



DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

**Resources for NZDF
Personnel and their families**



Understanding Resilience

Resilience isn't something you are necessarily born with. It is a term that has different meanings to different people. Some people think it is a personality trait, others think it is a process, and some think it something you learn. Here in the NZDF we promote that resilience is being able to bounce back from challenges that life throws at you. To do this, we believe you can learn coping skills that help in times of need.

Resilience doesn't mean being unrealistically happy and trouble free all of the time. We can think of a resilient person as being like a spring...they can bend and stretch and get a bit bent out of shape but eventually they spring back to shape and continue to function as they normally would. Sometimes they may need a little help to do this, sometimes they have the skills and resources to do it on their own. Resilient people are able to survive and sometimes thrive in spite of conditions that are difficult. Resilient people also make the best use of the resources they have knowing that life is often not perfect.

Contents

Mental Health and Resilience	4
How do I become Resilient?	6
Brain Basics & Mental Health	6
Brain Chemicals	7
Brain Parts	8
Bad Habits and the Brain	9
Getting the best from our brain	10
The Brain Audit – ‘SEEDS’ Model	12
Healthy Habits: The Formula for Success	13
Action and Coping Plans	15
Reducing your Stress Response Through Breathing	16
Tactical Breathing	16
The Periphery Technique	16
Short Mindfulness Tools	17
Flexible Thinking	18



Mental Health and Resilience

Mental health issues are increasingly common in New Zealand society. While Defence Force personnel are likely to be more resilient due to their training and conditioning, as humans we are not immune to psychological pressures. What does set our military personnel apart is that they are motivated to learn how to arm themselves with knowledge and tools that will build greater resilience and mentally fit minds in order to face whatever challenges work or life sends our way.

Mental or psychological health is about how we think, feel and act as we deal with life's ups and downs. It is also about how we handle stress and how we recognize and utilize our internal and external resources in order to cope with the stress that life sends our way. Being mentally healthy is not necessarily about being free from problems. Some problems are unavoidable, like pandemics, travel delays, accommodation issues and isolation and these problems can create stress and difficulty for us. These are often challenges that can leave us feeling tired, worn out, anxious or in some cases sad and low. Life is full of ups and downs, and it is normal to have reactions to life's challenges. Resilience is about being able to bounce back from these setbacks and hopefully even grow as a result of them.

The NZDF Mental Health Continuum is represented below in figure one. The green zone represents good mental health and wellbeing. When we are in the 'yellow' zone we are not feeling at our best. This may be due to fatigue, workload, stress or other factors. The continuum is dynamic and we can move between the yellow and the green even within a day or

“Modern psychology has been co-opted by the disease model. We’ve become too preoccupied with repairing damage when our focus should be on building strength and resilience...Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue”

Martin Seligman

week. However if we stay in the yellow zone for too long, we may move into the 'orange' or injured zone. Persistent worries, sleeplessness or distress means that our wellbeing and our performance is negatively impacted and sometimes so to our relationships. Moving into the red zone generally means we have a diagnosable condition that directly impacts our everyday functioning

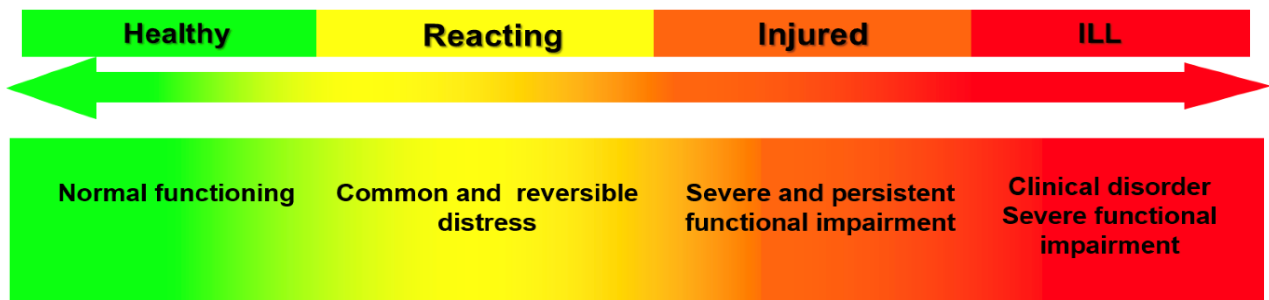


Figure One: The Mental Health Continuum

When we talk about people being 'resilient' or mentally fit, this does not mean that a person is firmly staked out in the green zone. Being resilient is about 'bouncing back', the very term indicates there have been tough times or adversity. When people (military or civilian) go through hard times it absolutely normal, natural and very human to experience stress, pressure and find ourselves sliding down the continuum into the yellow or orange. When we are resilient, we recognise this shift and look to pull ourselves out of it. This isn't usually straight forward or easy, it involves using good self-care techniques and mental skills to help us shift perspective and recharge. It also usually involves time.

