



EAT, PRAY AND AFFECTIONATELY LOVE

IT MAY SEEM SIMPLE, BUT SOMETIMES THE SIMPLEST THINGS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

WORDS: JOANNE WILSON

I'm passing on a beautiful little go-to designed to keep your relationships thriving while beating off any signs of depression and anxiety.

As featured last week, I had the honour of interviewing US neuropsychologist Dr John Arden who has devised a handy acronym that creates a happy and healthy brain. Post this up on your bathroom mirror for a constant reminder of how to live a fulfilling lifestyle, especially as we head into the winter months.

S is for Social Connectivity: Loneliness causes cellular changes resulting in a weakened immune system, a propensity for addiction and even early symptoms of dementia. Our telomeres (caps on the end of our chromosomes) can shrink without cultivated and fostered social brain networks. Keep yourself engaged with real time authentic family or friends versus online acquaintances, likers and followers.

E is for Exercise: Dr Arden says exercise is better than any anti-depressant or anxiety tool on the planet. He encourages

30 minutes of increased heart rate activity every day to stave off the blues. An array of awesome brain-enhancing biochemical processes occurs when we exercise, which include producing new neurons in our brain.

E is for Education: I'm sure you've heard, "If you don't use it, you lose it" – true story.

If you're not constantly learning, you're not building an infrastructure of brain connectivity. The more connectivity, the richer your cognitive reserve later in life.

I recently read about Yale professor Paul Bloom who specialises in cognitive psychology and pleasure research. He says pleasure doesn't just occur – it develops. Want to know how to get it? He says study more. Aside from a headache from guzzling a lot of expensive wine frequently, we know it won't provide as much happiness as if you were to learn about wine along the way. Instead of seeking delight from experiencing something over and over, gain knowledge from your object of pleasure.

D is for DIET: Feed your brain with nutritious fuel as your brain chemicals need it. A diet of fried hot chips and sauce will starve your amazingly created head of healthy neurotransmitters. Do that and you're up against it to think clearly and positively.

Neuroscientist Dr Caroline Leaf states 95

per cent of your serotonin and half of the dopamine in the body are produced in your gut. Importantly, don't fall into the trap of the unnecessary sense of urgency to eat on the go. Eat slowly until you're 80 per cent full and let your mind be your guide – not your eyes.

S is for Sleep: Achieving functional sleep is a deterrent for depression and anxiety. Dr Arden says sleep medications can hinder our sleep cycle required to naturally consolidate memories. Did you know your brain and body stays quite active when we sleep as it plays a housekeeping-type role removing toxins?

When we mess it all up with drugs and alcohol, it makes sense we experience that very apt term I recently heard of, "hangxiety" and dreadful symptoms afterwards. Do it often enough and you get depressed and anxious.

Struggling in this area? Start with mindfulness, prayer, exercise or a therapist to collaborate on sleep strategies to combat any over-thinking at all the wrong times.

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