University
- Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from Wayne State University
- Practiced for seven years in pediatric emergency medicine and behavioral health
- Currently practicing interventional psychiatry at outpatient clinic
- Passion for incorporating an integrative approach combining traditional psychiatry techniques with nutrition and lifestyle modifications

Presentation Outline

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- [The Brain & Stress](#)
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The Brain + Stress

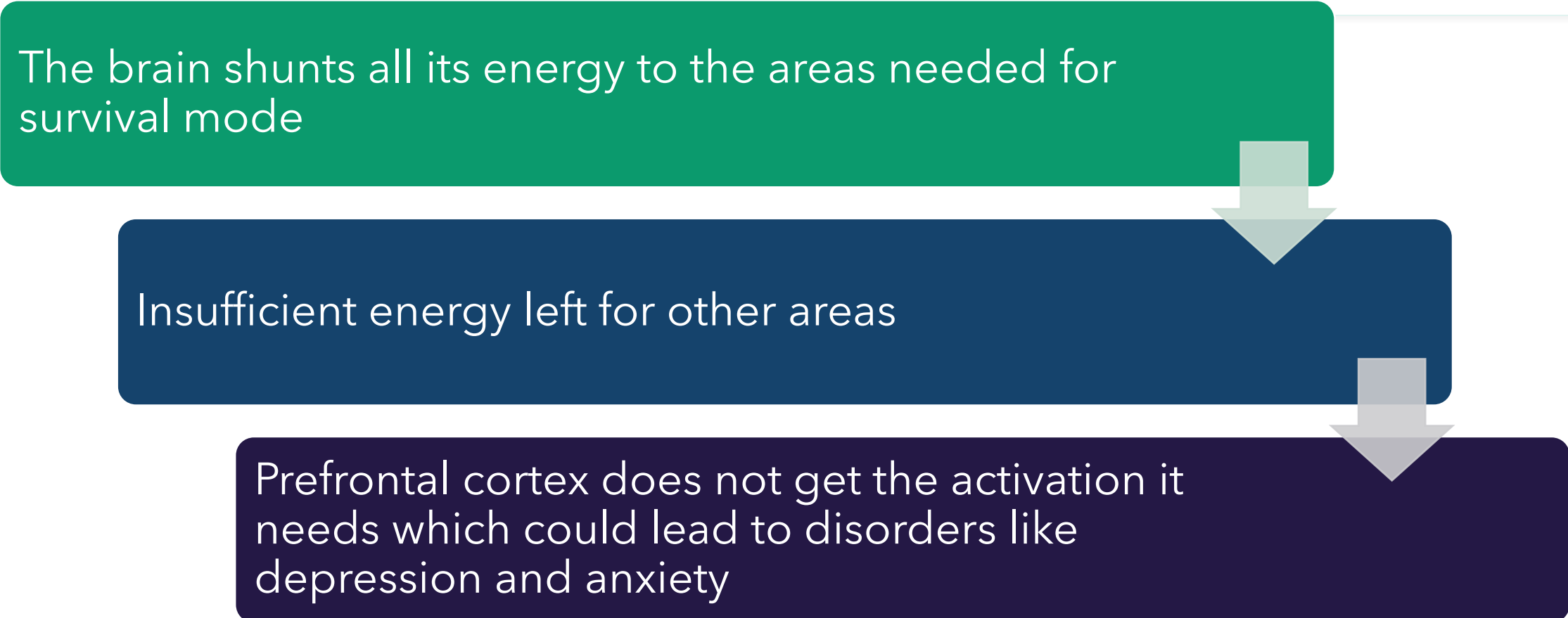


What does stress do to the brain?



How could stress lead to mental health disorders?

The brain shunts all its energy to the areas needed for survival mode



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graph TD; A[The brain shunts all its energy to the areas needed for survival mode] --> B[Insufficient energy left for other areas]; B --> C[Prefrontal cortex does not get the activation it needs which could lead to disorders like depression and anxiety];
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The diagram consists of three stacked rectangular boxes with rounded corners, each containing text. The top box is green, the middle is dark blue, and the bottom is dark purple. Arrows point from the bottom of the green box to the top of the dark blue box, and from the bottom of the dark blue box to the top of the dark purple box, indicating a sequential flow of information.

Insufficient energy left for other areas

Prefrontal cortex does not get the activation it needs which could lead to disorders like depression and anxiety

So,
should we
just avoid
stress??

