



Brigham and Women's Hospital
Founding Member, Mass General Brigham

Physician Wellness and Burnout: How to Prevent It

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DISCLOSURES

These relationships have ended.

I served on the Scientific Advisory Board for Jenny Craig.

I served on the Medical Advisory Board for obVus Solutions.

I served on the Medical Advisory Board for Clearing.com



OBJECTIVES

1. Define Burnout
2. Identify a Physician Wellness Hierarchy
3. Examine different strategies to increase physician wellbeing
4. Determine one step you can take to reduce burnout and or enhance wellbeing



What is burnout?

From an AMA article titled **Advocacy in action: Reducing physician burnout** published June 2024.

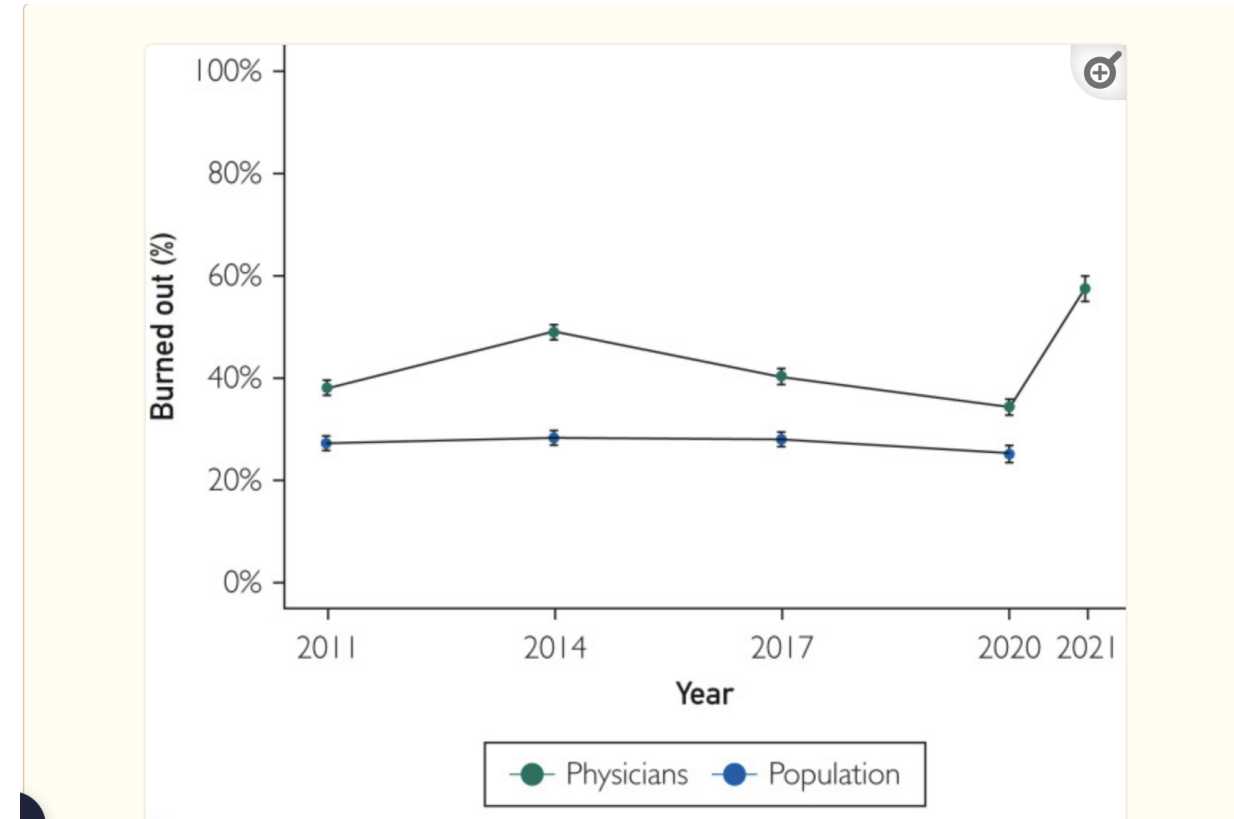
“Burnout is a [long-term stress reaction](#) that can include:

- Emotional exhaustion.
- Depersonalization (i.e. lack of empathy for or negative attitudes toward patients).
- Feeling of decreased personal achievement. ”

2025-- burnout rate in 41.9% (April 16, 2026)

(AMA: Physician burnout rates are falling, specialty gaps remain

<https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/ama-press-releases/ama-physician-burnout-rates-are-falling-specialty-gaps-remain>)



How Can Burnout Be Reduced?

System-Level Interventions: N Engl J Med. 2024 Oct 24;391(16):1519-1527 and JAMA Intern Med. 2017 Feb 1;177(2):195-205

Adding nonphysician team members: Improves physician satisfaction and reduces burnout

Scribes can offload documentation burden

Ann Emerg Med. 2021 Feb;77(2):180-189 and Ann Fam Med. 2017 Sep;15(5):427-433.

Task redistribution:

Clerks can enter physician orders in the EHR and conduct previsit planning.

South Med J. 2017 May;110(5):363-368.

Improving communication and workflow.

Streamline EHR.

J Gen Intern Med. 2015 Aug;30(8):1105-11.

Eliminating low-value clinical management practices

“Stop the Stupid Stuff.”

JAMA Health Forum. 2022;3(11):e224018

Appointment of chief wellness officers:

May help drive cultural change.

N Engl J Med. 2024 Oct 24;391(16):1519-1527

AI and large language models: Exploratory mode

May be able to reduce the burden of documentation. Use cautiously to maximize well-being.

N Engl J Med. 2023 Mar 30;388(13):1220-1221



Reducing Burnout On an Individual Basis

Individual-Level Interventions:

Professional Coaching

Probably effective in reducing emotional exhaustion (SMD -0.37) and depersonalization (SMD -0.30). The program needs 4 weeks or more.

Ann Intern Med. 2026 Jan;179(1):51-66.

Mindfulness-based interventions may not be as effective for physicians compared to nurses and mixed healthcare professionals

Emotional exhaustion (SMD -0.46) and depersonalization (SMD -0.09)

Ann Intern Med. 2026 Jan;179(1):51-66.

The NEJM review does recommend that **mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive behavioral therapy** be made available to all physicians, based on broader population-level evidence for depression prevention.