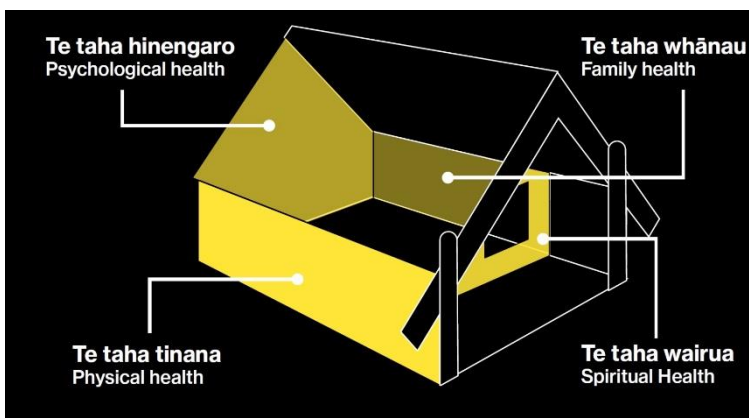
Social media and other cultural pressures are sending the wrong message that we all need to be happy, positive, successful all the time, but a resilient person will allow themselves to feel sad, angry low when they need to, making space for negative emotions as much as positive ones. To be resilient means you can perform your roles in work and family to the best of your ability even in the face of negative feelings, thoughts and external challenges.

Healthy	Reacting	Injured	Ill
Normal mood fluctuations; Calm and takes things in stride	Irritable/Impatient; Nervous; Sadness/ overwhelmed	Anger; Anxiety; Pervasively sad/ hopeless	Angry outbursts/ aggression; Excessive anxiety/ panic attacks; Depressed/suicidal thoughts
Good sense of humour; Performing well; In control mentally	Displaced sarcasm; Procrastination; Forgetfulness	Negative attitude; Poor performance or workaholic; Poor concentration/ decisions	Overt insubordination; Can't perform duties/ control behaviour or concentrate
Normal sleep patterns; Few sleep difficulties	Trouble sleeping; Intrusive thoughts; Nightmares	Restless disturbed sleep; Recurrent images/ nightmares	Can't fall asleep or stay asleep; Sleeping too much or too little
Physically well; Good energy level	Muscle tension/ headaches; Low energy	Increased aches and pains; Increased fatigue	Physical illnesses; Constant fatigue
Physically and socially active	Decreased activity/ socialising	Avoidance; withdrawal	Not going out or answering phone
No/limited drug and alcohol use/gambling	Regular but controlled drug and alcohol use/gambling	Increased drug and alcohol use/gambling - hard to control	Frequent drug and alcohol or gambling use - inability to control with severe consequences

How do I become Resilient?

If resilience is bouncing back from the red, orange or yellow zones and into the green zone, the million dollar question is: how do we become resilient? Or how do I become *more* resilient?

Research into how people can cope well in adversity has revealed that there are many controllable factors in your life that you can work with to improve your resilience. An easy way to think about these different groups of factors is using Sir Mason Durie's 'Te Whāre Tapa Wha' model, which is a wellness model that uses a whāre as a metaphor for wellness. The model suggests that if the four walls of the whāre are strong, this will support your wellbeing. There are great overlaps between wellness and resilience, so we can easily apply this model here.



- **Te Haha Tinana (Physical Health):** It is the case that if you are physical fit and healthy it is easy for your body and brain to cope with stress. You genetics may contribute to physical challenges that impact your ability to cope but there are elements of your physical wellbeing that you can control. Exercise daily is very good for your brain and heart. Eating the right foods and getting good sleep will provide the right foundations for coping and resilience
- **Te Taha Whānau (Family Health):** This can relate to more than just family, but also family and friends. There is **strong** research that suggests that good social support is a crucial factor in coping with adversity and stress. If you build loving family relationships and build connections with supportive friends this too will contribute to your resilience
- **Te Taha Wairua (Spiritual Health):** Understanding who you are, what you believe and what gives your life meaning will also contribute to your ability to face and make sense of adversity.
- **Te Taha hinengaro (Psychological Health):** How you make sense of the events that happen to you and around you can also be impacted by your thinking patterns and your understanding of and connection to your emotions. Good psychological fitness including knowing how to manage your thoughts and emotions will help you cope with life's challenges.

All elements of the whāre are connected and closely related. Our physical health can greatly affect our psychological health. For example if we are overweight and unfit this can impact our self-esteem and motivation. If we are experiencing chronic pain due to an injury this can impact our mood and our emotions. If we don't have a strong social network, this can also affect our self-esteem and mood. The following section digs a little deeper into the brain and how it relates to our psychological health. There are a few tools within the section to assess how you are supporting your brain health, which ultimate supports your psychological health.

Brain Basics & Mental Health

There are a number of people who don't feel happy. They feel stressed, they feel low, they may focus on the negatives in their lives, and these feelings combined with a bunch of other stressors including work can make them miserable. Does this mean they are depressed or mentally ill?

The truth is depression isn't as clear cut as people might assume, especially given how commonly it is diagnosed. Most health problems are diagnosed by their cause, for example cancer is diagnosed by identifying cancer cells in the body but depression is currently identified by a collection of symptoms when there is no specific physical cause. Feeling low, difficulty motivating one-self, poor sleep feeling like there is nothing to look forward to (and the list goes on from there). These symptoms indicate you are in a downward spiral. If you have enough of these symptoms you may get diagnosed with depression. This means you might have started in the 'yellow' on the continuum, then over time you may have slid down into the 'orange' or 'red'. There is no blood test, no gene identification.