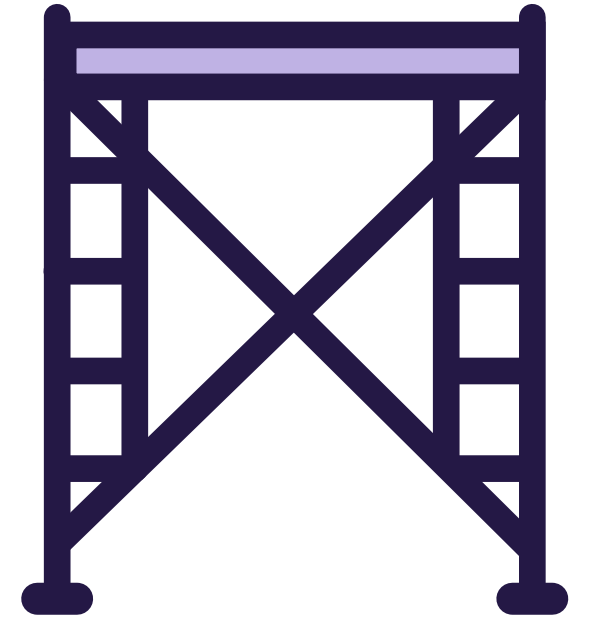


NO!

**We implement healthy
habits to cope with
stress!**



Scaffolding for Wellness



What is "scaffolding"?

Building yourself a support system



Boundaries and Communication



Coping Skills



Social Support



Positive self talk



Movement



Adequately fueling the body



Healthy sleep hygiene

Wellness



- Physical and mental wellness are interconnected
- Physical activity and good nutrition positively influence how our bodies function AND how we feel
- Poor physical health and chronic illnesses can directly impact our state of mind

The Importance of Physical Activity



Improved brain health and cognitive function



Boosts mood, both short term and long-term



Can improve sleep



Can reduce the risk of depression and anxiety



Improves confidence and self-image



Provides a break from daily stressors



Physical Activity Tips

- 1 Make it enjoyable for you!
- 2 Take a walk
- 3 Get a walking pad for your office or home office
- 4 Join a sports league
- 5 Join a group class and learn a new skill

Prioritizing Sleep



Why Is Sleep Important?



Restoration



Good sleep can
help us regulate
emotions



Helps with
learning and
attention



Help cope with
stress and feel
overall more
positive





How much sleep is needed?

- Most adults need 8-9 hours of sleep per night
- Figure out what amount you need to function the best
 - Think of how long you sleep on the weekends or on vacation
- If you need to add in more sleep to your schedule:
 - start from when you need to wake up and calculate what time you should go to bed
 - Then start with 15 min increments weekly to get to your goal

Create a Sleep Routine



Prepare your body
for sleep

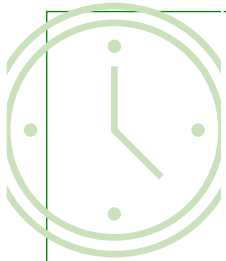
- Use same routine every night

screen free time for
at least 20-60 mins

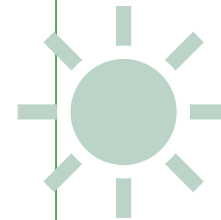
- Read, listen to audiobook,
listen to music, listen to podcast

Relaxation

- Meditation, breathing exercise,
yoga

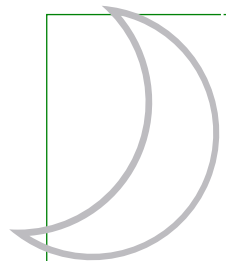


Try to go to bed around the same time even on weekends and vacation

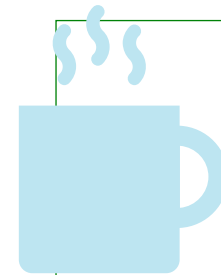


Sunlight within 30 mins of waking up can be beneficial for resetting "body clock"

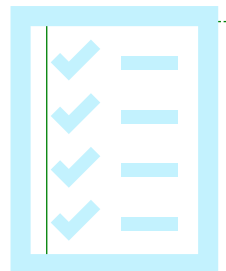
- Ample sunlight during the day is also helpful



Try to avoid daytime naps, but if you do nap try to keep it less than 30-60 minutes



Stop drinking caffeinated drinks after noon

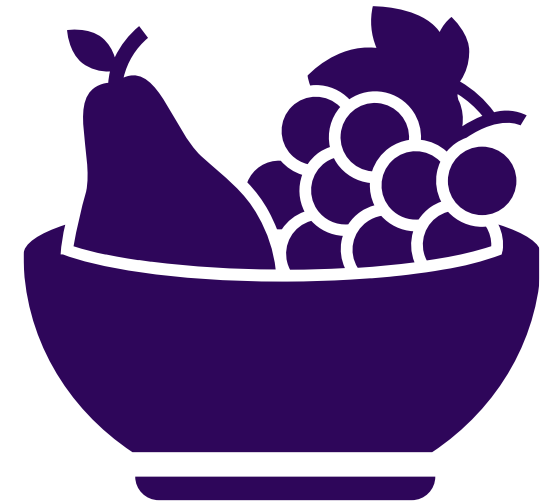


Keep a notebook on your nightstand to write notes or to-do list if you tend to worry when falling asleep



If middle of the night wakings occur, try calming activities in bed then out of bed if more than 20 minutes of wake time

Fueling Your Brain



How does food even impact our mental health?

