

Mental Health Series: Tips to Boost Your Mental Health

Featuring:

Patrick B. McGrath, PhD

TRANSCRIPT

Bice: I'm sure some of you would agree – and we've been told that working out, eating right, and getting a good night's rest – is a super important part of our body and mental health. But let's be honest, with our busy lives, it can be difficult to accomplish these goals.

Welcome to the Abbott Nutrition Health Institute's Power of Nutrition podcast. My name is Bice Dolciato and I am with the Abbott Nutrition Health Institute, and I am excited to bring you another episode of our mental health podcast series. Today's topic is going to be Tips to Boost Your Mental Health.

We are lucky again, as always, to have Dr. Patrick McGrath with us. He is the Chief Clinical Officer at NOCD, an app-based platform for the treatment of OCD. He leads their teletherapy services across the world, and has authored two books, titled Don't Try Harder; Try Different and The OCD Answer Book. So, welcome back, Dr. McGrath.

Patrick: Well, thanks. It's great to be here again.

Bice: And before we get started, I just want to make sure our listeners know that I'm in a recording studio, while Dr. McGrath is dialing in from Wisconsin, so you may notice a small difference in the sound quality of our respective microphones.

Dr. McGrath, would you mind just taking a quick moment to just tell everyone a little bit about yourself and your background?

Patrick: Sure. I've been a clinical psychologist for over 20 years. Most of my training is in anxiety disorders, so OCD, phobias, trauma, panic – those types of things – and I use a type of therapy called exposure and response prevention therapy, which is really designed to help people face their fears and learn that they can handle things, instead of spending time trying to talk them out of it or teach them a lot of coping strategies to deal with it.

Bice: Thank you so much for that, Dr. McGrath. It's always a pleasure to have you with us. So, what positive characteristics do people that are mentally healthy exhibit?

Patrick: What a great question, right? Because I think that, first of all, we want to take a look at how we're going to define what mental health is, right? So, is it that we're always feeling good or positive? I

don't know that we want to necessarily say that that's the best definition for mental health, because it is okay to feel down at times and to feel stressed and anxious and things too. So, I want to think of us in terms of the definition of mental health being somebody who has the ability to adjust to the situations at hand, and can make decisions and do things that allow them to get through it in the best way possible, and for people who are struggling maybe with their mental health, it is the fact that, maybe when stressors occur, there's delays in decision-making and ability to adjust. They can't turn on a dime the way that maybe they would have if they weren't struggling with this thing that's going on – if that's a mood issue or an anxiety issue. And so, what can we do to help people to better adjust at hand to the situations that are going on in their life and not be stuck or looking at things through a lens that is causing some distortions and interfering with them to perform at their best.

Bice: Yeah, that's really interesting to hear. And are there tips that you can share, how you mentioned to help those individuals adjust or maintain one's mental health?

Patrick: Yes! There's absolutely things that people can do that can really supports their mental health. One, establishing routines that are really good for you – so, a routine of good nutrition can be very helpful; a routine of working out and taking care of your body is a good one; a routine of good sleep hygiene is excellent and good; dental hygiene, as well, too. In fact, there's a lot more research lately about bad dental health can have very serious effects on us physically and mentally, as well, too. It's kind of fascinating. And, so doing things and creating routines that help us get through our day-to-day life in the best way possible and, hopefully, the easiest way possible are really good things to do. And, if you add other things to that, like if you are on a medication, taking that medication regularly, as prescribed; if you do practices such as meditation to keep that as a part of your routine. If you like to read, turning off the screens once in a while, and allowing yourself the ability to get outside, or read, or just socialize with people and friends, and not isolate. All of those things, I think, can be recipes – or parts of the recipe – that can go into the bakery of great mental health, shall we say? Where you've got this wonderful cake that's just full of all sorts of great, healthy things for you to do.

Bice: Yeah. No, that is super helpful, just to hear you say – I'm just going to tell you about the truth here is that, I heard you say routine, and you listed a great component, such as good nutrition, working out, sleep, and the dental piece? Who knew? I had no idea. So that is fascinating. But let's just be real. I do not like to work out, and I could say that some of our listeners probably feel the same way. And, we're always told that it's the best thing for you – I dread it! What other suggestions do you have to stay active – just to boost your mental health status?