So why do some people get depressed or struggle with resilience when others don't? It is a similar reason to why tornados are more likely to happen in Kansas USA than Manawatu, New Zealand. It is because the conditions are just right. There are a combination of

genetics, early childhood experiences and environmental factors (in your current work and life) that can make the perfect storm for mental health issues such as depression to develop. There is nothing fundamentally 'wrong' per say with a person's brain who has low resilience. It is often that some parts of the brain are working too hard, and others are not working hard enough. Most of you can relate to having a bad or sore back at some point. You may have had a physiotherapist pointing out that you need to strengthen your core muscles to support your spine, and that some muscles are overactive causing tightness – it's the same with the brain. When you are feeling like you just can't shake some of those negative feelings it can be that some parts of your brain, that deal with threat assessment for example, might be overactive. This means that maybe even small things are perceived as a threat to you, or in other words, things that might seem benign to some people are stressful or threatening to you. An example of this might be your annual performance meeting with your boss. For most people (or for you on a good day), this is not at all stressful or threatening. However if you have had a period of time where you have felt low or unhappy, then this performance meeting might feel more worrisome or threatening than normal. The good news is that you can use knowledge of the brain to understand why you might be feeling low, slow or de-motivated and help yourself get out of it.

Later on in this resource we will discuss how your thoughts about the world and yourself can also contribute to how resilient you feel and are, but right now, let's explore some of the basics of our brain that, with a very touch on neuroscience.

Brain Chemicals

The brain is made up of a billion tiny cells called neurons that all have connections going everywhere. Then there are very useful chemicals that act as the brain and bodies messengers, called 'neurotransmitters'. A great analogy from Dr Alex Korb¹ is that the neuron connections are like the routes travelled by airlines from one city to the next. This mass of interconnections reacts to different neurotransmitters. Now in our airline analogy, each neurotransmitter operates a system of neurons – so the 'serotonin system' is like the 'Virgin Airlines system' and the 'dopamine system' is like the 'Air New Zealand system'. Your brain relies on these different types of systems for processing information. In the same way that different airplanes are taking different passengers to locations around the world, your neurotransmitters are taking different messages around your body, which have different effects on how you feel. Let's look at a few now, and while you look at this list have a think about how each might contribute to your mental health and resilience:

- **Serotonin** – improves willpower, motivation and **mood**
- **Norepinephrine** – enhances thinking, **focus** and **dealing with stress**
- **Dopamine** – increases **enjoyment**, and is necessary for changing bad habits
- **Oxytocin** – promotes feelings of trust, **love** and connection & **reduces anxiety**
- **GABA** – increases feelings of relaxation and **reduces anxiety**
- **Melatonin** – enhances quality of **sleep**
- **Endorphins** – provides pain relief, feelings of elation

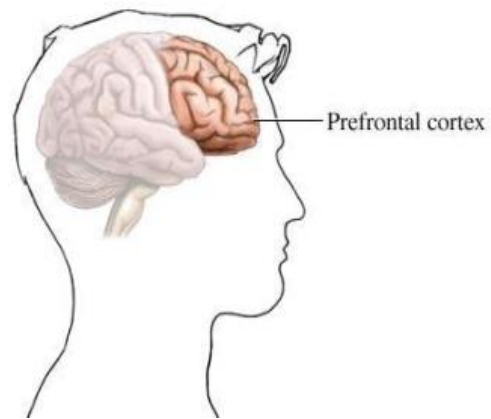
¹ Korb, A (2015) *The Upward Spiral*. Oakland. New Harbinger Public

- **Endocannabinoids** – improve your appetite and increase feelings of peacefulness and well-being

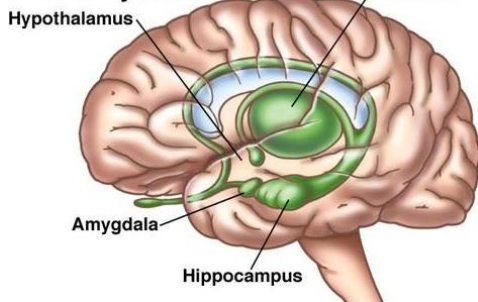
You can just scan this list, and see that if some of the systems that operate with these neurochemicals are not working, or out of whack – you are going to have problems! A dysfunctional serotonin system will affect your motivation and will-power for example. All of these neurotransmitters are necessary for your brain to work well – and when it isn't working well life can seem hard, sad or lonely.

Brain Parts

Let's now learn a little about the parts of your brain. A key player in your brain is the **prefrontal cortex**. This is the part of your brain that is responsible for reasoning. It is what give humans the evolutionary edge – as we are the only animals that have such a developed prefrontal cortex. This is the CEO of the brain – planning, decision-making, controlling impulses and motivation. You might hear people call this your 'thinking brain'. When we talk about resilience strategies later on, we will outline the importance of looking at strategies that can engage your thinking brain – switch it on, fire it up – when you need it most! We also should note that sometimes our thoughts aren't particularly helpful, and they can hook us into feeling or doing things that aren't helpful. However we have strategies for that too!



Limbic System



Then we have our **limbic system** – our emotional or feeling brain. This part of the brain is responsible for feelings – excitement, fear, anxiety, also memory and desire. You don't have to remember this – but it is comprised of four main regions

The Hypothalamus – this part controls stress. It regulates hormones and controls the bodies stress response, can put you into flight or fight mode – raising stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. It's like an air force base waiting to deploy aircraft to war. When you are anxious – this guy is on high alert – it has a hair trigger response, so if it's over active it is hard to be relaxed and happy.

The Amygdala is the next main part. It's the key player in reducing negative emotions like anxiety and fear. It is an ancient structure, deep in the brain that gives us the feelings of anxiety – stomach ache, nervous tension. People with depression have higher amygdala activity. So reducing this activity can lower anxiety and depression.

