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CC0005 Healthy Living and Wellbeing

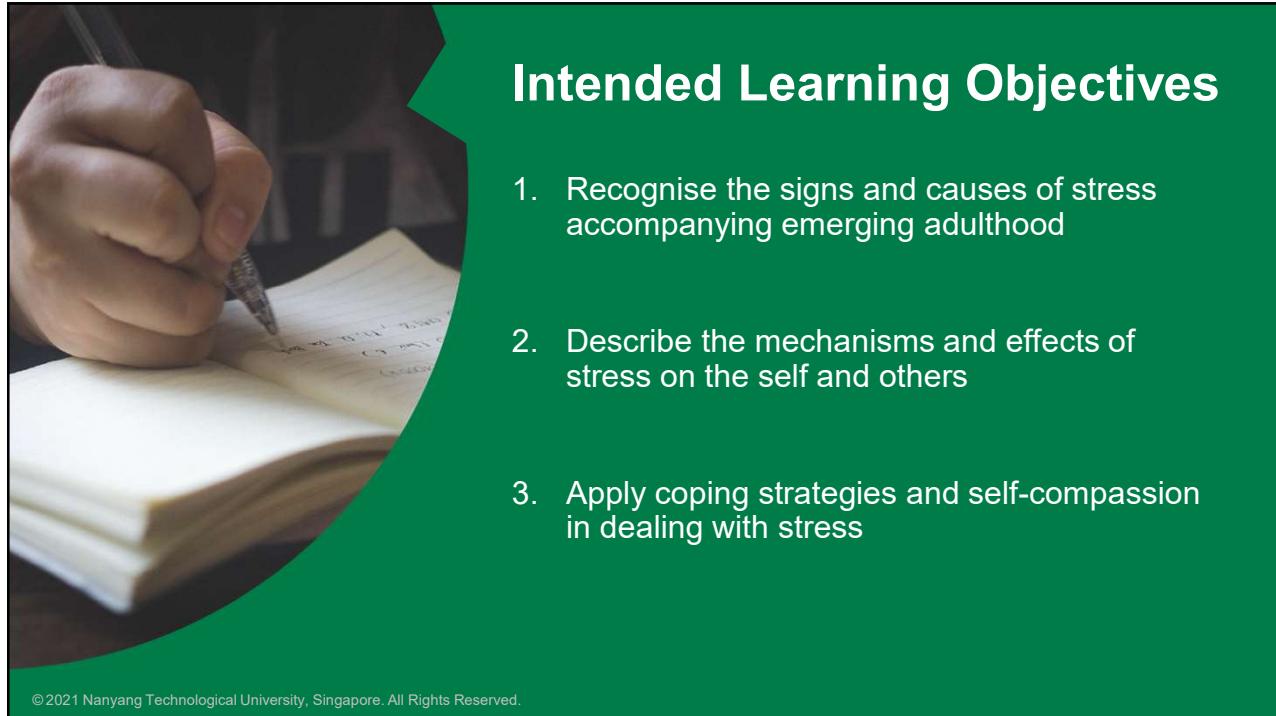
Lecture 2

# Understanding Stress and Fostering Self Care

Presented by Assoc Prof Andy Hau Yan HO

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## Intended Learning Objectives

1. Recognise the signs and causes of stress accompanying emerging adulthood
2. Describe the mechanisms and effects of stress on the self and others
3. Apply coping strategies and self-compassion in dealing with stress

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**01.**

# Sources and Impact of Stress on Body and Mind

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## The Stressful Lives of Young Adults

- Life transitions
- Academic stress
- Relationships issues (love, friendship, familial)
- Emotional upheavals
- Loneliness, isolation
- Pervasiveness of a sense of “never enough”
- Uncertainty about the future
- A COVID-19 new normal
- Identity crisis

Ng, C.W. (2019, October 09). Commentary: Facing disrupted futures, Singapore's youth must put their mental health first. *Channel News Asia*.  
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/disruption-prioritise-mental-health-impact-youths-singapore-11987948>

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## Identity, Youth and Crisis

- Adolescents' identities are evolving and require navigating between:
  - Desire for uniqueness
  - Desire to fit in with social groups, culture, society
- The "digital" self: Social media as an extension of own personality
  - Thus, seeking acceptance not only in real-life situations, but online as well.
- Severe identity crisis in adolescence leads to anxiety
  - Two potential extremes: Deviate from the norm or trapped inconformity

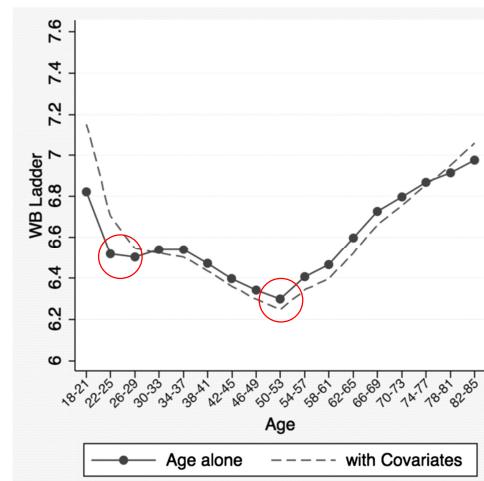


Samra, R. (2010, February 4). Commentary: Millennials, the burnout generation. *Channel News Asia*. [https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/millennials-tired-no-sleep-exhausted-the-burnout-generation-1117838#](https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/millennials-tired-no-sleep-exhausted-the-burnout-generation-1117838#.)