N Engl J Med. 2024 Oct 24;391(16):1519-1527 and JAMA Psychiatry. 2016 Jun 1;73(6):565-74.



Reducing Burnout Through Policy

Policy and Cultural Reforms

Eliminating policies that discourage mental health treatment seeking (e.g., intrusive licensing board questions about psychiatric history)

N Engl J Med. 2024 Oct 24;391(16):1519-1527

Improving parental/caregiving leave and access to child care to reduce work–family conflict

N Engl J Med. 2024 Oct 24;391(16):1519-1527

Addressing sexism and racism in medicine

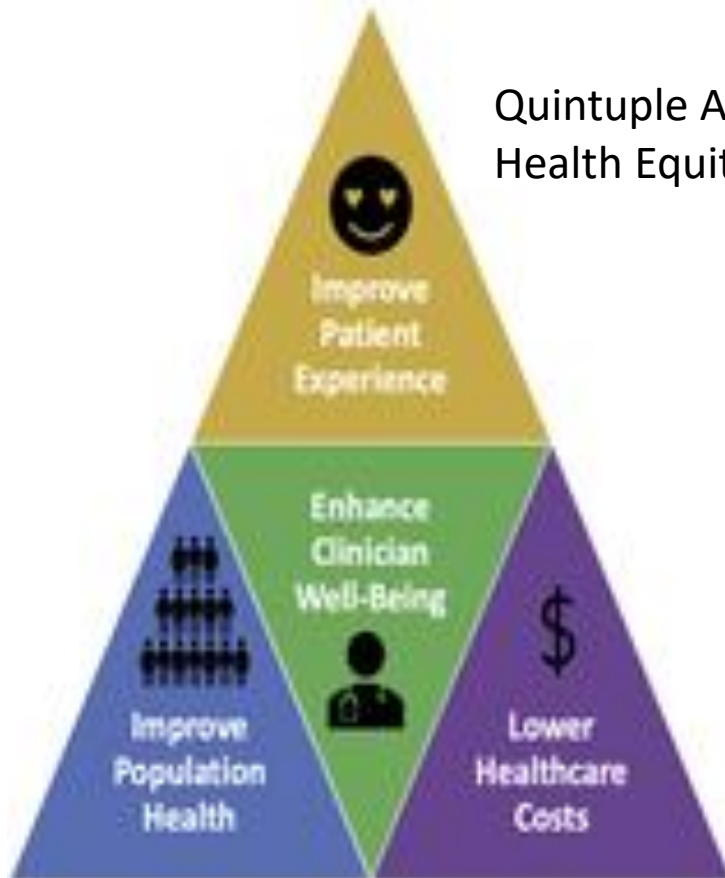
N Engl J Med. 2024 Oct 24;391(16):1519-1527

Destigmatizing access to mental health resources and providing confidential reporting structures for mistreatment.

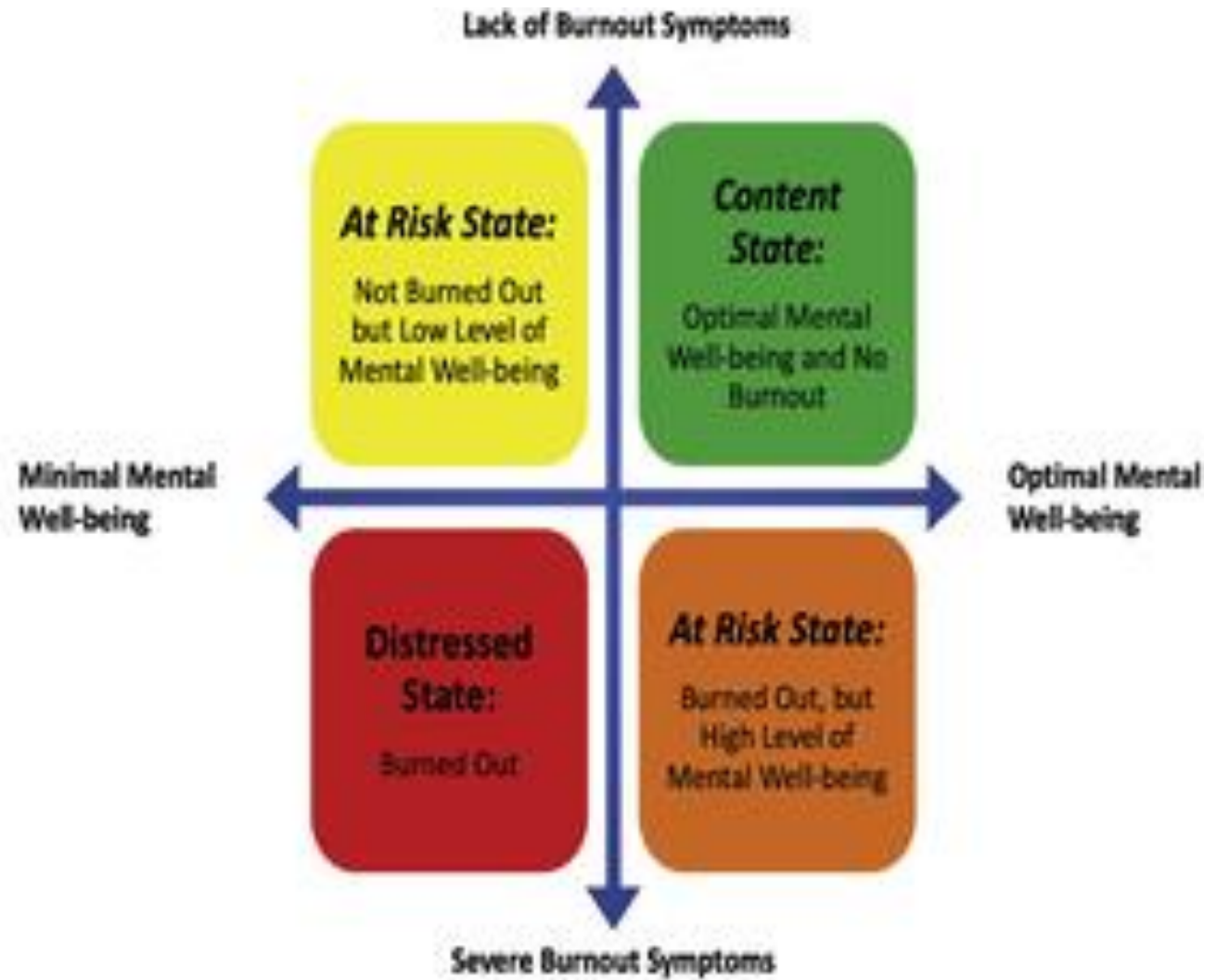
J Am Coll Cardiol. 2021 Aug 17;78(7):752-756.