**Amygdala:
Your gut
feeling**

**Hippocampus:
Memories**

The Hippocampus – this part is responsible for creating long term memories. The neurons that make it up are very sensitive to stress – and therefore it can encode negative and stressful memories much more readily. If you have trouble remembering happy events, or happier times but have no trouble recalling sad or negative events this guy is your culprit. The fact that it has a tendency to skew your perception by storing more negative than positive memories can kick off a negative spiral. The hippocampus is also important for context-dependant memories. This means it is easier to remember things that closely relate to your current situation (e.g. it is easier to remember your school memories when you visit your old college). If your context is depression then your happy memories that are easier to recall when you're in a good mood.

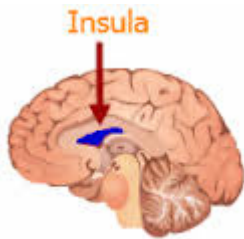
Finally the **Cingulate cortex** is that last part of the Limbic System – and this controls focus and attention. This is hugely important because what you focus on makes a huge difference to your mood. Difficulty paying attention or concentrating is a recognised symptom of depression. The front of the anterior cingulate is closely connected to your prefrontal cortex and often acts as a gateway between the cortex and the limbic system. It's the anterior cingulate who notices all your mistakes, makes you focus on pain, and contributes to your tendency to dwell on everything that is going wrong in your life. The Anterior Cingulate is the screen open on your iPhone – it directs what you are paying attention to right now. Activity in this region is directly related to depression – and can predict who will get better on antidepressants and who won't. If you stimulate this area with electrodes it can reduce depressive symptoms.



Bad Habits and the Brain

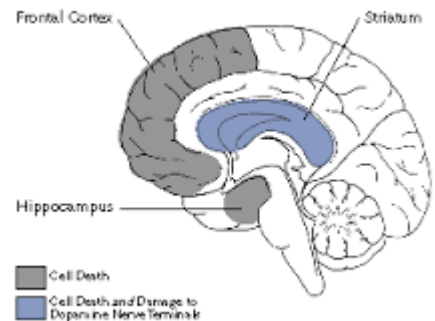
When we are low on resilience, we often have an issue with bad habits as well. Those things we do, that we know are bad for us, but we give ourselves permission to do them anyway, usually for a quick feel good fix. Like eating that Whitakers jelly tip chocolate, stopping at McD's for a quick bite... alcohol... netflix..... Sound familiar? Other bad habits can include procrastination, impulsiveness, addiction – these are the things that we do when we don't feel good – then having done them we feel even worse! Thus the negative spiral continues downwards.

The Striatum is the part of the brain that gets us entrenched in bad habits – and good. Habits are behaviours we do automatically, without thinking. Once you create a habit it can change your life without conscious thought! Good or bad! When you are feel low there is often reduced **dopamine** (enjoyment) activity in the striatum.



Why do some people recover completely from injury and others suffer much longer? Individuals react differently to pain and injury recovery. Not everyone develops chronic pain from injuries but some people have brains that are more reactive to pain. This puts them more at risk for the downward spiral into depression. **The Insula** is the part of the brain, within the cortex, that contributes to your awareness of pain. In people with depression, the insula often shows **elevated activity** – people with

depression often feel pain **more intensely**. Increased activity in the insula makes you more hyperaware of what is going on in your body – you notice your breathing, pain sensations, aches and you fatigue more easily. Calming the insula can help reduce your experience of pain, and worries about something being wrong with your body.



What is wrong with me? Why aren't I resilient?

Nothing is wrong with your brain, just like there is nothing wrong with Kansas – it just keeps getting hit with tornadoes because of a combination of circumstances. So why do you feel low? Or anxious? Or Sad? Or demotivated? It is because of a combination of circumstances...

- **Genetics:** This plays a role. Was there any one in your family who had a mental illness? A tendency towards anxiety and depression? Your genes are not a fatalistic destiny, but they do set you up for a propensity to be a certain way – they are a probability that certain circuits in your brain may be more excitable or overworked than others. This does not mean you cannot mitigate it. You can use strategies to work with what you were born with, especially when you are aware of it. What is your history?
- **Your Upbringing:** How we are raised contributes to our experience of stress and how we process things that happen to us. Your brain is developing – a work in progress from when you are born until you get older. It doesn't start out 'good to go' it matures with age. So the early experiences you have as a child shape the way your brain develops, the habits that are formed, the way your brain copes with stressors and perceives the world – parents take note!

- **Your Current Stress Levels:** This is what this resource is all about, and why the NZDF has support in place for its team through medical and other facilities. Stress levels at work (or at home) can contribute to our brain circuitry. If the parts of the brain that process stress (amygdala and hypothalamus to name two) are over worked – then this can affect the balance of the whole system! If you are in a challenging environment that stretches your psychological and physical resources for a long period of time, you can start to re-wire your brain to be overactive in the areas you don't want it to be (like the amygdala). The good news is, you can re-wire your brain through good habits for positive effects too!

Getting the best from our brain

You have had a really brief run through some of the neuroscience behind depression and anxiety. Now you need to know some really easy and simple things you can do to get those brain circuits working in the right way!

- **Go out into the Sun - Boost the production of serotonin & the release of melatonin**

Get your vitamin D! Spending time in the sun can improve your mood, and your sleep! Winter can be hard, especially with the weather and the short days but when the sun is out, go outside and soak it up (for at least 15 minutes).