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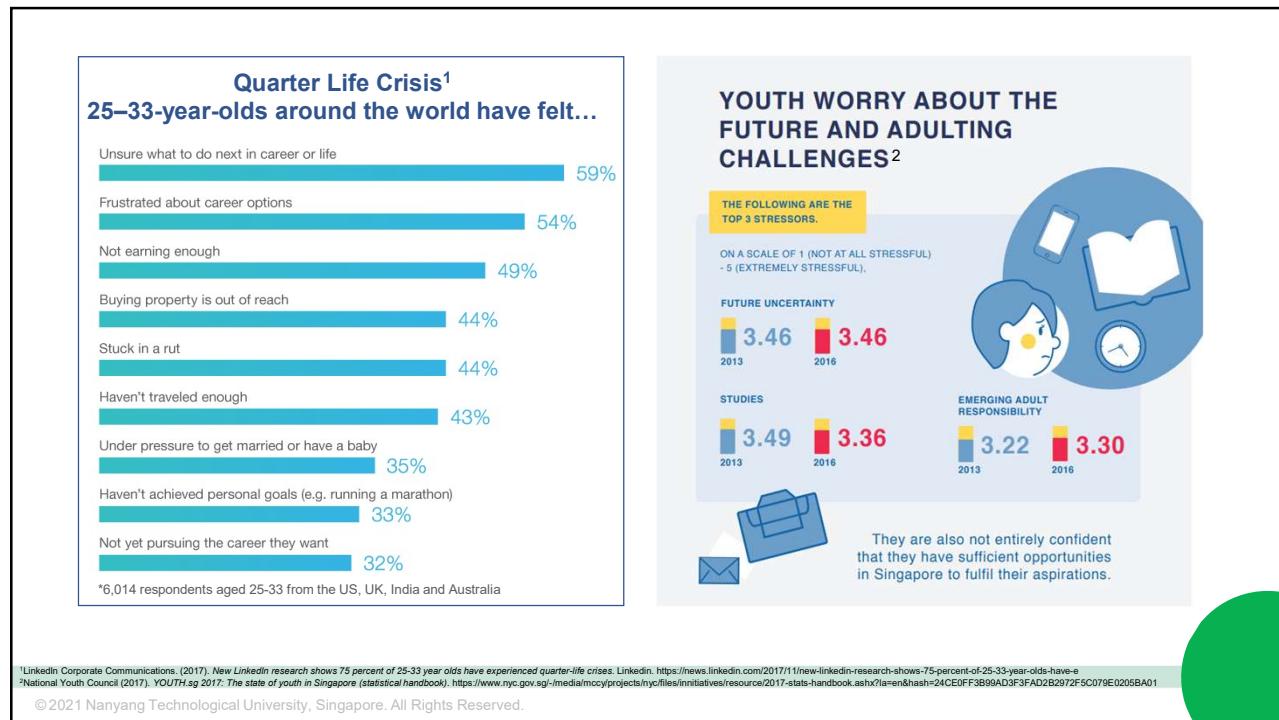
## The U-Bend A Snapshot of the Age Distribution of Psychological Wellbeing in the United States



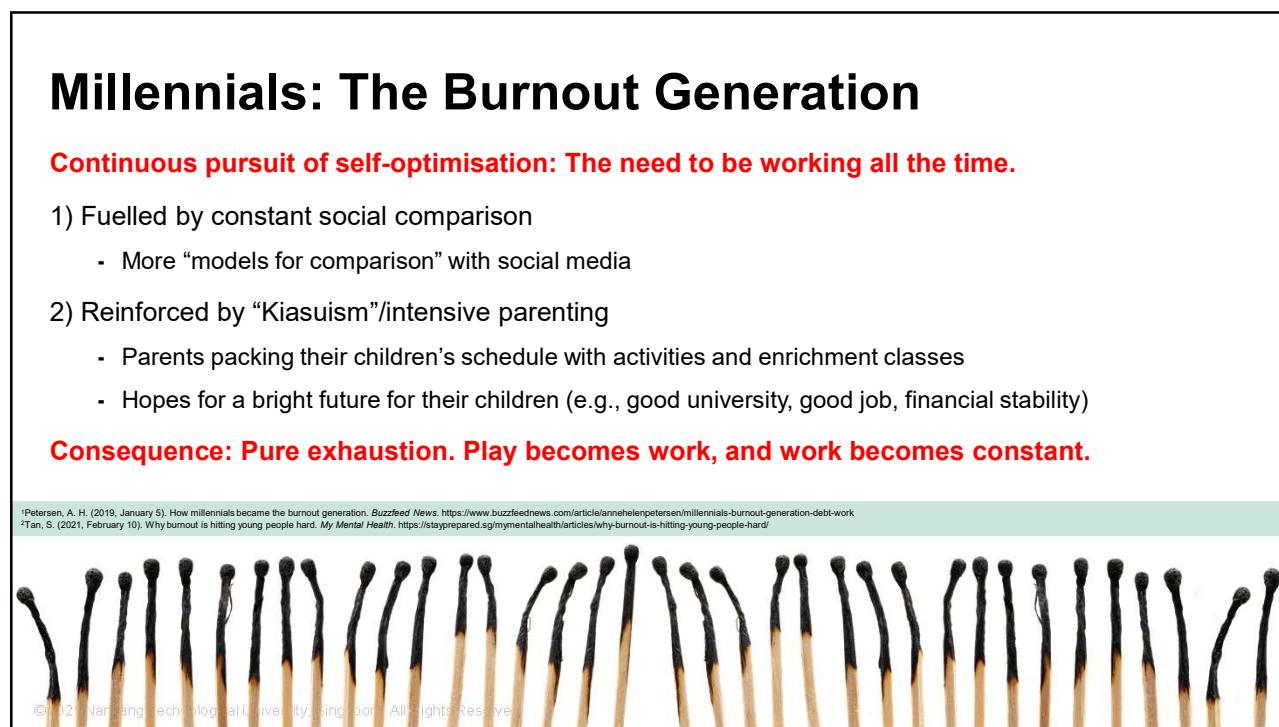
Stone, A. A., Schwartz, J. E., Broderick, J. E. & Deaton, A. (2010). A snapshot of the age distribution of psychological well-being in the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(22), 9985-9990. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1003744107>

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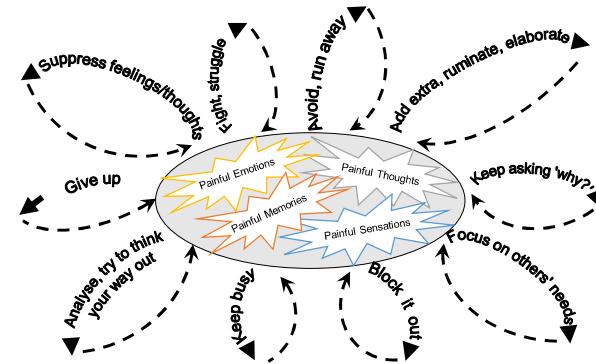
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## The Nature of Suffering

- Any experiences in which we experience physical, emotional, psychological and existential pains
- Being stuck in unpleasant feelings and emotions, whether the cause is big or small
- Includes stress, self-criticism, feelings of unworthiness, rumination, repression, suppression, annoyance, frustration, anger, sadness, hatred, negativity and negative reactions to unavoidable pain

