

WINTER AND MENTAL HEALTH



IN THIS ISSUE

by *Shelly McAlpin*

PAGE TWO

*Book Review:
Cleaning Up Your
Mental Mess*
by Dr. Caroline Leaf

PAGE THREE

*Are You Getting
Your Potassium?*
by Jamie Leslie

PAGE FOUR

*Winter and Mental Health
(continued)*
Book Review Opinion
by Liz Kornkven, LPC

Wyoming is a gorgeous place, but sometimes that roaring wind and subzero temperatures can really get a person down. The cold weather can also usher in depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). It is estimated that 30% of northern U.S. states, including Wyoming, will suffer from seasonal depression (Mayo Clinic, 2021). One might find themselves oversleeping, having changes in appetite, weight gain, and low energy. While it's normal to have down days, if you feel unable to motivate yourself as normal, you should definitely see a medical professional. In the meantime, these helpful hints might just help

Reach Out to Your Support System

Maintain social interaction and reaching out to your close friends can drastically reduce depression symptoms and give you the boost you need to combat winter depression. Whether meeting at your favorite coffee shop, or trying out a new winter sport with friends, you are bound to find emotional and mental resilience in the activity. If you are uncomfortable reaching out in person because of COVID related issues, consider video chatting, calling,
(continued on page 4)



www.threetrailsefap.org
threetrails@threetrailsefap.org



Three Trails EFAP
812 South David Street
Casper, WY 82601



P: 307.237.5750
F: 307.237.5772

Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess

by Dr. Caroline Leaf

Book review by Liz Kornkven, LPC

Dr. Leaf is a communication pathologist and cognitive neuroscientist with a master's and PhD in Communication Pathology and a BS in Logopaedics. She is an author of over five books, presents a podcast, and has a blog. Her newest endeavor is *Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess*.

In her book, *Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess* (CUYMM), Leaf stresses the importance of managing one's mind. Leaf states, "You can go three weeks without eating, three days without drinking, and three minutes without air but you cannot go three seconds without thinking."

Leaf states the "brain" is different from the "mind". The mind is what one thinks and feels, and how one makes choices. Leaf believes our minds make up over ninety percent of who we are. Our minds work by means of our brains. How we react or respond to various life situations and the world around us is called "mind-in-action" and is unique to each one of us.

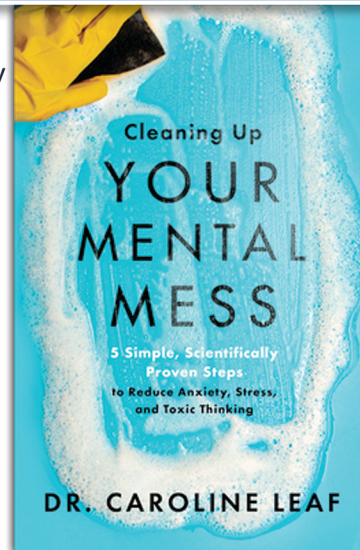
Dr. Leaf reports that, "we cannot improve our lifestyle until we learn to manage our thinking." Her research shows that it takes 21 days to form a new thought and 63 days to form a new habit.

Dr. Leaf has developed an app called Neurocycle. There are five steps in the app. First, "Gather" which is to read, listen, and watch what one is thinking including how one is feeling. Next, "Reflect" involves asking, answering, and discussing with oneself. The third step is "Write" where one journals and organizes one's thoughts. Fourth is "Recheck" which includes reanalyzing and examining what one has written down. The last step is "Active Reach" where one applies what one has learned in some tangible way.

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change. The brain can change in a positive or a negative manner. Dr. Leaf believes that our thinking can change our brains on the cellular, molecular, chemical, genetic and structural levels. The amazing thing is that one can direct this change process. One doesn't have to just watch life happen but can play an active role in one's brain processes. It's important to learn to train one's brain to learn. Dr. Leaf developed the Neurocycle app for this process. She offers a free Neurocycle 21-day trial.

Leaf conducted a clinical trial using the Neurocycle steps with an experimental group who used the app. Another group was the control group who didn't use the Neurocycle. The experimental group saw increases in autonomy which is an indicator of good self-regulation. Awareness increased from good to excellent in the experimental group. Toxic thoughts, toxic stress, and anxiety reduced significantly with the experimental group. The Neurocycle app also helped the experimental group's physical well-being increase. At six months, the experimental group had statistically significant reduced depression compared to the control group.