- **Find your happy thought – Boost serotonin in the anterior cingulate**

Depression, and feeling low, can often result in our brain only remembering the bad things that have happened. Sometimes it can be difficult, but you know that if you think very hard you will be able to come up with a very happy memory – even if it's only one. Meditate on this, remember every detail, think on it before you go to sleep and reflect on it. This will boost the serotonin levels in your anterior cingulate – improving your mood, and your ability to remember that life isn't all bad! A way you can super charge this boost is to journal your positive experiences– even small ones. Write down the details of that great run you did, reveal in the amazing dinner you went to. If you purposely focus and dwell on positive memories you will boost your serotonin! Remember this boost will improve your mood and motivation!

- **Make a small decision – Reduce your amygdala activity**

Uncertainty is what anxiety thrives on and it can be what perpetuates it. Some people are actually less happy when they have more choices to make. When everything is uncertain your amygdala becomes more reactive. If you tend to worry too much – find a decision you can make, and make it fast! Don't deliberate too much, choose something small, and just make the first step. The more decisions you make, the more in control you will feel – the less anxiety you will experience.

- **Pay attention to what you can control – Increase the activity in your prefrontal cortex**

Obviously there are many things that we cannot control; the weather, our boss, the health of our parents. By choosing to focus intently on what is in our control, we increase the feeling that we have control. Feeling in control can reduce worry, anxiety and even experiences of physical pain. It increases activity in the prefrontal cortex, which can start the upward spiral out of depression. So what can you control? You can control your own behaviour, what you do, what you say. You can control when you do the washing, and what you will wash. You can control what you do on your spare time. Seems menial – but find the small things and focus on those.

- **Take a slow breath – calm down the sympathetic nervous system**

It is as simple as breathing... slowly. When we are stressed we tend to have shallow short breaths. When we purposely slow our breathing down, and exhale with long breaths (out to the count of eight) we can directly influence our physiology. We can calm down our stress response.

- **Plan your way out of worry – increase the release of norepinephrine in your prefrontal cortex**

If you tend to be prone to anxiety or worry then plan for the worst and expect the best. Planning for how you will respond to stressful situations can activate the prefrontal cortex, and increase the release of norepinephrine (focus, dealing with stress). So plan for what you will do if you start to feel stressed (I think I will do some slow breathing or go for a walk). If the dinner gets burned, I will order in a pizza. If my boss gives me another task, I will drop the something else. If you find yourself worrying about the 'what ifs?' then write them down and follow that up with a 'then I will...'. For example 'what if I don't get that posting I want?'. Then follow that up with 'then I will apply for another role that is interesting to me or then I will focus on running a half marathon and put my effort into

physical training for a while' or any other back up plans you can think of! Having plans and back up plans will help reduce uncertainty for you.

- **Live in the now! Increase the activity in your prefrontal cortex and calm the amygdala.**

When we are anxious we are generally playing through our mind what terrible things may happen. When we are depressed, we tend to re-live awful moments in our past. By bringing our attention to the present, we focus on the here and now. In the here and now we will be surprised by how benign our environment is. The world isn't ending right now. My partner is not leaving me right now. Right now I am reading this text. I am sitting in a room that is most likely comfortable. What is around you? What do you see, hear and feel in the present moment. Get out of your head, and into the now. If you have difficulty with this, try doing a complicated task that requires your full attention. Like putting together a flat pack – or baking some cup-cakes, fixing your car. You will find that in these activities the inner critic voice of yours shuts down, as your prefrontal cortex has to stay focused on the task at hand. For more information on this – google 'mindfulness'.

- **Get a cuddle – appropriate physical touch releases oxytocin.**

Getting or giving a hug (appropriately – don't forget Op Respect), releases a hormone called oxytocin which has a combined effect of reducing the activity in the amygdala, reducing the sense of physical pain and also increasing feelings of connection and trust. So if you are feeling anxious, or low – do not shut yourself away. Find your partner and give them a good long hug. Or ask your mum, dad or a good friend. Physical touch from a loved one is a great way to feel better. If you are hugging someone you love, not only to you get a boost of positive chemicals to your brain – but so do they!



The Brain Audit – ‘SEEDS’ Model²

You have just received a few minor tips for improving your brain function and warding off depression and anxiety. The following brain audit though – is really the most important things you can do for you brain! Check these off and see how you do. If you can improve in any of these areas you will be healthier, fitter, sharper and more focused and more resilient!

- **S is for Social Connection**

The first ‘S’ in seeds is for **social connection**. Our brains, from the modern prefrontal cortex to the ancient amygdala are wired for social connection. We are social creatures designed to survive in a herd. From infancy our instinctual actions are to draw us near to our carer. This stays with us through to adulthood. Research has unequivocally shown that people who have strong loving relationships are happier and live longer. Research has also shown that people who are lonely or lack good connections tend to be unhappy, often suffer from anxiety and depression and often have poorer general health. So do you reach out for someone when you are upset? Or do you withdraw? If you have a tendency to shut yourself away – you are at more risk for depression and mental health issues. **If you want to be more resilient then connect to people (in person).**

- **E is for Exercise**

The first ‘E’ in seeds is for **exercise**. Exercise is the most powerful way to increase your resilience. Exercise strengthens your muscles, yes, but it also strengthens your brain. Exercise increases something called nerve growth factors – like BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor). This is like a steroid for the brain! Exercise literally causes the growth of neurons in the brain. But it doesn’t just boost the brain – it combats a host of symptoms synonymous with depression. Exercise improves sleep, appetite, self-esteem, energy levels and improves your mood. **If you want to be more resilient exercise more.**

