

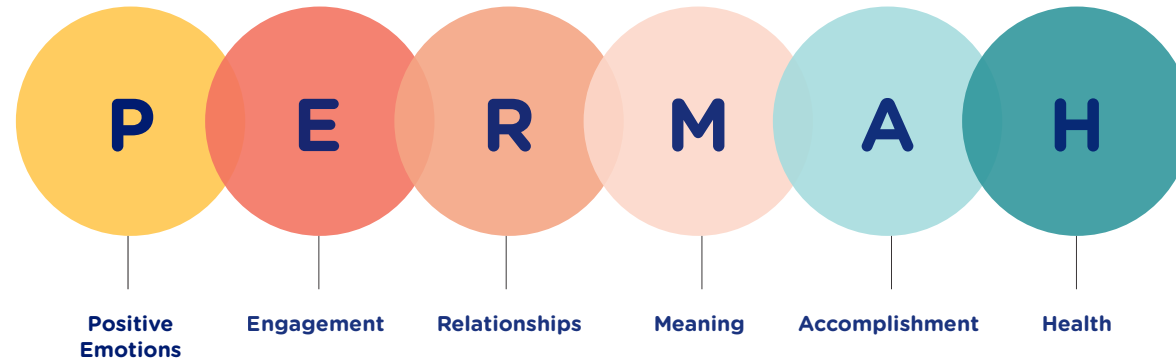
Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle to Increase Resilience

Part of The Well-being Toolkit for Dental Professionals

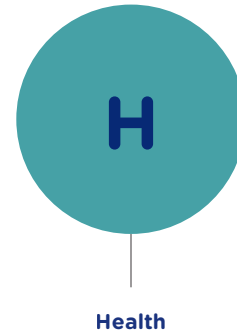
In collaboration with Dr Mahrukh Khwaja,
Dentist and Positive Psychologist



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Dr Martin Seligman’s PERMA model explores five pillars for flourishing and thriving at work and beyond.¹ It suggests that well-being is cultivated by the presence of a rich diet of positive emotions, feeling engaged, connected through positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Since 2012, a further component has been added to incorporate health factors, known as the PERMA-H model.²



Maintaining a healthy lifestyle to increase resilience

Positive health has gained a great deal of focus in recent years. Well-being models show how we can practise sustainable habits for optimal physical and psychological health, and key governing bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) recognise the importance of health in learning environments.³ Now more than ever we are aware of the importance of looking after our own health, and how maintaining good health through exercise, nutrition and quality sleep can help to reduce exhaustion and even the risk of burnout.⁴

This article discusses how the PERMA-H model can be used as a strategy to help build resilience and combat stress and burnout in dentistry with expert tips from Dr Mahrukh Khwaja: dentist, positive psychologist and author of the book 'Resilience and well-being for Dental Professionals'. It focuses on the final component of PERMA-H; 'health'.



Holistic health encompasses both the body and the mind

The five original elements of PERMA were initially derived from Professor Martin Seligman's components of 'Authentic Happiness'.¹ Since PERMA's initial development, there has been an increased focus on holistic health,¹ leading to the adoption of this sixth element. The health aspect of PERMA-H focuses on improving well-being through sustainable habits for better physical and psychological health.² It is a broad addition to the model, including aspects of holistic health such as sleep, exercise and nutrition.^{3,4}





Be aware of the lifestyle signs of burnout

Dental professionals may encounter professional stress more than other occupations, beginning in medical school and continuing throughout their careers.⁵ Therefore, they may be prone to anxiety disorders and clinical depression,⁶ and are more likely to experience burnout symptoms than any other medical profession group.⁴ Developing positive health behaviours to counter this can carry a beneficial impact throughout life, not only reducing the risk of burnout, but also preventing other adverse health conditions such as diabetes or heart disease.^{3,4}





Lifestyle factors to boost well-being

There are many things that dental health professionals can do to help improve their health and reduce their risk of burnout

1

Firstly, get a good night's sleep. Given the links between burnout and sleep deprivation, and the long working hours and demanding clinical situations faced by healthcare professionals, it is especially important to find a lifestyle balance that allows for good sleep hygiene. Getting adequate sleep is a key pillar for improving health, with findings suggesting that optimised sleep may be a core component dictating the reversibility of burnout syndrome.⁷

Given that achieving recommended levels of sleep quality and quantity are key components linked to burnout recovery, finding ways to naturally improve your sleep is an important factor for reducing burnout.^{2,7} Some helpful tips include:⁷