The Quadruple Aim



Quintuple Aim—
Health Equity



Laxmi S. Mehta et al. *JACC* 2021; 78:752-756.



2021 The Authors



The Reciprocal Domains of Physician Well-being

Chart illustrating the 3 domains of physician well-being,
with each domain reciprocally influencing the others.

What do physicians need to
function optimally?



What can be done?
Hold listening sessions and then
Take action on steps to improve work
flow and efficiency of practice.

What can we do now?
What is in our control?

Physician Well-Being: The Reciprocity of Practice
Efficiency, Culture of Wellness, and Personal Resilience,
NEJM Catalyst August 7, 2017



AMA's Stop That, Start This Check List

Notifications of scheduled appointments (e.g. specialist visits, diagnostic testing) automatically entering the inbox	Ask your IT department to help turn off inbox notifications (and escalate to the CIO/ compliance officer if they say it is not possible)
Directly answering patient inquiries that come through the patient portal	Develop standard protocols to allow team members to address patient portal messages
Being caught off guard by a patient's unexpected agenda items	Implement pre-appointment questionnaires
Reviewing lab results with patients after their appointment via an additional phone call or patient portal message	Develop pre-visit lab protocols and review results with patients <i>during</i> their appointment
Refilling long-term medications at each appointment with only enough to last until the next appointment	Implement 90 x 4 annual prescription renewals , where long-term medications are refilled at a 90-day supply with 4 refills once a year
Resigning yourself to “stupid stuff” in your day-to-day just because that’s how it has	Engage your local leaders to start a Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff initiative



<https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/ama-steps-forward-stop-this-start-that-checklist.pdf>

Available 7-8-2024

Title	Level	Key factors at level
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Beyond burnout: a physician wellness hierarchy designed to prioritize interventions at the systems level. The American journal of medicine, 132(5), 556-563.

Figure Health professional wellness hierarchy.

Setting Boundaries Sets the Stage for Stress Reduction

- After-hours work intrusion via technology can create stress.
- A culture that acknowledges the value of weeknights off and weekends off is one that fosters wellness.
- Making your schedule clear to colleagues helps.
- Make a list of your priorities.
- Schedule your time according to your priorities.



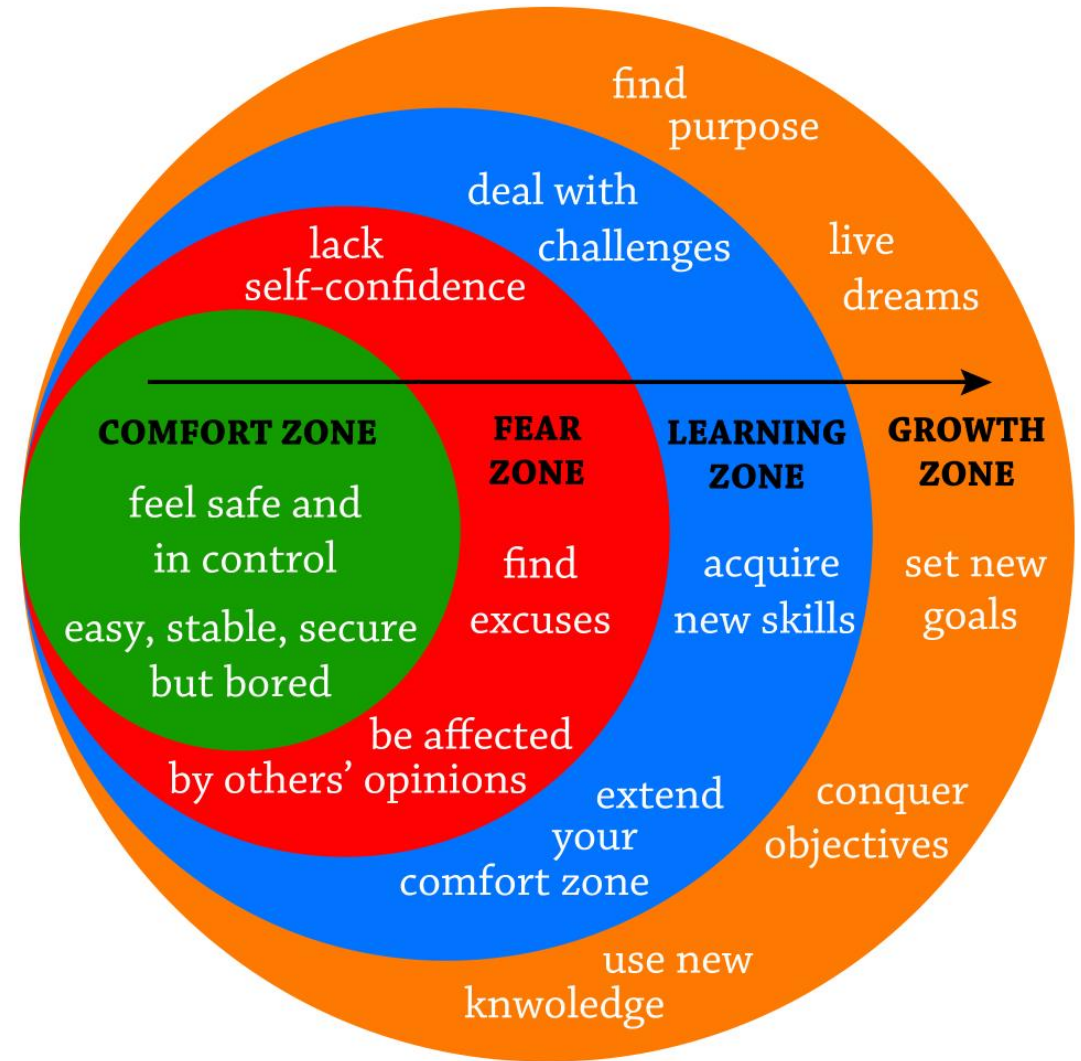
YoungAh Park, Yihao Liu, Lucille Headrick. **When work is wanted after hours: Testing weekly stress of information communication technology demands using boundary theory.** *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2020; DOI: [10.1002/job.2461](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2461)

What is a Growth Mindset?