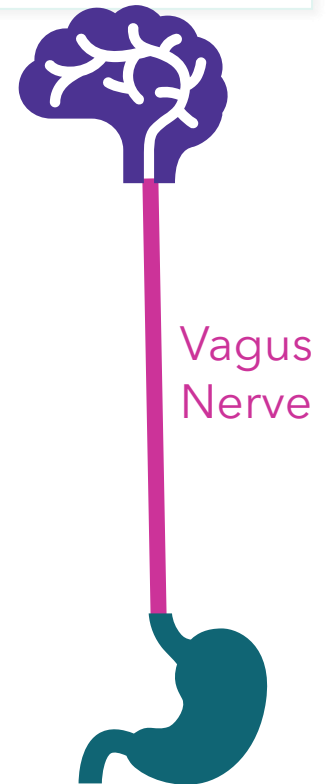
Gut-Brain Connection

Gut + brain are connected by one of our cranial nerves called the Vagus Nerve

Vagus nerve sends sensory info from the gut to the brain and motor signals from the brain to the gut

Gut microbiome (bacteria) also influences the signals to and from the brain

Types of food we eat can either cause inflammation in the brain or help reduce inflammation



Food = Fuel

Each meal should contain:

Protein



- meat, nuts, fish, legumes

Carbohydrates



- fruits, vegetables, oats, whole grains

Healthy Fat



- oils (cold-pressed organic coconut oil, extra virgin olive oil), avocados, fatty fish, grass fed organic butter (NOT margarine), Ghee

"Crowd Out" Method

ADDING more
whole foods into the
diet

Less room for the
foods that have less
nutritional value

It's not about
perfection!
Remember 80/20

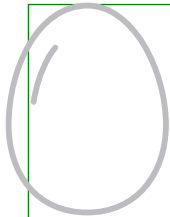
Tips & Tricks



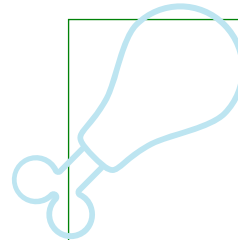
Limit alcohol, sugar, and ultra-processed foods



Read labels!



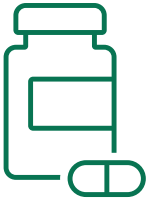
Eat breakfast - beneficial for concentration and starting your work day



Prioritize protein

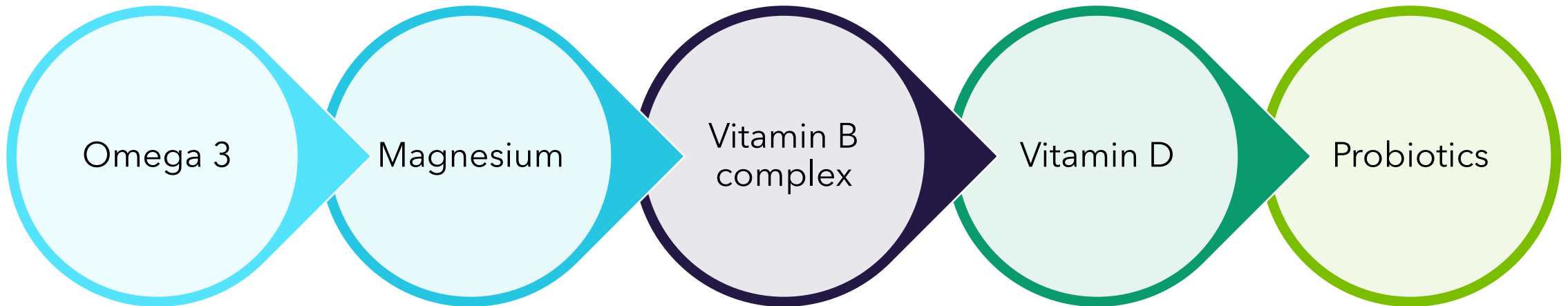


Increase water intake



Supplements

- You can't supplement away a poor diet!
- Some supplements can be beneficial for supporting mental wellness



*Ask your provider before starting supplements

Coping Strategies



Maladaptive Coping Strategies



Substance abuse



Emotional numbing



Isolation



Binge eating



Over-analyzing



"Retail Therapy"