- Aim to achieve adequate sleep at night (7 to 9 hours)
- Go to bed only when you're tired, and if you're not tired, get out of bed
- Set a fixed wake-up time

- Avoid napping during the day
- Avoid alcohol before bed
- Limit exposure to bright light in the evening, such as on your phone, computer or TV
- Exercise regularly
- As well as the above, it's important to make sure your bedroom is quiet and relaxing. Keep your room comfortable and cool, and avoid using your bed for anything other than sleep.⁷
- With regards to light, although even a small amount of light exposure in the evening can disrupt the circadian rhythm, it's important to be exposed to natural light throughout the day, but especially in the morning, to maintain a natural circadian rhythm in line with the 24-hour day.^{7,8}



2

Shake up your diet. Studies have demonstrated that a healthy diet is protective of burnout, whereas regularly eating fast food is related to burnout. A simple change like incorporating a Mediterranean diet into your lifestyle brings with it well-documented cardiovascular and glycaemic benefits, but may also protect against depression.^{9,10} The nutrients from foods and dietary supplements implicated in the processes related to mental health include omega 3 fatty acids, amino acids and carbohydrates, and have a variety of beneficial effects.¹¹

For example, omega 3 is known to interact with the central nervous system to support serotonin and dopamine neurotransmission, as well as playing a role in the hypothalamus-pituitary adrenal axis. Including foods high in omega 3 into your diet, such as salmon, tuna, mackerel, nuts and seeds, and plant oils, may therefore have a lowering effect on corticosterone levels, which are indicative of inflammation and stress.¹¹

Amino acids found in meat, poultry, eggs, legumes and nuts, such as tryptophan and ornithine, are also important for brain and mental health, and can help to improve sleep and modulate stress.¹¹

Finally, including adequate carbohydrates ensures the brain has enough of its preferred fuel substrate, glucose. However, you should try to eat this in the form of complex carbohydrates from foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains, which fuel gut bacteria to produce short-chain fatty acids that have an anti-inflammatory effect on the brain.¹¹

Some of the latest evidence suggests that it may be beneficial to adopt a plant-based diet, as this has been shown to result in short-to moderate-term beneficial effects in terms of weight, energy metabolism and systemic inflammation. However, whether these benefits extend to cognitive function, or mental and neurological health remains to be seen, but it can't hurt to try!¹²



DR MAHRUKH KHWAJA

The Relationship between Nutrition, Gut Health and Well-being

Did you know that keeping your gut healthy may aid in keeping your brain healthy as well? Recently medical literature is increasingly shining a light on the important relationship between our brain and the gut microbiome (microorganisms). Eating poorly may affect the brain through causing symptoms that are similar to anxiety,^{13,14,15} depression¹⁶, autism or Parkinson's disease. It does this through preventing us from getting key nutrients to keep healthy. Additionally, a poor diet may damage the composition of the gut microbiome and cause an inability to properly breakdown nutrients. Stress also greatly contributes here — and the more stressed we are, the more damage we may cause to the gut microbiome. Contrastingly, eating well contributes to creating a healthy gut, with a diverse gut microbiome. We are more likely to get sick less often, be more productive and have greater emotional well-being.





As with all our body systems, a combination of a diet rich in gut-friendly foods, stress management, (for example regular mindfulness practice) and physical exercise as well as targeted supplements, may all aid in creating a gut and brain that are healthy. With regards to positive nutrition, consider increasing these gut-healthy foods on a regular basis:

1

Wholegrains
Such as brown rice, barley, oatmeal.




2

Fresh fruits and vegetables



3

Foods rich in polyphenols
Such as grapes, almonds, broccoli, blueberries.




4

Beans and pulses
Such as chickpeas, kidney beans and yellow, brown, red and green lentils.




5

Nuts



6

Probiotics
Such as yoghurt



7

Fermented foods
Such as sauerkraut, kefir and kimchi.



8

Spices
Such as turmeric and ginger.





3

Move your body! Physical activity has a huge potential to enhance health and well-being, and any kind of physical activity is a great way to protect against burnout. For example, sport can reduce all three dimensions of burnout, with dental professionals who reported playing sports regularly showing reduced emotional exhaustion, reduced depersonalisation and greater personal accomplishment.⁴

Exercises such as running, training on an elliptical machine, rowing or cycling (in the gym or outdoors) have all been shown to reduce perceived levels of stress in the workplace, even if only done for short periods over a lunch break.¹⁷ Even really light exercise, like walking outside in the park or amongst nature has shown benefits, such as lowering blood pressure.¹⁸ Simply immersing yourself in nature or 'forest bathing' has also been shown to be good for your health, with numerous studies demonstrating reduced heart rate, lower blood pressure, increased relaxation and a general sense of well-being, which can be more pronounced in those already suffering from depression.¹⁹





DR MAHRUKH KHWAJA

Mindful Running

Did you know that you can exercise your muscle of mindfulness even when you are moving your body? A type of mindfulness practice, known as mindful running, brings together movement with anchoring to the breath with kindness and non-judgment. Here are my top tips for mindful running:

1

Notice sensations in your body

Are there any areas of discomfort? Do you need to take a break, slow down or keep going?