Is intelligence malleable or fixed?

Malleable — “If I make a mistake, I try to learn and figure it out.”

Fixed — Mindset that people can’t get smarter and do not work to learn from mistakes.



Moser JS, Schroder HS, Heeter C, Moran TP, Lee Y-H. Mind Your Errors: Evidence for a Neural Mechanism Linking Growth Mind-Set to Adaptive Posterror Adjustments. *Psychological Science*. 2011;22(12):1484-1489.

Results of Research with Growth Mindset?

25 students were given a test

Click a mouse button to correctly identify the center letter of a five-letter string of letters

- (MMMMM) or (NNMNN)
- Easy to make a mistake
- Check belief system about mistakes

Electrical activity in the brain was measured.

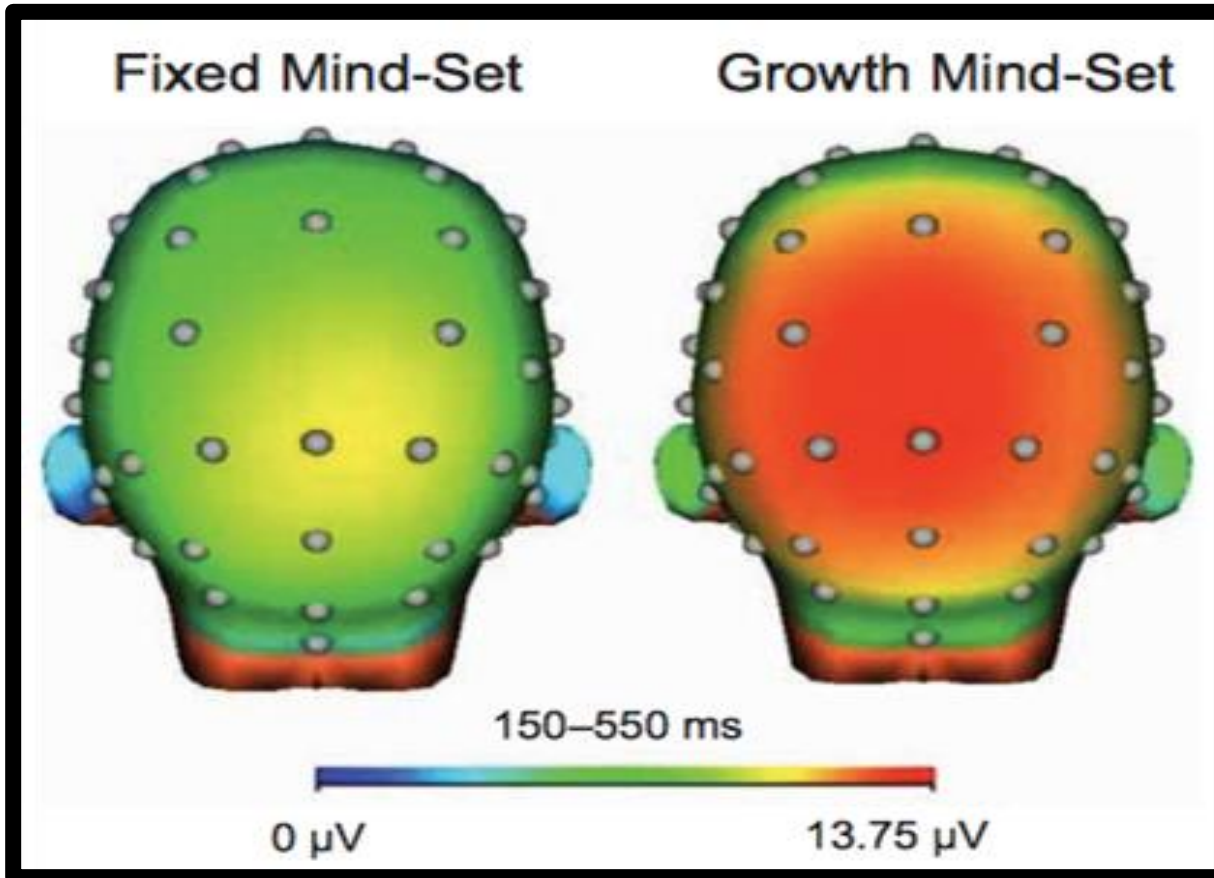
With a mistake, there are 2 signals within a quarter of a second generated by the brain and recorded in electrical activity.

1. Initial “Oh, crap!” response.
2. Second-indicated the person is aware of mistake and trying to fix it.



Moser JS, Schroder HS, Heeter C, Moran TP, Lee Y-H. Mind Your Errors: Evidence for a Neural Mechanism Linking Growth Mind-Set to Adaptive Posterror Adjustments. *Psychological Science*. 2011;22(12):1484-1489.

Results of Research with Growth Mindset?



A larger difference between the incorrect and correct answers = Growth Mindset

The difference between the Brain's second response to an Error—the what can I do to correct this in the future.

