

SILVER LININGS

In my world, there is a theoretical model, the AMSO Framework, that holds that the recipe for maintaining or changing health behavior includes:

Awareness: access to and understanding of evidence-based information

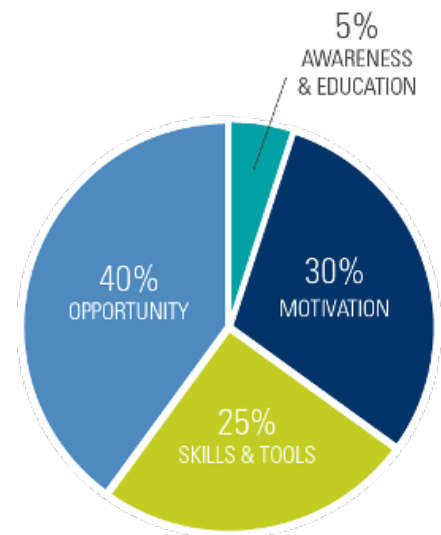
Skills: the ability to practice and master a new behavior

Motivation: the drive to perform or change

Opportunity: an environment that supports healthy change

COVID 19 has dramatically changed our day-to-day environments. It has upset our routines and our resources. It has forced us alternatively into togetherness or solitude. It has motivated us to either stew and chew or acquire new awareness and skills. Here is sampling of some of the positive adaptations I have heard about in the last few weeks.

- On Mother’s Day, my sons both bragged that their expenses had inexplicably plummeted. Silver lining?
- One of my dear friends, for the first time in her adult life, is enjoying the Zen of home cooking using a meal prep service she lovingly calls Super Fresh. Silver lining?
- A colleague remarked that he is going to continue to work from home for several days per week as he has discovered that he is sleeping so much better. Silver lining?



Source: American Journal of Health Promotion, 2005

As for me, it made me take a hard look at mental health. It is such a stigmatized topic in the workplace that my initial reaction to inquiries was to say: “No thanks, I’m not touching it.” But it simply would not go away. So, as I have been known to do, I jumped in with both feet. Over the last several weeks, I have taken 23 hours of continuing professional education on the lifestyle behaviors supporting mental health. Spoiler alert: what is good for the body is good for the brain.

HERE ARE MY TOP 10 HEALTH BEHAVIORS FOR PROMOTING BRAIN HEALTH:

1. **Sleep.** For adults 7-9 hours over a 24-hour period. (see chart for other age groups). This is not negotiable. Sleep dusts off the by-products of brain metabolism and gives you a fresh start. Wicked smart ideas are born after a good night’s rest.
2. **A whole food diet.** Eat a wide variety of foods as close to their natural state as possible. Processing reduces

nutrient density and makes it taxing for the body to find what it needs. Hunting for nutrients is a stressor.

3. **Unsaturated fats.** Fats that are plant-based and soft or liquid at room temperature optimize brain permeability and flexibility. Snack on some nuts or substitute avocado for mayonnaise on your sandwich.
4. **Water.** Every cell in the body needs water. That 3PM headache is not an ibuprofen deficiency. You're dehydrated. Dehydration is a stressor.
5. **Exercise.** We are designed to move. Activity is nature's way of burning off stress hormones. It doesn't have to be CrossFit (though my neighbor has turned his garage into a gym). Get outside and walk. Start counting your steps with an app or a wearable. Getting 10,000 steps per day could change your life.
6. **Connection.** We are social beings. We need an average of six hours of social interaction per day. Social distancing is a misnomer. Rather, think of physical distancing and socially connecting.
7. **Community.** Our community of insurance geeks has strengthened thanks to our nerd herd who built the means for us to stay connected, yet safely distanced.
8. **Gratitude.** Express thanks for what you do have: your health, your family, your friends, your purpose. And thank the grocery store clerk and the UPS driver who continue to meet your needs despite the personal risk.
9. **Nature.** We need at least 15 minutes of sunshine each day to manufacture Vitamin D – a fat soluble vitamin (see 3.) that supports brain health. The Japanese have gone so far as to promote a practice called forest bathing to combat tech burnout, increase mindfulness and lower blood pressure.
10. **Probiotics.** While the science here is still evolving, there is evidence that the gut microbiome has a role in communicating both to and from the brain. The rampant use of anti-biotics kills all bacteria –even the beneficial kind. Probiotics replenish the good bacteria.

COVID 19 has dramatically changed day-to-day opportunities, but it hasn't been all bad. Think of the changes you've made that have actually improved your life over the last few months. I became acutely aware that I was spending too much time alone, so I adopted a rescue dog named Izzy. Silver lining!

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF SLEEP MEDICINE / NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Infants (4-12 mo.): 12-16 hours per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children (1-2 years): 11-14 hours per 24 hours (including naps).
- Children (3-5 years): 10-13 hours per 24 hours (including naps).
- Children (6-12 years): 9-12 hours per 24 hours.
- Teenagers (13-18 years): 8-10 hours per 24 hours.
- Young Adults (18-25): 7-9 hours per 24 hours.
- Adults (26-64): 7-9 hours per 24 hours.
- Older Adults (65+): 7-8 hours per 24 hours.



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Patricia M. Fuller has dedicated the last 20+ years to designing and delivering wellness programs. Her events earn consistently excellent ratings for her holistic approach and her real world application.

Prior to concentrating in wellness, Pat taught accounting and auditing as an adjunct professor at the University of Tampa. She earned her CPA designation in 1992 as a senior associate for Coopers & Lybrand. She has a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Utah.

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