2

Observe your thoughts with non-judgment and kindness

If you do notice a critical thought pop up, gently nudge your attention back to your breath.

3

Bring your awareness to your breath

4

Invite a moment of gratitude

For having made time for running today, savour the joy you get from running and celebrate your body for being psychically able to run.

5

Stimulate all your senses through honing into all 5 senses

What can you see, hear, smell, taste or feel? If you can, leave your headphones at home and engage with the sensory experience of running.





Look after your mind. Meditation and mindfulness, particularly when combined with yoga, can be practised and integrated into spare moments in your day, and have numerous mental health benefits:²⁰

- Balance of autonomic function
- Increase in alpha rhythm, interhemispheric coherence and homogeneity in the brain
- Improved sleep quality and cognitive functions
- Alteration in brain blood flow and brain metabolism
- Modulation of the neuroendocrine axis

Remember to be mindful of your current circumstances and your own risk for burnout, as it could creep up on you before you realise it. Look out for the signs of stress and burnout and act before you have to react.

Yoga is a great starting point for burnout prevention, as it covers both mindfulness and physical activity. There are even specific yoga resources for dental health professionals, such as the instructional paper by Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani 'Yoga for Dental Professional: Scope and Simplified Practices', available here:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320615682_YOGA_FOR_DENTAL_PROFESSIONAL_SCOPE_AND_SIMPLIFIED_PRACTICES

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DR MAHRUKH KHWAJA

ACTIVITY 1

Yoga on the Dental Stool

As a busy dental professional, it can be difficult to make time for movement. The good news is that we can incorporate small amounts of movement into our clinical day. The illustration below captures simple yoga poses we can do on our dental stool, in the morning prior to starting our clinical session, in between calling the next patient into our surgery or at lunch.



Yoga on the Dental Stool



Sun salutations



Seated spinal twist



Chest opener



Cat-Cow pose



Warrior II. pose



Reverse warrior pose



Extended side angle pose

Khwaja M (2021). Mind Flossing Toolkit.



DR MAHRUKH KHWAJA

ACTIVITY 2

Boosting Serenity through Self-care

As dental professionals, we spend so much time looking after our patients, we don't always give the same care towards ourselves.

Self-care activities are ones that make us feel nourished, allow us to recover, and boost our levels of the positive emotion: serenity. Try this journaling exercise to help you prioritise regular 'me' time.



ACTIVITY 2



Boosting Serenity through Self-care

Reflect on the self-care activities you enjoy doing. Activities may include ones that bring you relaxation, connection with others, allow for creative expression, spirituality or physical self-care, such as taking a mindful deep breath, playing a board game with family, colouring, going for a nature walk or cooking a nutritious meal. Write these down in the space below.

Piggybacking off an existing habit, can be one effective way of integrating new positive activities into our lives. Can you piggyback the above self-care activities off an existing habit you're doing currently, such as when brushing your teeth, practising mindfulness by honing into the sensation of brushing, the taste and smell of the toothpaste etc.

Which auditory cues, such as an alarm on your phone, can you use to nudge you to schedule more moments of serenity?

1. Lamas T., et al. 2014; Gratitude interventions: A review and future agenda. In A. C. Parks & S. M. Schueller (Eds.), The Wiley Blackwell handbook of positive psychological interventions (pp. 3-19). Wiley Blackwell.



Boosting Serenity through Self-care

We often have quiet moments during our days. Reflect on when you can schedule your self-care activities on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Even a minute here and there adds up to filling our cup! Fill the table below with examples from your answers from 1, 2 and 3, writing down a time you can do this self-care activity, any cues that can help, and the duration.

Visual reminders can also nudge us to take some time for self-care. Write down each activity from your table, on a separate bit of paper and fill a jam jar with these ideas. Place this in your home in a visible position. For the next week, try this experiment: when you next have a spare moment, reach for your jam jar and do the activity. Reflect below on which activities you have enjoyed the most and why.

Daily	Weekly	Monthly