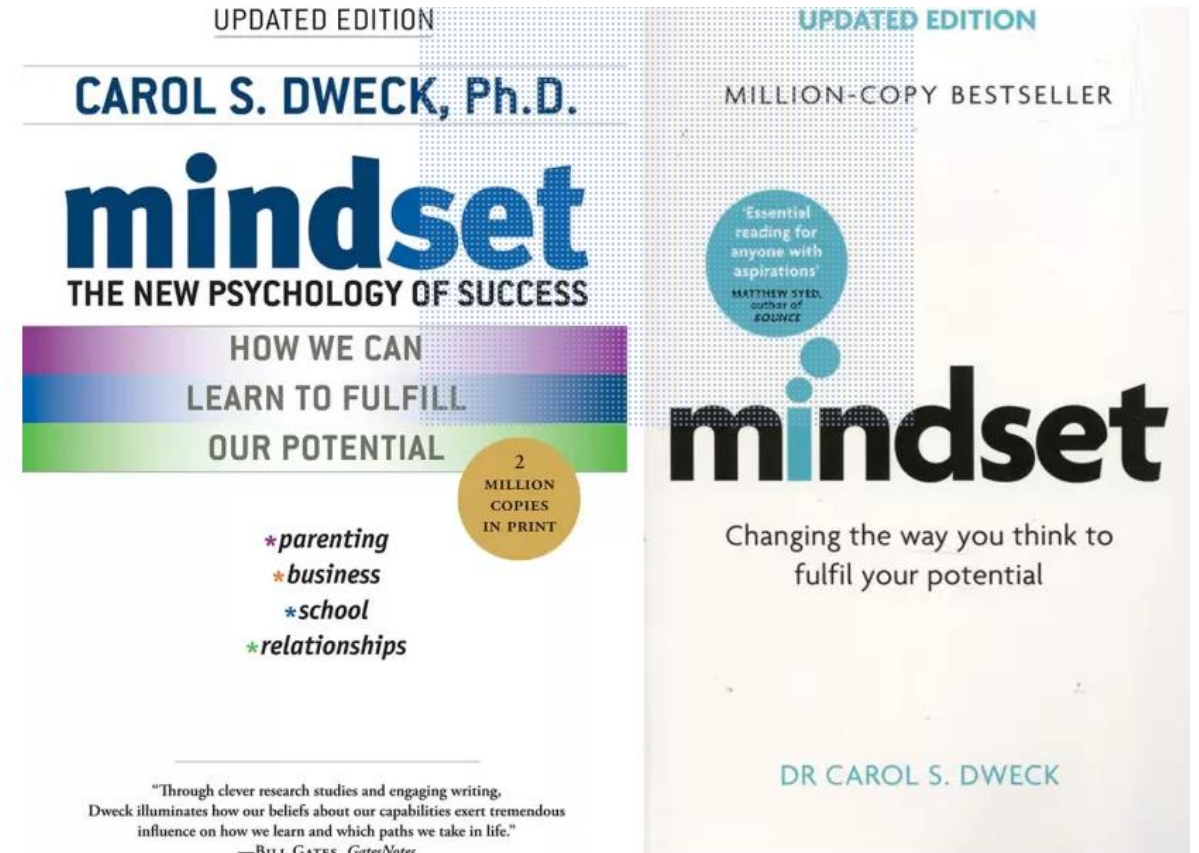
Moser JS, Schroder HS, Heeter C, Moran TP, Lee Y-H. Mind Your Errors: Evidence for a Neural Mechanism Linking Growth Mind-Set to Adaptive Posterror Adjustments. *Psychological Science*. 2011;22(12):1484-1489.



Carol Dweck and Growth Mindset

- Carol Dweck's Theories of Intelligence Scale
- 6 point Likert Scale
- “You have a certain amount of intelligence and you really cannot do much to change it.”
- Scored so that the higher score was most compatible with a growth mindset.

Test your mindset at <http://mindsetonline.com/testyourmindset/step1.php>



Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

Dweck, C. S. (2017). *Mindset by Carol Dweck*. London, United Kingdom: Robinson.



Growth Mindset and Physicians

“Physicians are immersed in a culture that perpetually defers self-care and responds to errors with shame and blame.”

A higher percentage of physicians condemn themselves when they make an error compared to people in other fields.

52% of MDs put off self care and only 15% of people in other fields do (self-report).

It is recommended that MDs work with coaches or therapists to reframe mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.



Mandy Erickson June 28, 2021 in The Scope Published by Stanford Medicine, article titled, “Physician Well-Being and Burnout.”

Social Connection as a Basic Human Need

“...we emphasize that social connectedness is a basic human need that when lost leads to burnout..”

JAMA Viewpoint

Southwick SM, Southwick FS. The Loss of Social Connectedness as a Major Contributor to Physician Burnout: Applying Organizational and Teamwork Principles for Prevention and Recovery. *JAMA Psychiatry*.2020; 77(5):449–450. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.4800



Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Social Connectedness in Medicine

“Strong peer support in a small rural group practice brings friendship, pride and loyalty, all of which motivate retention.”

- Mandal A, Phillips S. To stay or not to stay: the role of sense of belonging in the retention of physicians in rural areas. *Int J Circumpolar Health*. 2022 Dec;81(1):2076977.

“Groups that provide us with a sense of place, purpose, and belonging tend to be good for us psychologically. They give us a sense of grounding and imbue our lives with meaning. They make us feel distinctive and special, efficacious and successful. They enhance our self-esteem and sense of worth.”

- Haslam SA, Jetten J, Postmes T, Haslam C. Social identity, health and well-being: An emerging agenda for applied psychology. *Appl Psychol*. 2009;58(1):1-23.

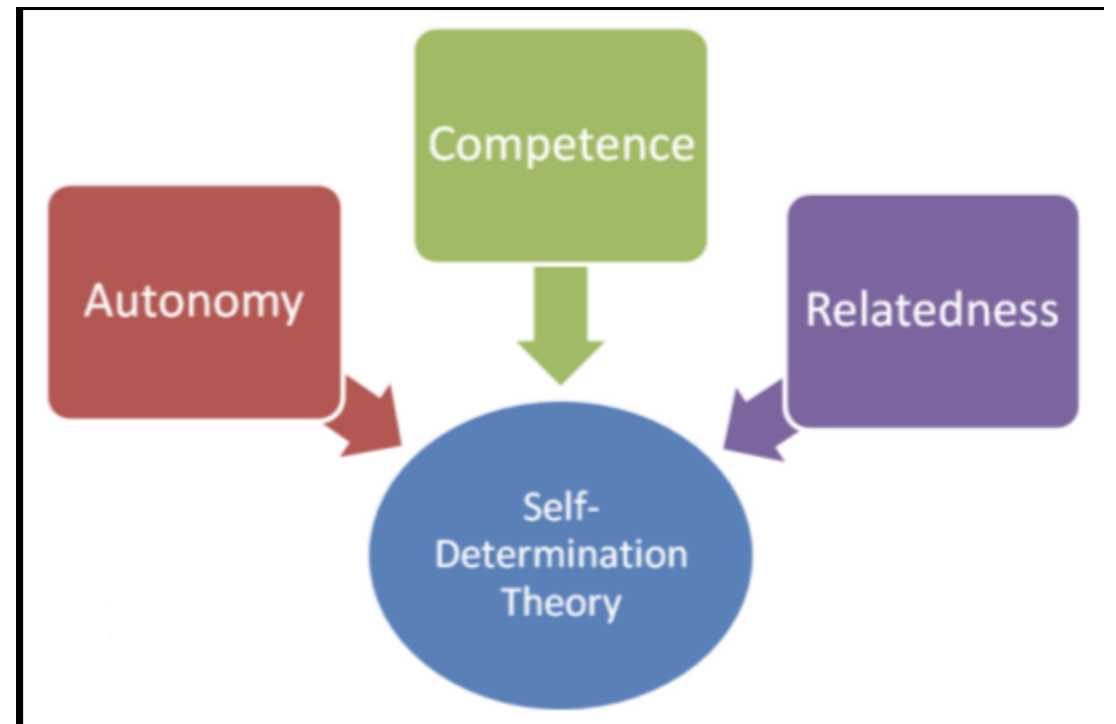


Importance of Autonomy

Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory

We all need 3 things to stay motivated and engaged.