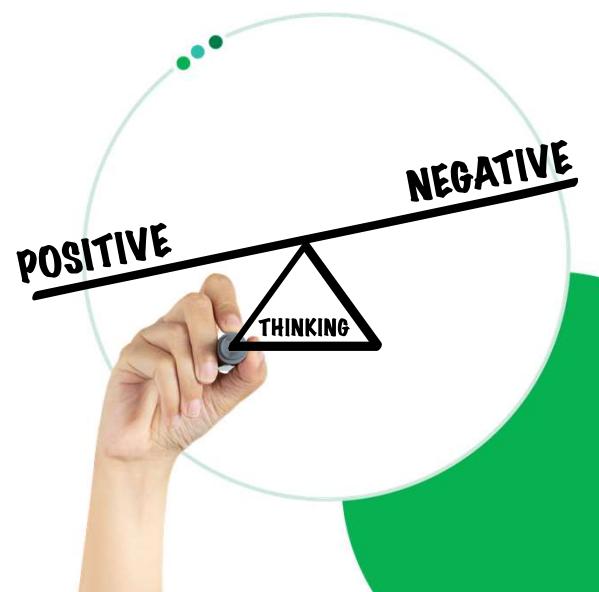


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## The Notion of Negative Bias

- Scientists believe our brain has a built-in “negativity bias”.
- It was a lot more important to notice, react to, and remember threats and bad events during the early days of human development.
- That's because in the tough environments in which our ancestors lived, if they failed to avoid a threat such as a predatory animal, there is little chance of survival.
- While society has progressed and we don't live in caves and get chased by animals anymore, our negativity bias has not changed and remains persistent in noticing the negative rather than the positive



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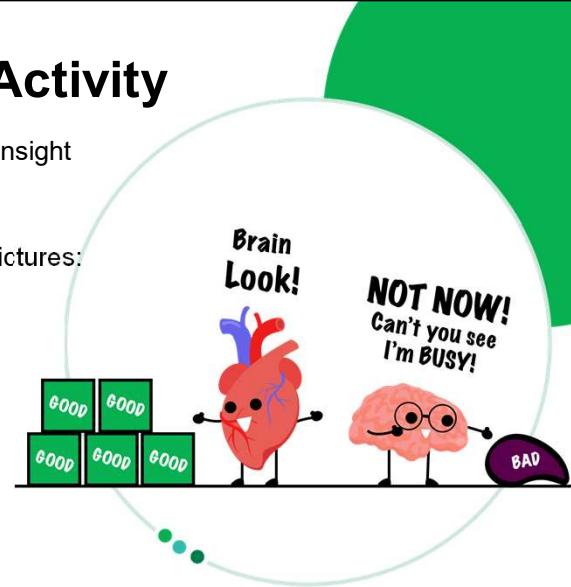
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## Negativity Bias and Neuro Activity

- Recording activity in brain's cerebral cortex provides insight into our response to different stimuli
  - More activity → More information processing
- Male university students were shown three types of pictures:
  - Positive (pizza)
  - Negative (dead cat)
  - Neutral (hairdryer)

Results:   Pizza   Hairdryer   **Dead cat**  
Greatest activity recorded with negative stimuli

**CONCLUSION**  
We are more heavily influenced by downbeat news than good news.

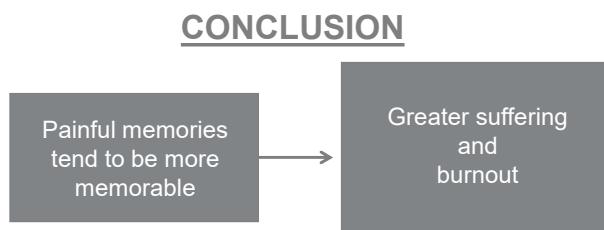


Ito, T., Larsen, J., Smith, N. & Cacioppo, J. (1998). Negative information bias weighs more heavily on the brain: The negativity bias in evaluative categorizations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(4), 887–900. <https://doi.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.75.4.887>  
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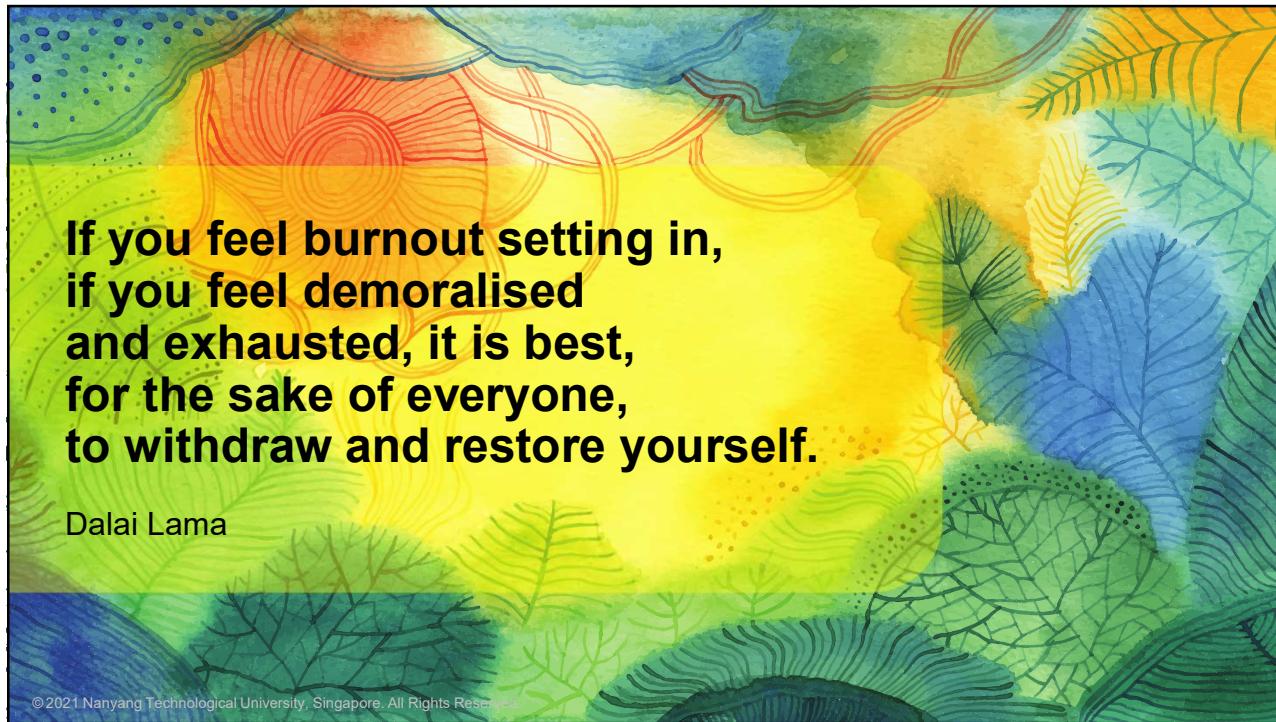
## Negativity Bias and Everyday Life