Leaf states the bottom line is we cannot improve our lifestyle until we learn how to manage our thinking. She believes that using the Neurocycle app daily will help achieve this. If one's thinking changes then possibly their lifestyle will change.



(Continued on page 4)



ARE YOU GETTING YOUR POTASSIUM?

By Jamie Leslie

It may surprise some, but Potassium is a powerful mineral that is helpful in battling depression, pain, and regulating serotonin. According to the website Mental Health Food, low levels of potassium can increase the risks of experiencing depression. High potassium diets are helpful in relieving symptoms of depression and tension. The website also notes that if a person is deficient in potassium, then they can experience an increase in irritability, fatigue, muscle weakness, cramps, restless leg syndrome and chronic pain. Potassium also regulates serotonin. The Mental Health Food website notes that potassium appears to act as a facilitator in ensuring the brain's ability to properly utilize serotonin.



Bulimia, chronic diarrhea, diuretics, and Crohn's disease can be causes of a potassium deficiency. Also, the Website Mental Health Food notes that excessive consumption of cola drinks can cause a potassium deficiency. For women, who have just undergone childbirth, the result could be a lower level of potassium. This can be a contributing factor to postpartum depression.

If you want to increase your potassium levels, consider these sources:

- Bananas (Try some on your morning cereal!)
- Spinach (Good for Pop Eye, should be good for you!)
- Sweet Potatoes
- Apricots
- Acorn Squash (I like mine with butter, nuts, and brown sugar.)
- Salmon
- Avocados (Time to make some Guacamole!)
- Beans
- Nuts
- Milk
- Potatoes
- Raisins
- Dates
- Prunes
- Carrots



(continued from page 1 - Winter and Mental Health)

sending letters, and/or texting. Consider an online trivia session with 2 – 4 of your closest friends. Regardless of how you connect, it is important to reach out to those you trust when struggling.

Put Sleep First

Do you find yourself staying up late to stream your favorite show after a long stress filled day? TV screens and electronic devices inhibit the release of melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone that regulates our sleep-wake cycle. When depleted, quality and duration of sleep is affected. Setting a pattern of going to and waking up is essential to helping lower SAD and other forms of depression. Did you know that melatonin is also released in the body in response to natural light?

Sun Exposure

In places like Wyoming, almost one out of four people have vitamin D blood levels that are too low or inadequate (National Institute of Health, 2021). Our body's absorb vitamin D from food and the sun. Both our immune systems and our mood rely on vitamin D. It is not uncommon for people to become vitamin deficient because of the effects of winter months and lowered sun exposure. Talk to your medical professional about your vitamin levels. Staying inside multiple days during the cold winter season can actually be detrimental to your overall immune system. Venture out when there are bright blue skies and dress warmly. The sunshine can help tremendously with our overall balance.



Take care of yourselves and your mental health.

The winter can be a brand-new set of experiences to explore and reconnect with good friends.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20364651> (2021)

<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-Consumer/> (2021)

OPINION

(continued from page 2 - Book Review)

I read the book and was encouraged to put some of the applications in to place. I got a trial subscription to the Neurocycle app. I think one drawback of the book and the app is that Dr. Leaf has a lot of scientific research. If you like science as I do, it is interesting to see the different outcomes of using the app. Leaf had various graphs, drawings, and photographs to help explain the scientific principles. On the other hand, understanding the science behind the app is somewhat difficult. For me, I think it would take more study time to understand how to use the app and not just read the book. Dr. Leaf posits that some mental health issues can be helped with the app, for example depression and anxiety. So, my recommendation is to read the book and if the free trial is available, to begin using the app to see what kind of outcomes you might realize. Dr. Leaf suggests using the app daily for approximately 15 minutes for best results. A question to ponder is if the Neurocycle app does work for me, is it worth the time and effort to read the book and work on applying the app. I think the answer would be yes but there's a lot of effort to expend to learn how to control one's thinking. But it could be a powerful alternative to taking medication to help with one's mental health concerns.



www.threetrailsefap.org
threetrails@threetrailsefap.org



Three Trails EFAP
812 South David Street
Casper, WY 82601



P: 307.237.5750
F: 307.237.5772