- 1—Relatedness—social connection
- 2—Competence
- 3--Autonomy



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-determination_theory



Concept of Flow

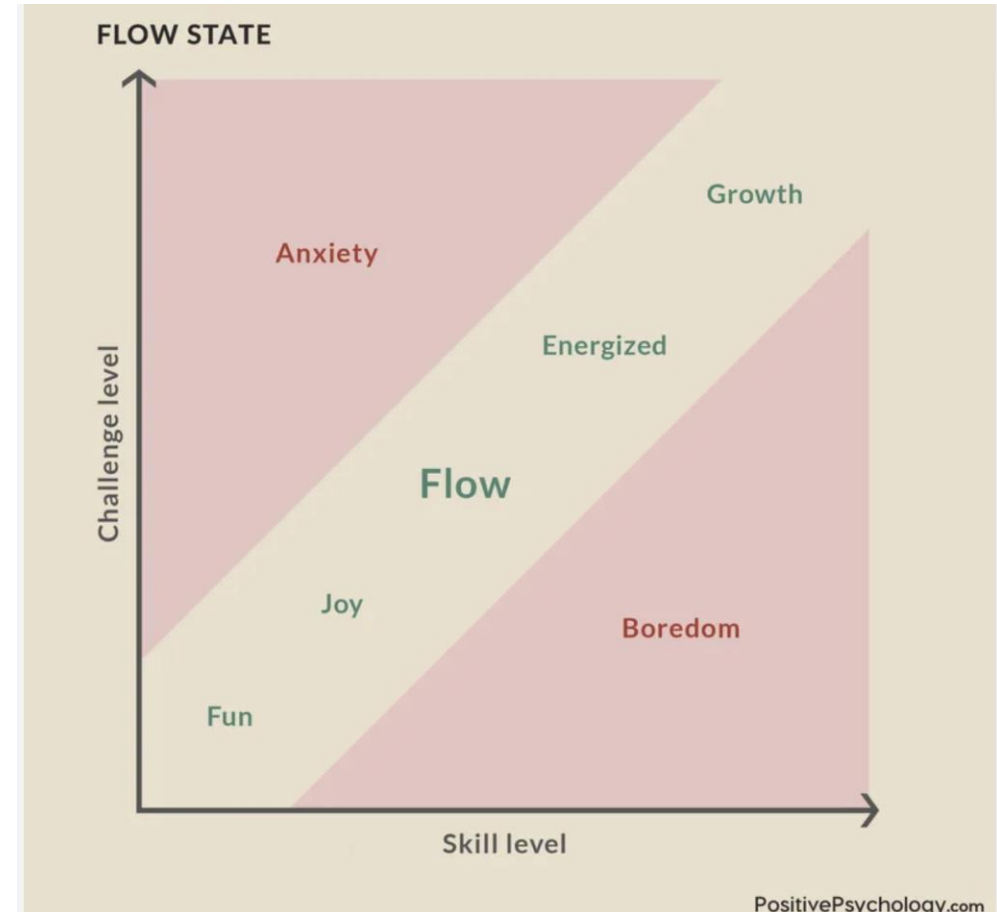
“The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times . . . The best moments usually occur if a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.”

Quote from Csikszentmihalyi 1990

When are you in flow at work?

When are you in flow at home?

How can you create more moments of flow?



What is in Your Control? Spotlight on Physical Activity

150 min of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week (5-minute bouts count)

Treadmill workstation

Stationary Bike workstation

Portable peddler

Walking meetings

Exercise ball as chair

7 minute exercise routine

<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/activity/the-7-minute-workout>