- The negativity bias shows up in lots of ways.
  - In a relationship, it takes five good interactions to make up for a bad one.
  - People will work much harder to avoid losing \$100 than to gain \$100.
  - At the end of the day, do you think about the fifty things that went right, or the one single thing that went wrong?



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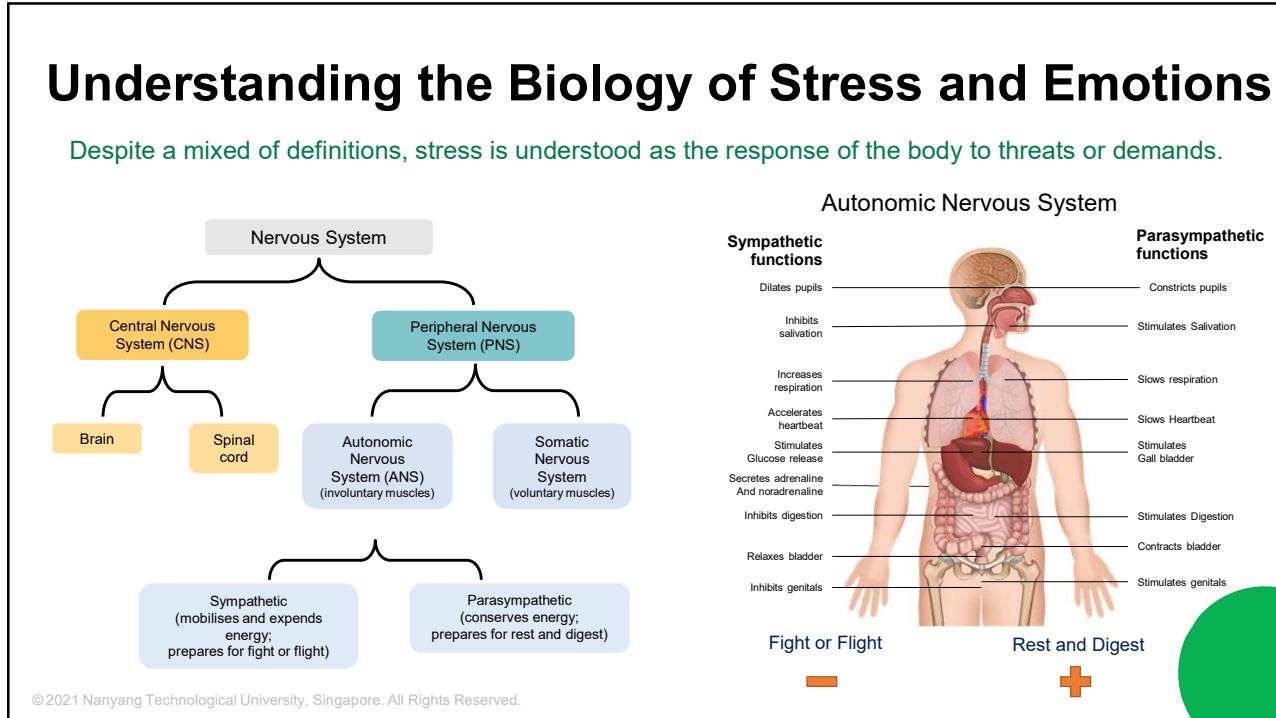
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## Understanding the Biology of Stress and Emotions

Despite a mixed of definitions, stress is understood as the response of the body to threats or demands.



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# Biological Responses to Stress

## Homeostasis

- The need for an organism to maintain optimum balance in body functioning
- Includes body temperature, the body's acid-base balance, body's oxygen content and the amount of oxygen that reaches the brain



## Allostasis

- Variable systems that allow an organism to cope with environmental changes.
- Helps to maintain stability with stress via adaptive responses, but long-term activation can lead to biological duress

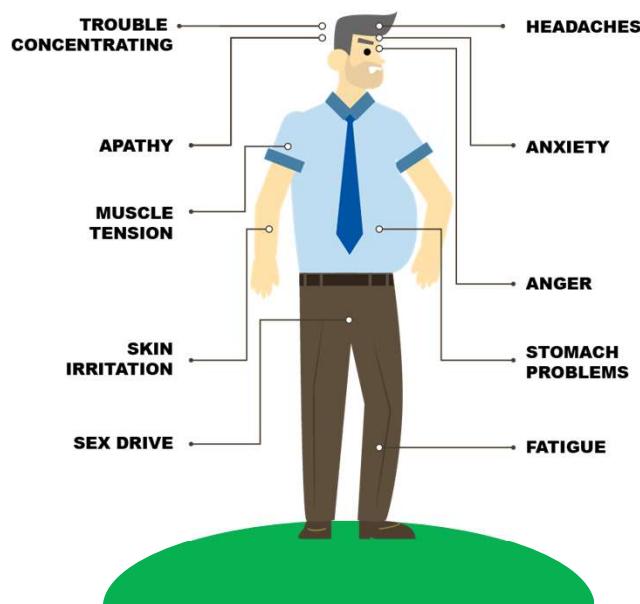
Allostasis is a protective system. It assists us to face a challenge, and is designed for short-term activation. When a person is faced with stress, the body prepares the person for the challenge. Such a response is meant to be infrequent. When that person lives out a lifestyle that overtaxes the inbuilt coping mechanism, then health can start to suffer. When this happens, allostasis gives way to allostatic load.

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# Allostatic Load

- It refers to “the **wear and tear** on the body” which accumulates as an individual is exposed to **repeated chronic stress**.
- While **stress hormones** (i.e., cortisol) can decrease muscle tone and protect our body in the short term, **overproduction of it can lead to pathophysiology**.
- This kind of stress can **weaken immune system**, induce illnesses such as hypertension and heart disease.



