

The

# Liker Health Report



Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Winter 2022

## Mental Wellness During Winter Months

### *Cultivate a Positive Mindset for Surviving the Winter Blues and Pandemic Ups & Downs*

The last two years have certainly affected the way we think about life... and death. It has always been our ability to adapt which allows humans to survive. Change is inevitable, whether it be in good times or times of adversity, but it's our reaction to that change which inevitably determines our success or failure. Thus, the concept of *mindset* has become critical to resilience and the ability to thrive, rather than simply survive.

The first step is to take stock of how the winter blues affect you mentally. It's not uncommon to be affected by cold, dreary weather or fewer hours of sunlight; people living in extreme northern locations experience a more pronounced effect. Post-holiday blues can also play a role, and now we have to deal with 'post-pandemic flux syndrome.' This term was coined by Washington Post writer Riley Cuddy to describe a general feeling of numbness resulting from periods of anxiety and depression. As the hope of returning to normalcy comes and goes, you may feel like only a really big life change will make everything better. Yet, that's where the caution comes into play. Before you sell your house, move out of state, or quit your job, take a look at your thought process, understand why these ideas have emerged, and vet your plans carefully.

Ask yourself, "Is this just the pandemic talking?" "Is my worry or anger guiding my decisions?" If you think a negative mindset is moving your thoughts towards irrationality, reach out to a trusted friend or professional counselor. Asking for help is the second step in cultivating or returning to a positive mindset. For added positivity, don't forget to focus on your physical well-being — follow the tips below.

### Staying Healthy During Winter

1. **Prioritize sleep. Get 7 or 8 hours nightly.**
2. **Eat more nutrient-dense, plant-based foods.**
3. **Take a multivitamin-mineral supplement, if needed.**
4. **Avoid alcohol or food binges.**
5. **Maintain an exercise regimen; make adjustments for cold weather.**
6. **Drink plenty of water and regularly apply moisturising lotion to prevent dry skin.**
7. **Expose your skin to sunlight, even if only through a window, or use a light therapy lamp.**
8. **Continue hand-washing, mask-wearing, and social distancing in crowded outdoor spaces and indoors with potentially unvaccinated people.**

### RESEARCH PEARLS:

#### Circadian Body Clock, Inflammation & Disease

Researchers have recently provided more evidence for why erratic eating and sleeping patterns, including shift work, is bad for your health. Under normal circumstances, the 24-hour circadian body clock keeps humans healthy and in time with the day (light) / night (dark) cycle. The circadian clock also affects the immune system by regulating macrophages, a type of immune cell which attacks pathogens.

Studies showed that a disruption to the normal cell rhythms led to the generation of more inflammatory molecules, or reactive oxygen species (ROS). Chronic inflammation leads to inflammatory diseases such as heart disease, obesity, arthritis, diabetes and cancer. Furthermore, by interfering with the macrophages' ability to neutralize pathogens, the immune system's ability to fight infection is compromised. This study makes the case for getting sufficient sleep and enough daylight exposure.

*Frontiers in Immunology. 2020;11:1743.*

# The “Big 5” Traits

## Relationship Between Health & Personality

A person’s state of well-being encompasses several aspects of health — well beyond the physical — to the intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, environmental, and occupational. And while this has been in the past somewhat of a “woo-woo” concept, traditional medicine is today, much more open to considering all of these when treating patients. It has also become increasingly clear that an individual’s personality traits can affect his/her physical functioning and vice versa.

The attainment of good health or decline into poor health occurs through the individual’s social support system; personality traits influence perception, feeling, and action of the social support system. In turn, the social support system influences health behaviors and physical health. The “Big 5” personality traits include openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. All were predictive of physical functioning to varying degrees, but only one had a negative effect.

Trait	Physical Functioning
↑ Openness	↑
↑ Conscientiousness	↑
↑ Extraversion	↑
↑ Agreeableness	↔
↑ Neuroticism	↓

### Biomarkers of Conscientiousness

Overall, conscientious people exhibit less disability and higher physical functioning. Possible mechanisms include optimal health behaviors, strong social ties, and less stress. There’s a great deal more evidence pointing to the effect of conscientiousness on health when researchers measure specific biomarkers. More conscientious people tended to have lower leptin levels which decreases the risk of gaining weight; ideal lipid levels; and lower inflammatory markers (C-reactive protein and Interleukin-6). When these biomarkers are elevated, chronic diseases, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, typically ensue.



**Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.**

**Colin Powell**

## Dear Dr. Liker...

*My octogenarian mother does not think she needs resistance exercise. How do I convince her otherwise?*



Resistance training, or muscle-strengthening exercise, is important at all ages, yet statistics show that only forty percent of American adults engage in this type of exercise. In the elderly, it’s even more important, but only about 8.7% of 75+ year olds participate.

As people get older, they “naturally” lose muscle strength and size, which contributes to an increasing risk of mobility limitations and death. However, you could argue as to whether these are “natural” changes, since regular resistance training helps counteract these effects. Even the very elderly can increase muscle strength and size by participating in a weekly program that includes low resistance levels and low repetitions. In other words, it doesn’t need to be super-intense to be effective.

Another great reason to encourage your mother to engage in resistance training is that researchers have found that it can significantly improve overall cognitive function. This benefit can be enjoyed both by cognitively healthy and cognitively impaired individuals. Short-term memory was improved as well, but only in those who were already cognitively healthy.

**HL**



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