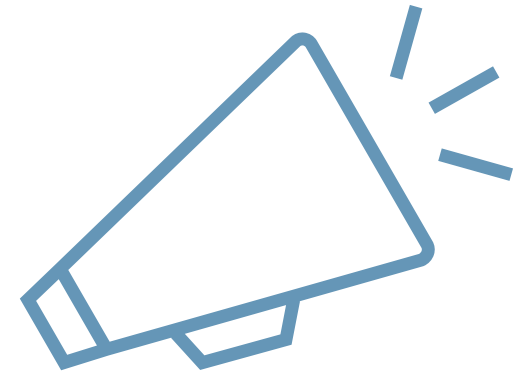
Healthy Coping Strategies

- Meditation + Breathing Techniques
- Positive thinking
- Cognitive reframing
- Talking with friends, family, or a therapist
- Exercise
- Controlled distractions (hobbies)

Explore Hobbies



Boundaries + Communication



Boundaries



Emotional



Physical



Workplace



Time



Tips for Boundary Setting

Identify values
and needs

Open
communication

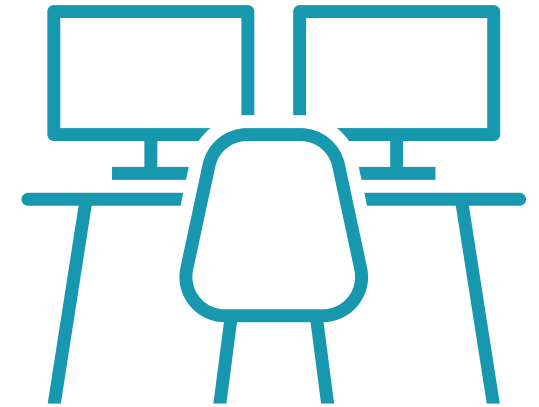
Start small

Consistency is
key

Learn to say
"No"

Practice Self-
Compassion

Remote Work Tips





Set a daily routine

- Pick an activity to signal the start of your work day
- After work, try to mimic a drive home by picking an activity to do for 10-20 mins before starting "home-life"



Create a designated workspace

- Signals the brain that it's time to work, improves focus, reduces distractions



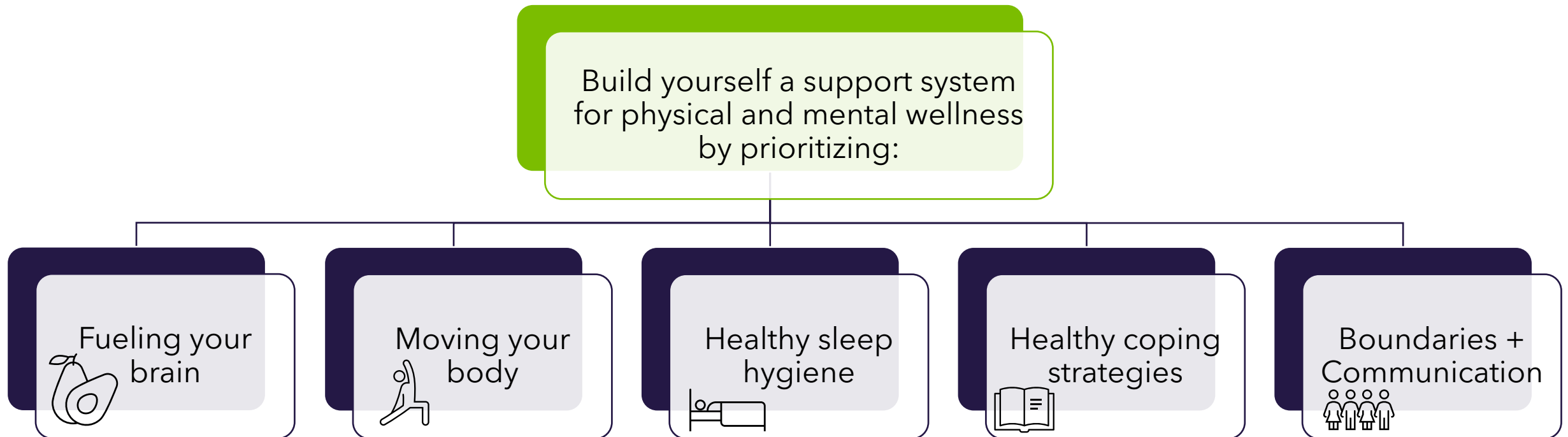
Schedule breaks

- 5 min breaks can give your legs, back, neck, eyes, and brain a break
- For a boost: walk, stretch, or do yoga

Wrap-Up

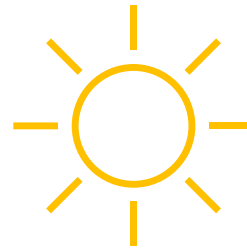


Presentation Wrap-Up



Questions?





Thank You!!



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This course should not be construed as medical advice.

The intent is to provide suggestions for improving mental wellness.

We suggest you seek advice from your medical provider before implementing these suggestions.

ONE FINAL NOTE