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## Chronic and Unresolved Stress: Burnout

- Burnout is a reaction to chronic stress derived from all aspects of life:
  - “A literal collapse of the human spirit”<sup>1</sup>
  - “The loss of concern for the people with whom one is working”<sup>2</sup>
  - “Psychological withdrawal from work in response to excessive stress and dissatisfaction”<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Storlie, F. J. (1970). Burnout: The elaboration of a concept. *The American Journal of Nursing*, 70(12), 2108-2111. <sup>2</sup>Maslach, C. (1976). Burned-out. *Human Relations*, 9(5), 16-22.

<sup>3</sup>Chemiss, C. (1980). *Staff burnout - job stress in the human services*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002248718103200418>

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## Degrees of Burnout

- First degree:**
  - A failure to keep up
  - Complacency with status quo
  - A gradual loss of reality
- Second degree:**
  - Accelerated physical and emotional deterioration
  - E.g., weight gain or weight loss, sleeping too much or too little, difficult to concentrate
- Third degree:**
  - Major physical and psychological breakdown
  - E.g., heart attack, ulcer, mental illness and most frequently depression

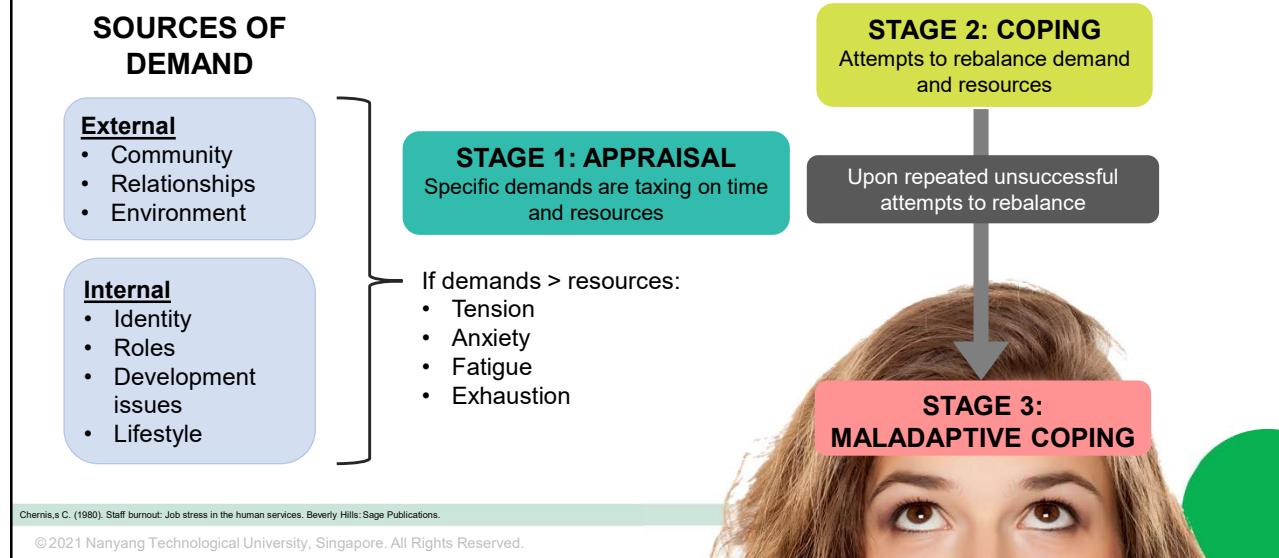


Simendinger, E.A., Moore, T.F. (1985). *Organizational burnout in Health care facilities: Strategies for prevention and change*. Rockville: Aspen Syst Co.

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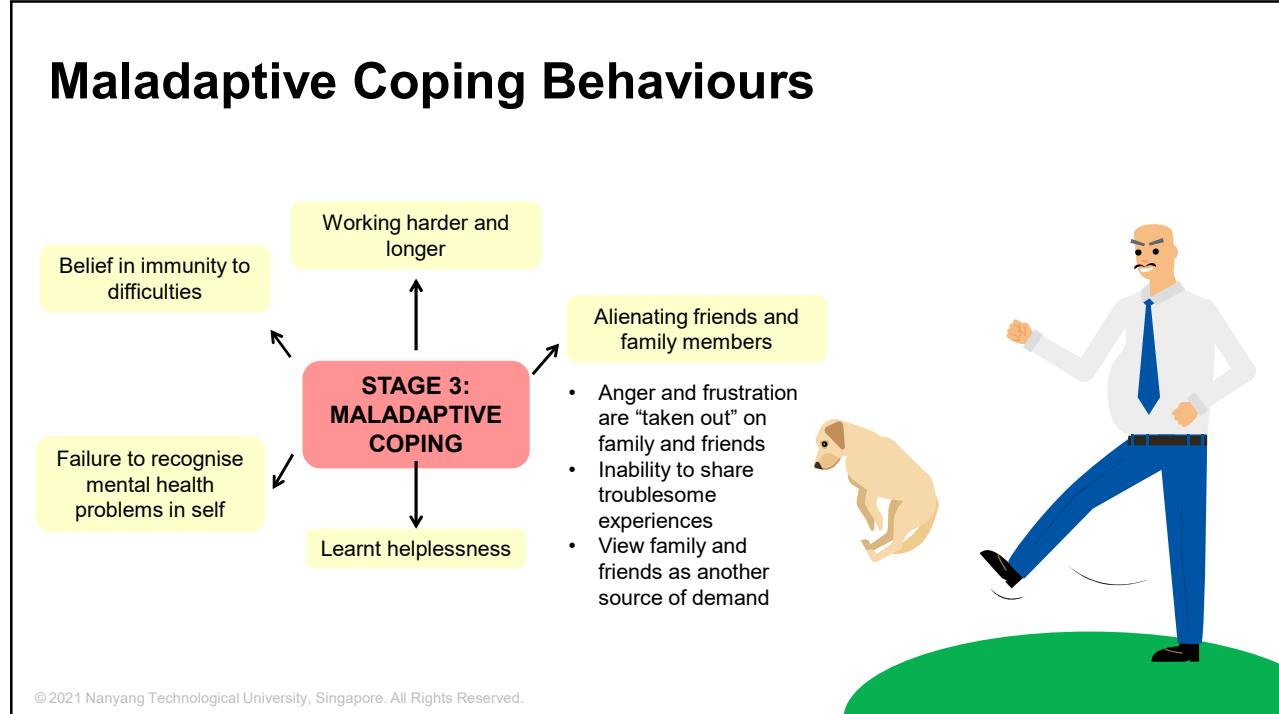
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# Burnout as a Transactional Process



