

BUILD MENTAL RESILIENCY

by Dr. Dale Johnson, CSA

The brain is an incredibly pliable organ that can improve as you age. This means the things you do every day can help you build a better, more pandemic proof brain. The combination of restorative sleep and exercise, for instance, is an antidote to mental decline – matchless medicine we can't get elsewhere. **Here are some ideas to build mental resiliency.** (1)

Cut your consumption of media calories. Think about what media sources you are following and how often you are checking them. Too much media consumption can make us feel that we are losing control of our lives. **Research shows that when we shift our focus to what we can control, we see meaningful and lasting differences in our well-being, health, and performance.**

Maintain strict structure. Just as your body loves homeostasis, a stable equilibrium or balance across its systems, the mind loves predictability, order, and routines. This allows you to adapt quickly to unexpected changes and challenges. **Create daily to-do lists; set goals; organize your spaces including where you work, stick to a regular schedule for eating, exercising, and sleeping even on weekends; and commit to an end-of-day ritual that is calming.**

Keep connections thriving. One of the more devastating epidemics that has arisen from the pandemic is loneliness. **Social support is proven to strengthen resilience by increasing our sense of control and self-esteem.** Sociality also has positive neural outcomes: it actually deactivates circuits in the brain that trigger fear and anxiety. **When we connect with others, we hot-wire our brain's calming centers while taming its emotional reflexes.**

Use apps that help you practice mind-body medicine. From apps, that help you meditate, to those that allow you to join online groups to share your experiences and socialize, there is no shortage of programs to help you build resilience.

Use food to boost mood. The idea that you are what you eat applies to mental health too. **Large population studies reveal that people who eat a lot of nutrient-dense foods – more fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, beans and legumes, fish, eggs, and fermented products like yogurt – experience less anxiety and depression and report greater levels of happiness and overall life satisfaction.**

***Seek professional help.* “You don't have to wait for things to get that bad. Therapy isn't just for people struggling with serious mental illness,”** quoted Olympian Michael Phelps.

(1) Sanjay Gupta, “WORLD WAR C, Lessons fro the COVID – 19 PANDEMIC and How to Prepare for the Next One” (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), pp. 214 -218.