- **E is for Education**

The second ‘E’ in seeds relates to **education**. Now this should be easy for us military types that are always on a course. The reality of the matter is that education increases development of new neural pathways – more connections means a higher functioning brain. Learning something *new* is very good for us. So come on all you SNCOs and Senior Officers – when did you push yourself to learn something new? Also, as I said previously, if we are learning a new task our prefrontal cortex has to take control, which is great for staving off depression. When we are focused on or attending to a complex task we are not ruminating or worrying. Research shows people with higher education are often happier and less likely to develop dementia. **If you want to be more resilient learn something new.**

- **D is for Diet**

I am sure this will not be news to you. The ‘D’ relates to **diet**. We all know that sugar is not great for our waistline and our heart – but it shouldn’t be a surprise to you that it is also bad for the brain! In fact in some corners of the health community they are labelling Alzheimer’s as ‘type 3 diabetes’. Sugar affects focus and functioning of your brain. So fill your diet with foods that will feed your brain and not rot it away. **If you want to be more resilient improve your diet.**

- **S is for Sleep**

The last part of the seeds audit is not the least. **Sleep** is a crucial factor in brain health. People with anxiety and depression often have sleep issues. Studies have shown that people with depression often spend too long in the REM stage of sleep. This is when the brain is most active during sleep. This means that even though you may be asleep, if you are depressed you are not getting into the deeper restful stages of sleep for long enough. Sleep deprivation can lead to psychosis, poor attention and concentration, fatigue, low mood and other issues. We also know from our own surveys in the NZDF that people who are struggling with mental health are also often struggling with sleep. There are many ways to improve your sleep NZDF Medical can help. If you know you are not sleeping well, do something about it now before it kicks you into a downward spiral. If you are already depressed tackling the job of getting better sleep can put you more quickly on the road to recovery. **If you want to be more resilient get better quality and quantity sleep.**

² Arden, J (2014) *The Brain Bible*. McGraw-Hill. John Arden is a neuropsychologist, and the SEEDS model comes from his great book on the brain – the Brain Bible.

Healthy Habits: The Formula for Success

Now that you understand a little more about the brain and the body and how doing certain activities (exercise, sleep, getting some sun) can improve the inner workings of your brain the question remains – well how do I make this happen? People often struggle to follow through on goals like getting fitter, eating better. Life gets in the way! Even in the NZDF work can get in the way of a regular exercise program, or the routines you currently have now may support your meat pie habit. To develop a more resilient mind and body you might have to make some changes to the way you behave – and that involves changing habits!

GOALS are not enough!

Often when we want to change our behaviour or our habits we set goals. But there is a catch with goals....while they give us an end state to work towards (which is important)...what we also need are **strategies** to get there. How many people who say they have made a new year's resolution are able to sustain it over the long term? The answer is very few, and that is because, although they had a goal in mind, they actually needed to focus on the process of obtaining the goal rather than the outcome. Below are two different strategies that you could try to help maintain healthy habits. Try them and see which one works for you.

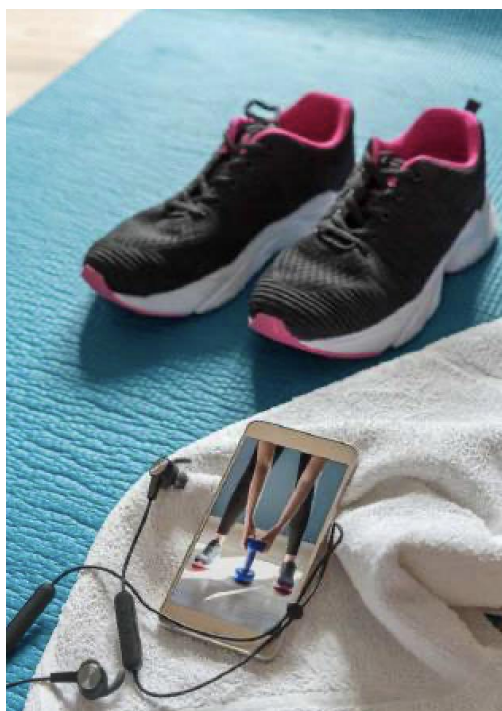


Strategy One – Good planning

We can have the best intentions to change our behaviour to increase our activity level but without good planning we know that people don't tend to actually make the right changes or maintain them for very long...this is why new year's resolutions don't tend to stick even when people are fairly motivated to make changes.

Effective planning for behaviour change takes two steps

1. **Action planning** – deciding when, where, how you will become healthier
2. **Coping planning** – anticipating what barriers will stop you from continuing to become healthy and putting in place strategies to get over those barriers



There are a few other things within your planning phase that you need to take account of before you get going:

- Set low expectations: Make your goals small and easy at first and then build up over time. This means don't set a goal immediately to run 5k, 3 times a week, if you don't run at all! Set a goal to go out for a run/walk three times a week, and make it an achievable time frame, like 20 minutes of walking or running.
- Make it very easy to achieve what you want to achieve and make it hard to do what you don't want to do. This means getting your PT gear ready the night before and putting your running shoes next to your bed so it is easy to roll out of bed and get dressed for your run. Delete Facebook off your phone so you have to physically log in when you want to see it. This will make it that much harder to scroll Facebook.
- Have a buddy to hold you to your goals. Share your goal and share your plan of how you will achieve it. This way someone is checking up on you. It makes it more likely you will follow through on it.
- Write your goal down. Then visualise yourself putting in the effort. This is also more likely to result in you achieving your goal
- MOST importantly habit change is reinforced by REWARD. Give yourself a reward every time you complete the behaviour you want to reinforce. That doesn't mean give

yourself a chocolate bar every time you run, give yourself a reward that will motivate you and contribute to your wellbeing. Like \$10 toward new shoes, or a new game.