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## Maladaptive Coping Behaviours



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## 02. Positive Coping Strategies

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### Emotion-Focused Coping

**GOAL:** Diminish the emotional consequences of stressful events

- Focusing on (and venting) emotions
- Behavioural and mental disengagement
- Seeking spiritual comfort
- Meditating
- Journaling
- Reframing



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## Problem-Focused Coping

**GOAL:** Resolve the stressful event or alter the source of the stress

- Seeking information
- Taking direct action
- Planning
- Focus on solution
- Seeking support
- Physical exercise



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## Proactive Coping

**GOAL:** Manage predictable future obstacles through self-regulation (i.e., “future-proofing”)

- Building resources needed to succeed
- Setting realistic goals
- Recognising potential stressors



Aspinwall, L. G. & Taylor, S. E. (1997). A stitch in time: Self-regulation and proactive coping. *Psychological Bulletin*, 121(3), 417–436. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.121.3.417>

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## Meaning-Focused Coping

**GOAL:** Draw on personal values and life goals to sustain meaning in life when faced with stressful events

- Realistically acknowledging threat
- Benefit seeking
- Benefit reminding
- Adaptive goal processes
- Reordering priorities
- Infusing ordinary events with positive meaning



Folkman, S. & Moskowitz, J. T. (2000). Positive affect and the other side of coping. *American Psychologist*, 55(6), 647–654. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.6.647>

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## 03. Resilience Through Self-Care and Self- Compassion

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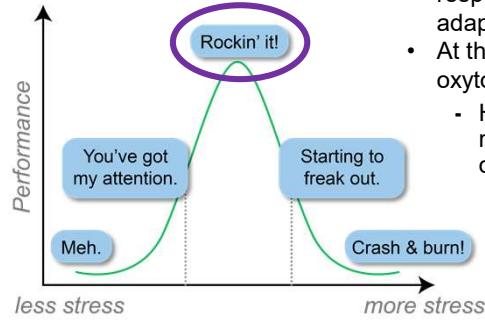


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# The Upsides of Stress

## Moderate levels of stress leads to optimal performance

- More physiologically charged up
- Heightened sense of clarity
- Stronger motivation to perform



## Moderate levels of stress builds resilience

- Trains body to manage and respond to life stressors adaptively
- At this level, brain produces oxytocin
  - Hormone helps cells regenerate and repair micro-damage

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# Resilience

- Resilience is the process of adapting well to adversity; having the capacity to “bounce back” from difficult experiences.
  - “A pattern of positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity.”<sup>1</sup>
  - “The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation in the face of challenging or threatening circumstances.”
  - “A set of **inner resources**, **social competencies**, and **cultural strategies** that permit individuals to not only **survive**, but **recover**, or even **thrive** after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning.”<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Wright, M. S., & Masten, A. S. (2008). Resilience processes in development: Fostering positive adaptation in the context of adversity. In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 17–37). Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. [https://doi.org/10.1007/b98572-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/b98572-9_2) | <sup>2</sup>Vestekova, Z., Gackova, A. M., Oroszova, O., Gajdovska, B., van Dijk, J. P., & Reijneveld, S. A. (2008). Self-esteem and resilience: The connection with risky behavior among adolescents. *Addictive Behaviors*, 34(3), 287–291. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2008.11.005> | <sup>3</sup>Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Spina, S. U. (2005). Adolescent peer networks as a context for social and emotional support. *Youth & Society*, 36(4), 370–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0041188X04267814>

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# Factors in Resilience

## Social relationships

- Caring and supportive relationships offer the security of love and trust
  - Offers encouragement and reassurance
  - Provides role models for demonstrating positive coping strategies

## Internal to the self

- A positive view of oneself—confidence in own strengths and abilities
- Deep understanding (and acceptance) of own weaknesses and limitations
- Capacity to regulate emotions and impulses
- Capacity to make and implement realistic plans
- Ability to reflect, process, articulate, and tell stories
- **These are all skills we can nurture within ourselves!**



American Psychological Association. (2018). The Road to Resilience. Retrieved from: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>.

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# Self-Care for Preventing Burnout



Connect with Others



Practise Self-Validation



Practise Self-Care



Manage Emotionality

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## Connect With Others



- Maintain connection with others
- Seek support from peers, family, and friends
- Join or establish a peer support or study group
- Engage in meaningful conversation regularly
- Participate in social activities
- Provide volunteer service to others
- Embrace interpersonal development



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## Practise Self-Validation



- Know that your best is all you can do
- Assume an internal locus of control
- Seek reward from within instead from others
- Be intentional rather than reactive to others
- Be mindful of thoughts and actions
- Practise positive self-talk
- Be a life-long learner



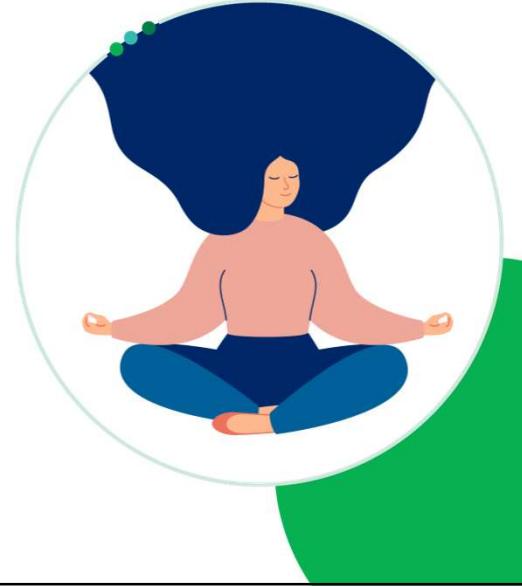
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## Practise Self-Care



- Live a healthy and well-balanced life
- Commitment for regular working schedule
- Make time for fun and recreation
- Be kind to yourself
- Spend time in nature
- Reserve time for yourself
- Allow for alone time
- Attend to your spiritual and creative self



