



DAILY NEEDS

Brian Burke, PhD
Fort Lewis College

Although we set long-term goals...

which makes us wait for until it is achieved, delaying gratification is not an all-or-none proposition – you still have basic needs in the short term, which I like to put into 5 main categories, to be discussed in turn below:

- 1) Sleeping well
- 2) Eating well
- 3) Exercising your mind
- 4) Exercising your body
- 5) Exercising your soul

1) Sleeping Well

Research has consistently shown the importance of a regular sleeping pattern that is in rhythm with the surroundings (i.e., sleeping when it's dark, being awake when it's light). The average amount of sleep that people need has been estimated in one study at 8.29 hours per night. College students, as you can imagine, typically get far less than this, perhaps around 6 hours per night. This can hurt when it comes to exams – especially since sleeping has been shown to have a key role in memory consolidation – as well as leave someone more vulnerable to physical illness.

2) Eating Well

In order to have energy for school and for life, you need to maintain healthy nutrition. What we put into our body goes a long way toward determining what we can get out of it. This campus has the usual gamut of “empty calorie” fast-food choices but also features many healthy alternatives, especially at Muir’s own Sierra Summit. Eating well means eating at regular intervals and regular-sized meals that are appropriate for your metabolism and activity levels. Eating too little is at least as unhealthy as eating too much, and either one can be a symptom of an eating disorder, for which help is available through PCS. If you are unsure about healthy eating patterns, you can also consult the wonderful dietician, Heather McCracken, at Student Health Services (SHS) on campus.

3) Exercising Your Mind

The good news is that, as students at UCSD, you are proba-

bly already doing this on a regular basis. Our brain is like a muscle; in order to function optimally, it needs repeated practice. For many people, college is the time in their lives when they exercise their cerebral capacities more than ever before (or after). But your mind also has another component that is as important as academics – emotional intelligence. So exercising your mind refers not only to book learning, but also to increasing your awareness of your own ever-changing emotions and learning how to manage overwhelming and negative feelings like anxiety and depression. Of course, PCS can help with this process too.

4) Exercising Your Body

A previous column (November 2002) focused on an obvious but often ignored treatment for negative moods – physical exercise. Body and mind are, of course, intimately connected; many scientific studies have shown that exercise is an essential component in the treatment of physical and psychological disorders ranging from obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and even cancer, to anger management, anxiety, and depression. Why is exercise so effective? Because it actually increases the release of “endorphins” in our brains, special neurochemicals that help us to relax and feel good. (These are similar in structure to morphine and provide us with a more natural “high”). So how can you increase your exercise at UCSD? Start small. Pick one new thing to try out once a week for a month – and see how much better you feel! It’s a small commitment with large benefits to be obtained!

5) Exercising Your Soul

Even if you did all 4 of the suggestions above (sleeping and eating well, exercising mind and body), your life might still be lacking something. That something is what I simply call “meaning.” For some, their life’s meaning can be found on a specific spiritual or religious path. For others, their life’s meaning is found elsewhere, in their jobs, their relationships, and in nature. Wherever you choose to look is fine – and it certainly doesn’t have to be only one place – as long as you look somewhere! College is a great opportunity to find your passions, figure out what makes you tick and what things you enjoy most of all. It is essential to build interests, hobbies, and friendships in your life – otherwise, where will the joy in your life come from?

The Key to Happiness?

Overall, I think that we humans tend to worry about the wrong stuff, low probability catastrophes that we cannot control, such as shark attacks and airplane crashes. Instead, we should be worrying about what is most likely to hurt or kill us – e.g., cancer and heart disease, which are more in our control than we commonly believe. For instance, we can reduce the risk of illness by using sunscreen, eating healthier, decreasing our substance use, exercising regularly, and other such lifestyle changes. In the end, the key to happiness is not solely in a grand life plan or big picture framework but in the basic, everyday habits of your life!

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