Let's get started with some action and coping planning! Here is an example of an action plan around the goal of increasing fitness, or starting a new instrument, or drinking more water:

Example Action Plan	Fitness Goal	Music Goal	Drinking Water
Goal	I will exercise every day by walking to and from work	I will learn to play guitar by doing an online course daily	I will drink more water - 2 litres every day
Action Plan	I will get up 45 min early so I have time to walk to work. I will have my shower gear set up at work so I can shower when I get there	I will sign up to this new course, and set a practice time on my phone for 530 every day (after work, before dinner)	I will drink a cup of water before and after every meal.
Potential Barriers	Rain & Wet Weather Early meetings at work Running gear not cleaned Sick kids	After work functions Laziness Internet too slow	Forget to get the water Out and about with no water available
Coping Plan	If it is raining I will go to gym on camp and use treadmill before work	If there is a work function I will do my practice before work that day	If I forget to drink at a meal I will drink two glasses in between meals
Coping Plan	If I have an early meeting I will set my alarm to go to gym at lunch	If I am feeling lazy I will get my partner to prompt me to do the practice	If I am out and about with no water I will buy a water bottle and drink the whole thing
Coping Plan	If my kids are sick I will arrange with my partner to look after kids while I go for a walk after dinner	If the internet is too slow I will just free style and use pre-printed music sheets to practice with	

This is simple to do, but it involves a bit of thoughtful planning. Remember in an earlier section we learnt that planning is great for reducing anxiety? Doing a bit of planning around implementing healthy habits will have the dual effect of making you feel more in control at the same time as helping you build resilience through good health and wellbeing!

Action and Coping Plans

Use the table below to write down your healthy habit goals and your corresponding action and coping plans.

ACTION PLAN:	Goal:		
Goal			
Action Plan			
Potential Barriers			
Coping Plan			
Coping Plan			
Coping Plan			

Reducing your Stress Response Through Breathing

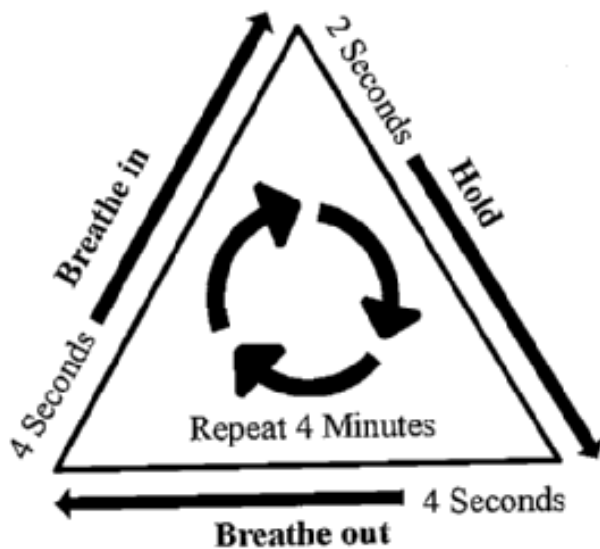
Now that you have mastered some healthy habits, it's time to learn a tool that can help you manage your physiological reaction to stressors in the moment that you are feeling stressed!

Tactical Breathing

In the NZDF formal Resilience training, we teach mental skills that help our people bounce back from adversity. The first of these skills is tactical breathing. The intent behind slowing your breath is that this can bring you into the present moment, and help you feel more calm and connected to your body.

To breathe more tactically you simply bring your attention to your breathing and slow your breath down roughly a count of four seconds in, hold, then four seconds out. In flight or fight state our breathing speeds up. This is to maximise oxygen saturation in our muscles. While we can't slow our heart rate or lower our blood pressure we **can control our breathing**. So if we actively bring our attention to our breath and start to slow it down, we send our brain a direct message "calm down, go to blue head, we are not in a threat state". This technique is great if you have some time to calm yourself down, but often you are in the middle of a meeting, need your brain resources right now and it is socially unacceptable to run into the bathroom mid meeting to do some deep breathing. In addition, you would need to do this for at least five minutes (depending on the situation) to really calm yourself down, this is not an

instant relax effect. What you do need to know about tactical breathing is that it is a form of 'mindfulness'. Mindfulness, in short, is a form of meditation where you bring your attention to the present moment, and observe yourself (thoughts, feelings, sensations) while suspending any judgements.



The Periphery Technique

When you are stressed or in 'fight or flight' state your pupils dilate. That means that when in threat state we are susceptible to tunnel vision. Tunnel vision is where we use only our foveal vision (centre of our gaze). This means we tend to lose some of our peripheral vision. Evolutionary thinkers believe this was due to the flight or fight response being triggered in survival situations where there was a need for finding an immediate escape route.

We can use this to our advantage. If you are upset or stressed,

but you are in public you can do what we call 'breaking into periphery'. This is a technique that can be used when trying to prevent tears from coming in public.