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## Manage Emotionality



- Self-regulate anxiety and emotions
- Cultivate a non-judgemental mindset
- Develop relaxation and stress management skills
- Maintain a positive mental attitude
- Appreciating the here and now
- Be realistic and renounce perfectionism
- Develop a non-reactivity to emotions
- Practise self-compassion



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## Three Facets of Resilience

- **Recovery**

- Disruption of stressor to normal functioning is only *temporary*

- **Resistance**

- Exhibits normal functioning before, during and after a stressor (even long after a stressor)

- **Reconfiguration**

- Revision of cognitions, beliefs and behaviours to adapt to adversity



Lepore, S. J. & Revenson, T. A. (2006). Resilience and posttraumatic growth: Recovery, resistance and reconfiguration. In Calhoun & Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of posttraumatic growth* (pp. 24-46). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

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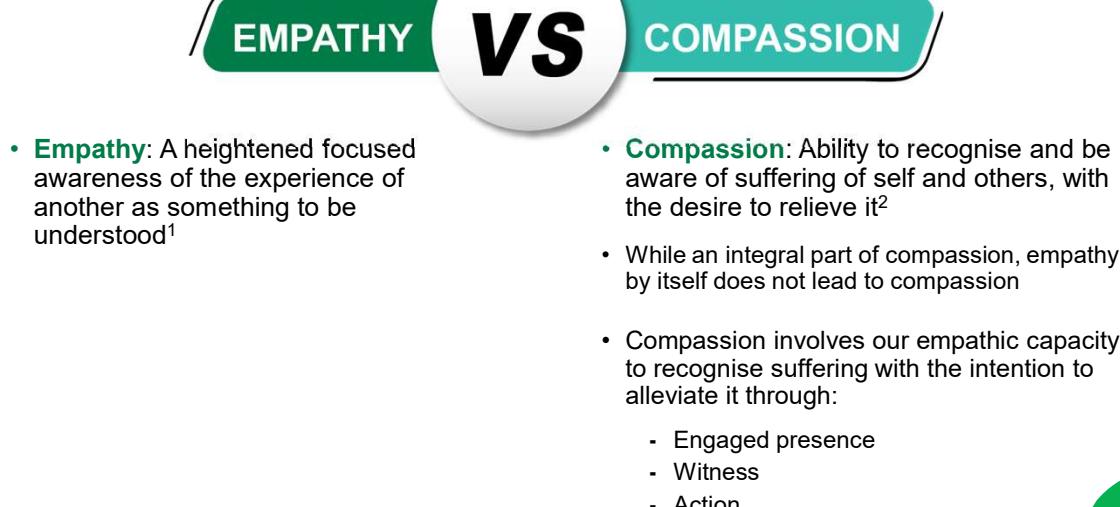
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## COMPASSION

- Awareness of the sufferings of living beings
- Concerns for the alleviation of suffering

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<sup>1</sup>Gilbert, P. & Choden. (2016). *Mindful compassion: How the science of compassion can help you understand your emotions, live in the present, and connect deeply with others*. New Harbinger Publications. | <sup>2</sup>Straus, C., Taylor, B. L., Gu, J., Kuyken, W., Baer, R., Jones, F., & Cavanagh, K. (2016). What is compassion and how can we measure it? A review of definitions and measures. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 47, 15–27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.05.004>

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## The Story of Two Arrows

- According to Buddhist philosophies, the human life experiences eight basic sufferings.
- These sufferings are unpredictable and unavoidable, like arrows that can hit us at any given time without warning.
- While some people may only suffer the pains of the eight arrows, most of us are prone to suffer the additional pain of a second arrow.
  - The second arrow of negative emotional reactions—the arrow we shoot ourselves with



Samyuktāgama. *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*.

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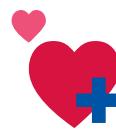
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## Core Components of Compassion



### Mindfulness

- Requires noticing the suffering of self/others
- Without judgement, avoidance or aversion



### Kindness

- Treating self/others with care and understanding
- Involves active soothing and comforting



### Common Humanity

- Seeing experience of self/other as part of a larger human experience
- We are not alone

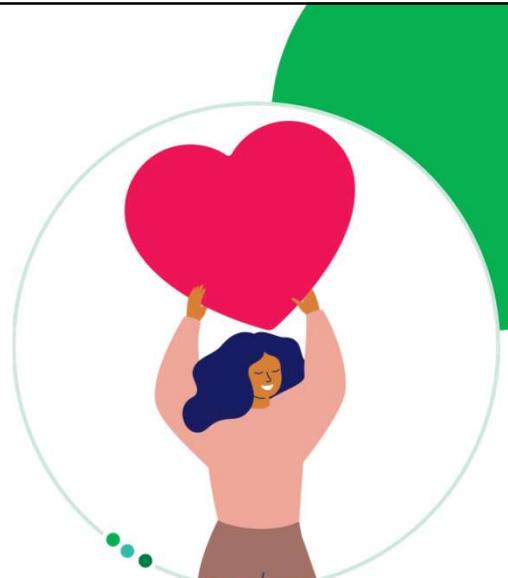
Neff, K. D. (2012). The science of self-compassion. In C. Germer & R. Siegel (Eds.), *Compassion and wisdom in psychotherapy* (pp. 79–92). Guilford Press.

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## From Compassion to Self-Compassion

- Extending **compassion to the self** for one's feelings of inadequacy and suffering
- An **open-heartedness to self** and the recognition of one's strengths and limitations
- Self-compassion is not self-pity or self-centredness but is linked to **deeper self-understanding** and emotional balance.
- Self-compassion is associated to intrinsic motivation, learning and **growth goals**, curiosity and exploration, less fear of failure and greater personal growth.



Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. Guilford Press.