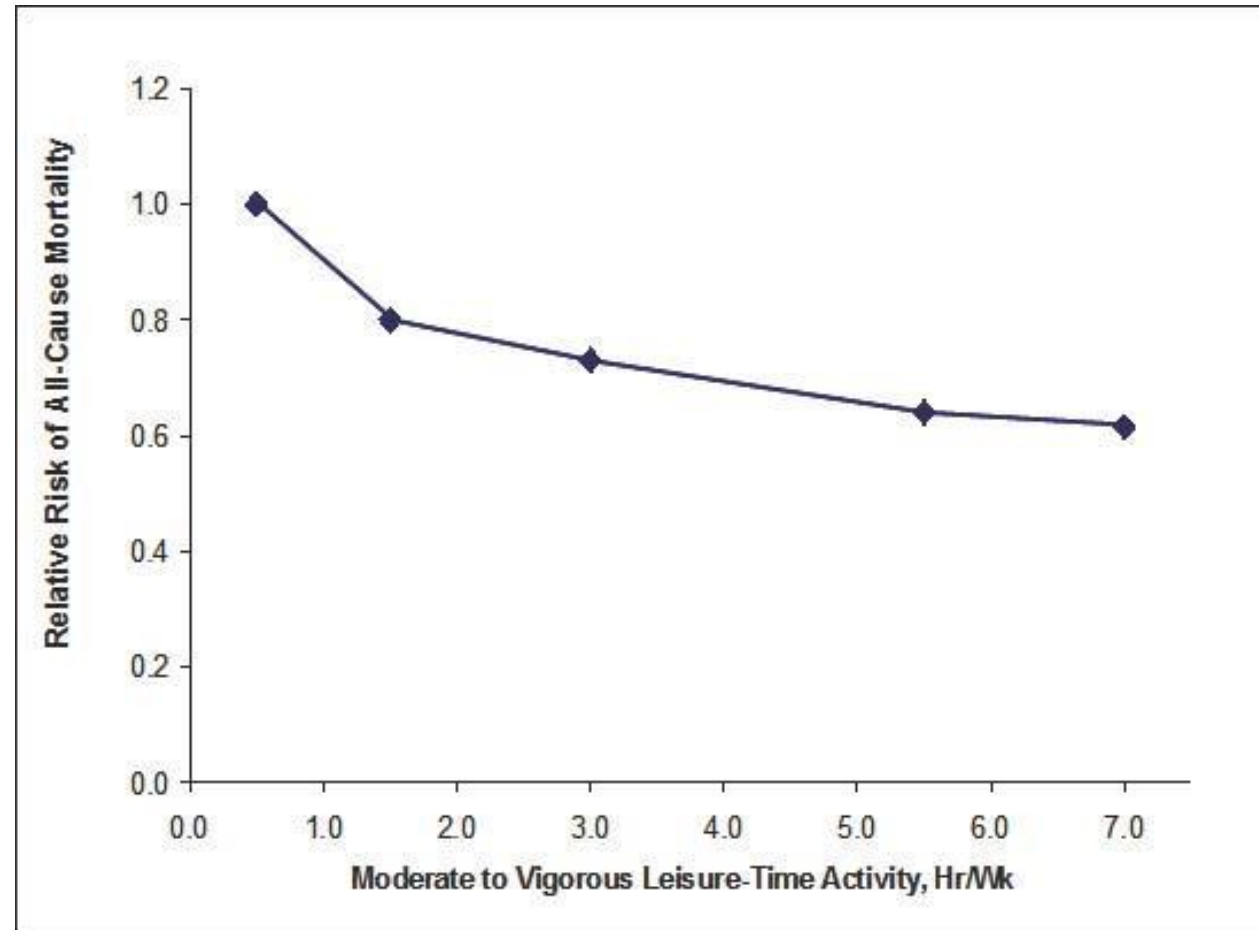
5 minute exercise snacks each hour

Squats

Planks

Bridges

Burpees

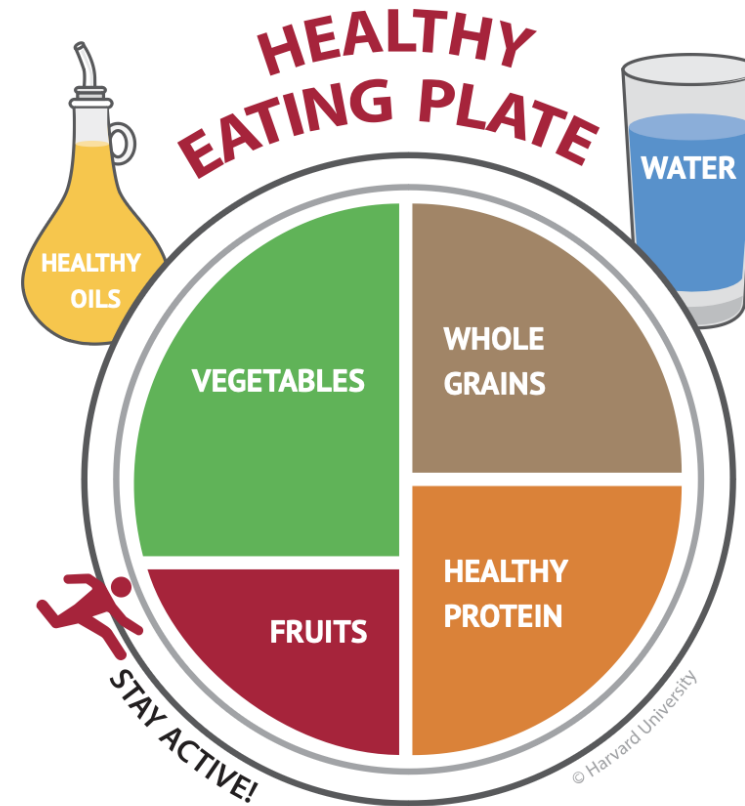


What is in Your Control? Spotlight on Nutrition

Recommendations are to eat at least how many servings of fruit and vegetables a day?

5

Am J Clin Nutr. 2021 Aug 2;114(2):530-539.



[https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/healthy-eating-plate/#:~:text=Who%20created%20the%20Healthy%20Eating,\(USDA\)'s%20MyPlate](https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/healthy-eating-plate/#:~:text=Who%20created%20the%20Healthy%20Eating,(USDA)'s%20MyPlate)



