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The many factors that affect our mental health

The Vitl Nutrition Team / 10 Oct 2022

Mental health is not a sensitive topic, it shouldn't be a taboo or something we shouldn't freely talk about. It is a normal, inseparable part of our human lives; as normal and worthy of attention as the health of our skin, hair, nails, lungs and liver.

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Mental health is not a sensitive topic, it shouldn't be a taboo or something we shouldn't freely talk about. It is a normal, inseparable part of our human lives; as normal and worthy of attention as the health of our skin, hair, nails, lungs and liver. And although we often go to lengths to protect ourselves from toxic influences that may harm our bodies – such as avoiding cigarettes, adhering to healthy diets and exercising– , we tend to neglect to protect our most vital organ, our fascinating chief operating officer that is a stubborn 7 year old child at times; our brain.

This blog aims to touch base on day-to- day habits and factors that affect our mental wellbeing more than we realise. Habits that have been 'normalised' by society making us feel more inadequate if we don't stick to them.

Let's talk about peer pressure

We often push ourselves to do things that are normal around our family and friends, like going out on a Friday night, hitting the gym throughout the week, having an active social media presence, sipping on alcohol and coffee to relax or help us keep up with our hectic schedules and these are just a few examples! The question is, is this something that you are organically wired to do? Or something that normal, seemingly happy people do that you SHOULD also do to be happy? Pushing ourselves to do anything just to keep us relevant is a major stressor for our body. Just because someone said that going out and drinking every weekend is 'living the best life', it doesn't necessarily mean it's right for you. In fact, alcohol is one of the biggest 'normalised' depressants. That hangover the next day often comes with feelings of anxiety, depression and irritability, but just because it has been 'normalised' we are ok with it and keep doing it every weekend to be social, although our body and mental wellbeing may not be able to keep up.

Just because for someone working out first thing in the morning is great to kick-start their day, it doesn't necessarily mean that this works for you. Your body might be better suited to do intense physical exercise later in the day, but you still push yourself to do it at 6 am just because someone said 'morning exercise is best'. Well, it might be for some, but not for everybody. We are all unique after all. Not to mention, exercise is supposed to be fun and the more we enjoy it the more likely we'll stick to it! Try to stay in tune with your body's spikes of energy and drops and make the training schedule that suits your schedule and your needs.

This doesn't only apply to exercise, but everything in life. Why go out only on a Friday or Saturday night? Why not go and enjoy a drink and a nice chat with your friend on a random Tuesday evening? Why do we need to associate extreme behaviours with 'having fun'? Who said

having a 'wild night out' is getting back home at 4 am? A wild life could be your own version and indeed if it means a quiet night in, a trip to the theatre, or anything that makes you feel content and good. It could be anything.

Sabotaging our needs

We've learnt from a very young age to follow our strengths and not necessarily our needs. Just because you were doing great in maths and physics at school, it doesn't mean you have to follow a career in engineering; you might well want to be a doctor or something not related to a strength you have. Needs and strengths are not always aligned; to find something you love doing and you are good at is a blessing. Finding that job, or hobby is difficult if we don't ask ourselves 'what do I want?'

Social media

Our ancestors experienced feelings of sadness, anxiety or despair. But, the days they were feeling low, they weren't bombarded with pictures and videos from people having a blast and 'living their best life'. Although we can agree that a lot of social media content is not a true representation of someone's life, they still manage to trick our brain into thinking that we are inferior and that our lives are 'mediocre'. But guess what?! Mediocrity is actually what prevails around the world, but it's very uncommon online. Social media only shows the extremes - either something very beautiful or something devastating. This is only the 1% of someone's life (usually). The 99% that nobody 'shares' is actually the mediocre part.

Some people are indeed resistant to those triggers, but some of us can be affected by social media. You might benefit from monitoring your usage, or deleting particular accounts entirely if you see them affecting you more than they should.

Poor diet and trends

A poor diet can have an impact on our mental health; if our brains don't get a constant supply of key nutrients needed for its optimal function, then symptoms may occur. A highly nutritious diet

rich in B vitamins, magnesium and healthy fats are all essential to sustain brain health – at a structural and functional level at least.

Keeping up with trends that are not made for you, can also cause stress to your body. For instance, intermittent fasting can have promising benefits, but it is not for everyone; some people are more prone to experience irritability and nervousness when on an empty stomach for extended periods of time, so why put that pressure on you? Find the eating schedule that most suits you, and make sure you are opting for the healthiest, most nutritious choice.

Mini stressors we ignore

Unnoticed small stressors in our day-to-day life add up and can affect everything, from our sleep to our relationships. The last drop of these stressors may mean we blow up at our partner or kids, even though they may not have been the root cause.

Such stressors can be snoozing the alarm clock, getting stuck in traffic on your way to work, coming home to a messy house, washing machine breaking or hearing criticism about yourself. The trick here is to try and identify the cause of stress and try to resolve this (or with the person who is causing it). Oftentimes, a malfunctioning relationship can cause us stress, but instead of sitting down with the person we have the problem with, we keep everything inside and end up blowing up to our closed ones, or experiencing spiralling thoughts at bedtime.

Identify the trigger, try to resolve it and see how it goes. You might be surprised with how much difference this can make to your relationships and stress levels throughout the day.

How to improve

The internet is full of tips and advice to help and improve our mental health. What works for someone may not necessarily work for you. It's about finding the right thing. And how can you do that? We'd say try it out!

Identifying the triggers and the causes for what may make us feel less happy, satisfied or fulfilled with our lives is important to then be able to figure out what needs to change.

A shift in mindset requires a lot of effort and feeling like you're not alone is important. We would recommend seeking expert advice from a therapist or counsellor to do this together.

Allowing the space to overcome our negative self-talk by first understanding them, reflecting inwards; what makes us feel good and fulfilled? This could be very powerful. Tools such as self-reflection done through journaling, meditation and positive affirmations are some ways to do this. Taking the time out of our day to make time for ourselves shouldn't be underestimated.

Implementing good habits such as establishing a good sleep routine or exercise regime will also impact how we feel about ourselves and will benefit our mental health.

Lastly, mental health rarely gets the attention it deserves both in personal and professional settings. But latest research has shown that how you feel has an enormous impact on your health. Studies have concluded that people who felt generally happier and more fulfilled lived longer and had less risk of developing certain diseases. ¹ We didn't include this stat to make us all feel worse about ourselves, but as a motivator. We have the power to change and to live the life we want to live, unlocking it is the tricky part. But we are not alone.

If you or a loved one is struggling with mental health please see below links for support:

[Mind](#)

[Mental health](#)

[Samaritans](#)

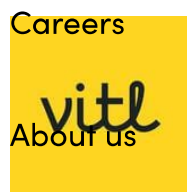
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