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## Importance of Self-Compassion

- Always available
- Fosters connectedness rather than separation or self-centredness
- Involves relating to yourself and your life with an **open mind and open heart**
- Transforms sufferings into our teachers, an **opportunity for kindness and gratitude**
- A **skill** that can be taught and mastered through contemplative practices

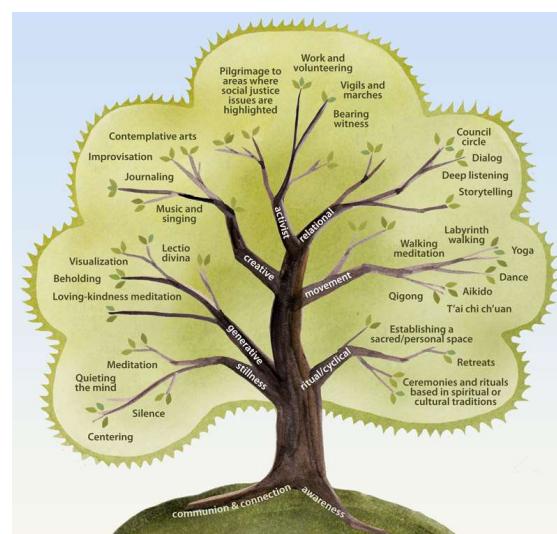


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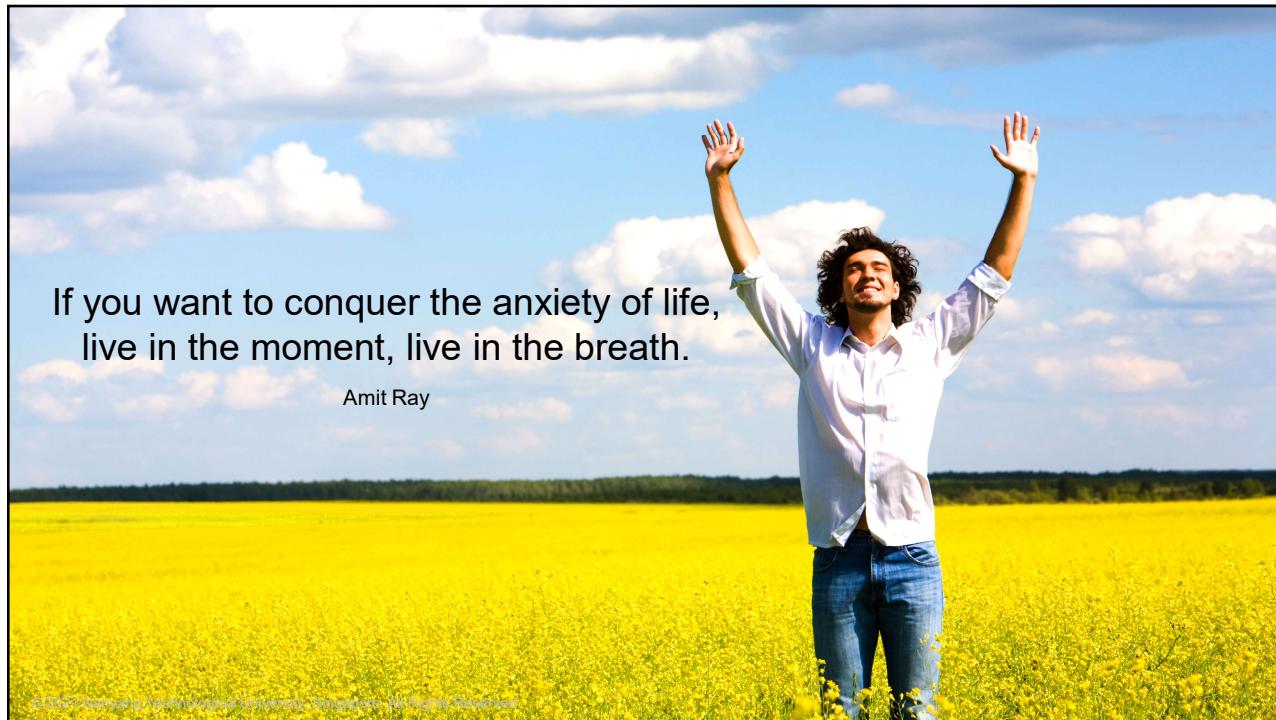
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## The Tree of Contemplative Practices



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## Contemplative Mindfulness Practice

- **Attention:** Often, our attention is in the past or in the future where we are ruminating or obsessing about our day. With practice, we can strengthen the part of our brain that helps bring focus and sustain attention.
- **Intention:** When we practise mindful attention, we direct our attention by being purposeful about the focus of our minds. Intention shapes mindset, and directs attention with clarity, openness, purpose, and curiosity.
- **Attitude:** When we are mindful, we start to see our own mental patterns and habits, allowing us to begin the practice of strengthening a positive and receptive mind. Being open and curious is the springboard for compassion, gratitude, creativity, innovation and wellness.



Germer, C. K. (2009). *The mindful path to self-compassion: Freeing yourself from destructive thoughts and emotions*. Guilford Press.

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# Presence of Heart



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# Plasticity of Mind

- Lazar (2005) used Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to assess cortical thickness in participants with extensive insight into meditation experience, which involves focused attention to internal experiences.
  - The prefrontal cortex and right anterior insula, brain regions associated with attention, interoception, sensory processing, emotional regulation, empathy and compassion, were thicker in meditation participants than matched controls.
  - These data provide the first structural evidence for experience-dependent cortical plasticity associated with meditation practice.
- Repeated experience shapes our brains—the more one practices, the stronger the cortex is.



Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Wasserman, R. H., Gray, J. R., Greve, D. N., Treadway, M. T., McGarvey, M., Quinn, B. T., Dusek, J. A., Benson, H., Rauch, S. L., Moore, C. I., & Fischl, B. (2005). Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *NeuroReport*, 16(17), 1893–1897. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.wnr.0000188598.66243.19>

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# Daily Mindfulness Practices

## Towards Compassion and Gratitude

Mindful of	Activities	The Reminder
Body	Walking	Don't rush. Be grateful of the beauty that surrounds you in nature and in your city. "Look at the beautiful array of colours beaming from this garden."
	Eating	Notice it is the first time that you are connected to this food. Be curious with the form, colour, smell, taste...Chew the food in your mouth mindfully. "I am thankful to be nourished by this food, which gives me the energy to learn, to love and to live."
	Washing your hands	Be aware of the source of water and how it arrives to your faucet. "I am grateful to have my life sustained by clean water."
Mind	Being aware of the habitual thoughts	Notice when you ruminate, regret, worry, speculate, dream: Being carried away from the present moment. "This is my habitual thought: I notice you and I will not be attached to you."
	Being aware of unwholesome emotions	Notice if you are getting trapped in worries, anger or other negative emotions in the beginning of the day. "I am ready to start a new day and live every moment in full awareness."

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**Our bodies are our gardens to which our wills are gardeners.**

William Shakespeare

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