So how do we break into periphery? Choose a spot directly ahead of you. This may be the eyes of your opponent, if you are confident enough. Then, whilst keeping your gaze ahead of you, engage your peripheral vision and start to explore the room/area around you. Ideally you would identify five interesting things around you that you hadn't noticed before. This serves to distract you from what is triggering the emotion at the same time as enhancing your peripheral vision. Your peripheral vision is linked to your parasympathetic nervous system, so your brain is sent a message 'we are not under threat' and starts to calm itself.

The 'pros' of the periphery technique is that you can maintain eye contact with your boss (or the giver of feedback) and although you feel yourself getting upset or angry, you can regulate your emotional system without anyone knowing that is what you are doing.



The key to the periphery technique working is practice!!!!

If you get road rage, then engage your periphery while driving. Your eyes are on the road, but you are scanning your surrounds. This has the dual benefit of calming the rage, while becoming more situationally aware. The more you use this technique to calm your system, the quicker it works. Your brain rewires a pathway that gets stronger and stronger, till you see a threat (old guy driving at 50k in a 100k zone), you engage your periphery and your brain says 'oh, we are scanning our periphery again, time to calm down'.

Five Steps to Peripheral Vision:

1. Choose a focal point, keep your eyes on that point
2. Explore to the left and right up and down just with your peripheral vision (keep your eyes straight ahead)
3. Try to notice five things/objects you hadn't paid attention to before.
4. For enhanced effect as you explore your periphery try to slow your breathing down.
5. Rinse and repeat!

Short Mindfulness Tools

You may have heard of the term 'mindfulness' before. Mindfulness has been given many definitions, but mostly it describes the ability to be fully present and aware, paying attention with an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance.

If we are struggling with negative thoughts we are often ruminating about past events, or worrying about future events. Mindfulness techniques help us to pay attention to the now. The techniques are designed to bring your attention to your body and the sensations within or to the sounds, sensations and sights of the world around you. A regular mindfulness meditation practice will help you start to take control of your attention and with time you will be able to notice your thoughts drifting off to unpleasant places, and you will be able to gently bring yourself back to the present. These short exercises here are a good place to start and can be done almost anytime anywhere.

Ten Deep Breaths

Take ten deep breaths. Breathe in slowly and notice your rib cage rise as you breathe in and fall as you breath out. Notice the sensation of the air flows in an out. Focus on emptying your lungs as completely as possible, pause, then let your lungs fill slowly again. As thoughts come into your head, just notice they are there and let watch them go as you might watch a car go past your house.

Five Things

First take five deep, slow deliberate breaths. As you breathe in and out focus your attention on the sensations you feel in your body, the air coming in and out of your lungs, where the air comes in (nose or mouth), the feel of your tummy rising as the air comes in. Then as you continue to breathe slowly and deeply:

1. Look around you and slowly and intentionally notice five things that you can see around you (anything at all)
2. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
3. Notice five things that you can feel. This can be things that are touching your skin like clothing, or it can be the chair underneath you or the floor under your feet.

Then finally take another five deep breaths. Notice how you are more aware of your environment. The tidiness of the room, the sounds around you, the furniture holding you up.

Mindful Living

Take an everyday activity, and choose to make it a mindful activity. This might be brushing your teeth or having a shower, or it might be your daily run. During that activity try to pay attention to what you are doing. For example notice with intention how you grab the toothpaste and squeeze it onto the tooth brush. Notice the feel of the tooth brush, the taste, the motion. As your thoughts try to drift off, just notice and gently bring your attention back to the activity you are doing.

Flexible Thinking

Words can be powerful. All of us have an internal dialogue, a voice inside our heads that commentates our lives like a constant Facebook stream. The voice can be positive, neutral or negative.



Great Burger – Great Friends



Burger last night at Mike's



Fatty burger – I'm so fat!

For people who struggle with resilience, their internal dialogue is often a constant stream of negative judgements. Some thoughts that swirl around in our heads are judgments we make of ourselves that are so cruel we wouldn't often say them to our worst enemies; "you're so useless, you're a failure!", "you're so fat, no one will ever love you", "you are going to fail that test, why bother studying!".

If we have a tendency towards anxiety the thoughts are scary stories we tell ourselves about our future. "What if you never meet someone who will love you?", "what if you never get promoted?", "everything is going to go wrong during that practical exam tomorrow."

To become flexible and resilient we need to acknowledge that these negative thoughts, or negative feelings (worry, sadness) or negative images are just that; thoughts, feelings and images.

Thoughts: are just words in our heads

Images: are just pictures in our heads

Emotions: are just feelings in our bodies

To help us remember the thoughts/images and emotions are just that, we can do a few simple defusion³ exercises:

Creating Distance:

Think of a negative thought that bothers you and add these simple sentences in front of your negative thoughts

“I’m having the thought that...”

“I’m telling myself the story that....”

Now to create a little more distance, try again by adding this:

“**I notice that** I’m having the thought that...”

“**I notice that** I’m telling myself the story that...”

When we do this, we are de-fusing from our thoughts. When we are fused with our thoughts they can seem like the absolute truth and very important. When we add in ‘I notice that I’m thinking’ we start to realise that the thoughts are just words in our heads, stories that we are telling ourselves.

The thoughts may be important and we can pay attention to them if they are helpful (like when our thoughts tell us that touching that hot thing is dangerous) but if they are unhelpful (like ‘you are stupid’) then we can acknowledge that ‘you are stupid’ is just a thought we are having and let it pass naturally through our inner dialogue without paying it any attention.

³ Defusion: un-fusing ourselves from our thoughts – realising that they are just words in our heads.



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