Nutrition Tips

Bring your lunch

Focus on Harvard Healthy Plate meals

Cook in batches on Sundays and freeze

Connect with colleagues or neighbors
and share your meals

Delegate the cooking to someone else

Buy prepared meals that are
unprocessed and healthy

Prepare healthy snacks to bring to work

- Nuts and dark chocolate
- Carrots and hummus
- Apple and almond butter



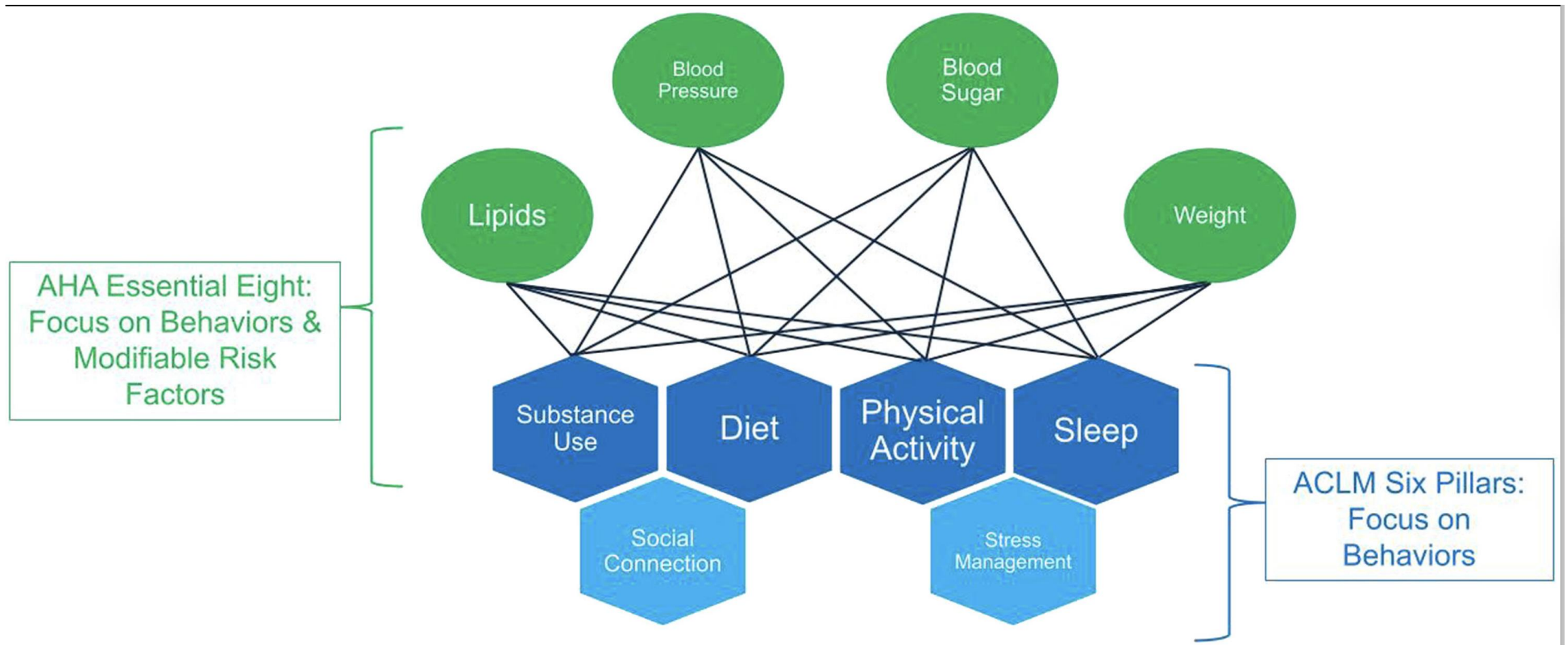
What is in Your Control? Spotlight on Sleep and Sleep Tips

- Same schedule weekdays and weekends
- Achieve 7-9 hours a night
- Nap 20-30 minutes before 3pm
- Careful with caffeine
- Blue wavelength light blocks melatonin
- Eat 3 hours before bed
- Alcohol disrupts REM sleep
- Keep bedroom like a cave



<https://www.thensf.org/how-many-hours-of-sleep-do-you-really-need/>



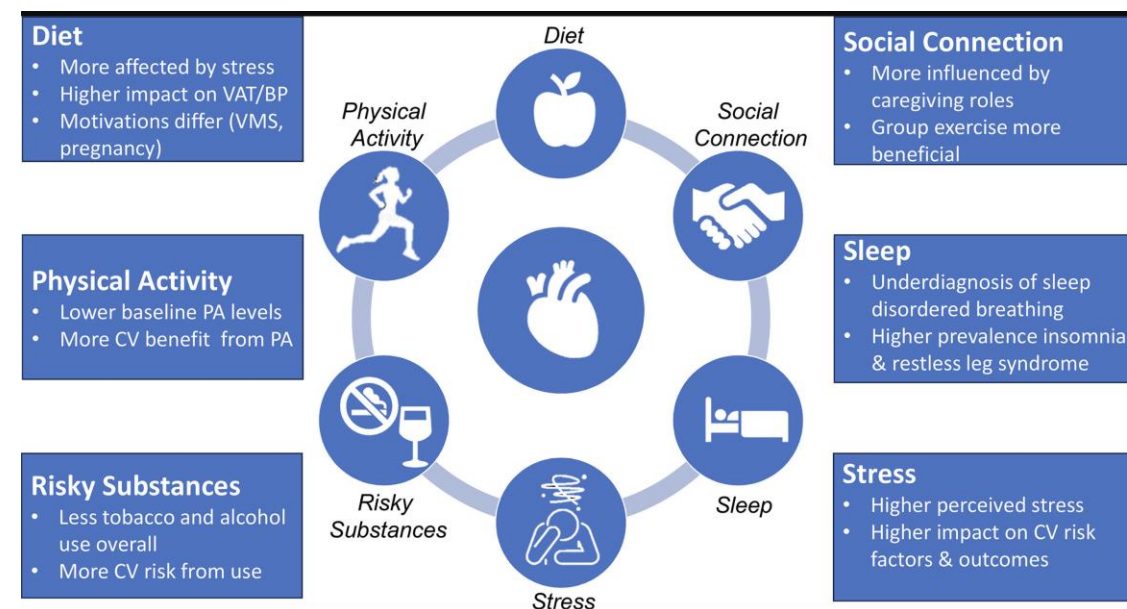


Focus on Women

Highlights

- Lifestyle medicine and cardiology are natural partners.
- Sex and gender can influence lifestyle factors and may lead to differential effects.
- Higher rates of perceived stress, depression and anxiety are consistently seen in women.
- Females are less likely to use both tobacco and alcohol but appear at higher risk.
- At any given dose of PA females may derive more benefit.

VAT=Visceral Adipose Tissue



Cynthia Geyer, John McHugh, Meagan Wasfy, Beth Frates. Lifestyle medicine pillars for women's heart health, American Journal of Preventive Cardiology, Volume 23, 2025, 101085, ISSN 2666-6677, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajpc.2025.101085>.

Take Aways:

1. The three domains of physician wellbeing include
 - Efficiency of practice
 - Personal resilience
 - Culture of wellness
2. In the health professional wellness hierarchy, the foundational level is
 - The basics of food, water, and sleep.
 - The next level is respect, followed by safety, appreciation, and the top of the hierarchy is to heal patients and contribute.
3. Wellbeing involves more than exercise, diet and sleep.



Take Aways:

4. A growth mindset is described by Carol Dweck, PhD, as an attitude of learning from mistakes and mishaps.
5. It is recommended that physicians adopt a growth mindset and avoid a shame, blame, and guilt attitude.
6. A sense of belonging is a basic human need.
7. Physicians can enhance their sense of well-being and help colleagues to do so, too, by creating opportunities for connection.



Take Aways:

8. Accumulate 150 minutes of physical activity per week
9. Use the Harvard Healthy Plate as a guide for each meal
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ fruit and vegetables
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ whole grain
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ healthy protein
10. Sleep 7-9 hours a night for adults



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