Patrick: Yeah, garden, clean your house. Do things that you keep you moving. One of the things that's been really fun lately is these virtual reality headsets that are available and playing games on those, where you're standing up and active – it could be golf, or bowling, or whatever it is – but, it's entertaining and it's movement, as well, too. So, not just sitting – a stand-up desk for work could be something that could even be very good for you; or, programming in a couple of breaks throughout the day where you just walk around the house, or even – but, my eye doctor has said, of watching for eye strain. Every hour or so, I look up at the various corners of the room, and I stare at each of them for ten

seconds to give myself a different depth of field and way of focusing, so that it's not just on the computer screen the entire time. Maybe wearing glasses that block the blue light, if that's something that affects you and has a deleterious effect on the sleep cycle that you go through as well, too. That could be something. There's all sorts of tiny things that could be very helpful. And, even if you don't have time to cook, and it's just easier to do prepared things, there are great meal delivery services that deliver healthy alternatives than potentially just fast food on a daily basis, as well.

Bice: Yeah. Again, another wise description in the great list that you offered. So, Dr. McGrath, what you're saying to me is I need to fire my cleaning lady and stop watching them do the work, just to get myself moving. Noted. Thank you so much for that list.

Patrick: Um, if there's a lot of things going on in your life, and the cleaning person who comes to your house adds value to your life because you are doing time and other things that you really get something out of, then great! But, if you're the kind of person who hires people to come clean your home and you sit and watch them do that, I would say maybe the time is better spent with you doing it and getting the benefits of being active out of that experience.

Bice: That's even better for me. Thank you so much for that! So, stress. We hear it. We feel it. We talk about it. It can take a toll on one's mental health and emotional health. Can you provide some stress management strategies?

Patrick: I think it is knowing yourself and knowing your body and knowing what your limits are, as well, too. So, if you need to sleep, then make sure that you're putting in the time to be able to sleep. And, if you're feeling kind of run down, and tonight, maybe instead of working out, I'm going to just sit here with a box of cookies – well, maybe you could find a middle ground. What if you sat there, but if it was a healthy snack instead of a box of cookies, right? Then you don't have to deal with the guilt of that tomorrow. So, knowing what your limits are; knowing what you can push yourself to do; but also having the ability to recognize that compromise, even that we have to do internally with ourselves, doesn't always mean that I'm going to feel great and satisfied. Sometimes it means, in order to do certain things, I might have to give up other things, and even though I won't necessarily like that, and it might not be immediately gratifying, what can I do that's better for me in the long term? And, I always like to work with people on knowing where do you want to go? Not how do you want to feel, necessarily, right now, but where do you want to go to and how are you going to get there, and how are you going to get to your goal that you want to achieve? And, is what you're doing about feeling good in the moment, or is it more toward working toward the goal that you have?

Bice: Thank you for that. Are there any closing comments, and I want to think about our health care professionals that are listening with us today: in the wake of the pandemic, what would be some big key takeaways for them?

Patrick: Well, first of all that they deserve care, too. And, unfortunately, there's a lot of people who are health care providers who believe that the only care that's necessary is the care they provide to others. And I want them to know that they deserve care, as well, and so I thank them for the service that they've provided to others, and I hope that they will allow for services to be provided to them. Many people, of course, will think, well, I didn't do enough – I didn't do enough, and people were called heroes. And, there – very often their response was I'm not the hero, it's the people I treated who were heroes, and then all these types of things. So, accept the compliment. Say thank you when people say those types of things to you. Just allow it to be there. Don't push it away. And make sure that sometimes you're selfish and you're prioritizing yourself and your needs before other people. You may not be able to do that at work, and you may not always be able to do that if you have children and things, but even if it's ten minutes of meditation or silence or something like that, where you can be grounded in yourself, with yourself, and allow yourself to know that, hey, I'm handling this; I'm doing what I can; I'm moving forward; I'm not going to stay stagnant; I'm not going to be stuck; and, I'm going to allow myself just a little bit of tranquility here for a few moments – even if it's just that, that's fine. Build on that. Utilize that. And know that you're worth taking care of, because you're taking care of other people, as well, too. So, your health is just as important as the health you're trying to provide to others.

Bice: Thank you for being our hero, Dr. McGrath, especially developing this podcast series with us, because it's important to serve the patients and also the health care professionals that we serve on a day-to-day basis at the Institute.

Patrick: Absolutely. It's been an honor.

Bice: Thank you so much for joining us on today's Power of Nutrition podcast. For our listeners, the 988 lifeline provides 24/7 confidential support for people in suicidal crisis or mental health related distress. By calling or texting 988, you'll connect to a mental health professional. ANHI is excited to provide a series of podcasts on a variety of mental health-related topics. So please join us for the next episode by visiting [ANHI.org/resources/podcasts](https://anhi.org/resources/podcasts). We will be adding new episodes often, so please check back throughout this year. Thank you for listening. Stay healthy, and be safe.