



The Self-Care Reset



Building Balance
with Evidence-Based, Clinically
Informed Strategies



Introduction to this E-Book

This free resource is designed to offer practical, evidence-based self-care strategies to support mental health, emotional balance, and overall wellbeing in 2026. Rather than aiming for perfection, the focus is on small, consistent habits that regulate the nervous system, improve sleep, reduce stress, and build resilience in everyday life. The strategies in this guide are intended to be flexible and sustainable, helping you create a stable foundation for wellbeing that can adapt to changing demands, energy levels, and life circumstances. Small, consistent acts of care create meaningful change — your wellbeing is built one day at a time.

“From a clinical perspective, self-care isn’t a luxury or a reward for coping — it is the daily foundation that allows your mind and nervous system to recover, adapt, and grow. When you care for yourself consistently, you give your mental health the conditions it needs to thrive.”

About Simon



Simon MacLachlan is an endorsed clinical psychologist and accredited gestalt psychotherapist who provides a warm, open and collaborative space for healing and growth.

Simon is dedicated to providing his clients with the current best practice and evidence-based treatments, and is continually engaged in professional development, supervision and learning. Simon has a particular interest in the understanding and treatment of complex trauma across the lifespan.

Simon's treatment focus is humanistic and person-centered, addressing the whole person.

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01 Sleep Optimisation

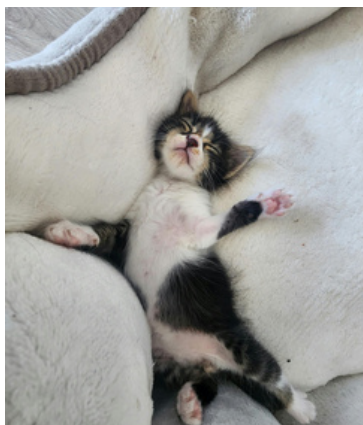
Sleep is fundamental to mental health because it allows the brain to regulate emotion, consolidate learning, and reset stress systems, directly supporting mood stability, cognitive clarity, and resilience. When sleep is consistently disrupted, emotional reactivity increases, coping capacity decreases, and vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and burnout rises.



Strategies to optimise your sleep:

Spend at least 1 hour before bed winding down.

- This can include:
 - Deep, slow breathing (in through nose, long exhalation through mouth)
 - Gentle stretching
 - Talking with your partner (no problem solving, or “big” conversations)
 - Dim lighting, remove blue light from screens or put away screens altogether at least 1-1.5 hours before bed (this promotes healthy melatonin production, the body’s most powerful sleep-signalling hormone).
 - Reading (nothing too stimulating)
- If you’re having difficulty falling asleep, instead of lying in bed (which often worsens cognitive and physiological activation), get up out of bed and go to a comfortable place in your house to wind down using the strategies above
- This is called “stimulus control”, and is an evidence-based way to break the association between bed and wakefulness



1 Practice winding down or engaging in boring, repetitive behaviours like folding laundry until the urge to sleep increases (this is your cue to return to bed)

2 Don't force behaviours in order to sleep – this often worsens anxiety and erodes physiological sleep drive

3 Get up at the same time each morning, and try not to “lie in” more than 10 minutes after waking

Strategies to optimise your sleep:

- Try not to stress about your sleep – your body will catch up after sleep loss, and it is easy to catastrophise the impact of poor sleep.
- Research has demonstrated unequivocally that worry about sleep and associated negative beliefs about not sleeping perpetuate poor sleep onset and increase sleep fragmentation over time
- Recognise that your body will eventually repay your sleep debt, even if it takes several nights
- Each night of poor sleep is “sleep drive in the bank” for the following night
- Spending more time in bed each night will usually worsen sleep, as this strengthens the association between bed and poor sleep, or bed and worry about not sleeping



1

A good rule: after tracking your sleep for a week, your optimal time in bed (TIB) should be your total sleep time (TST) + 0.5 (half an hour). Spending any more time in bed is likely to weaken your sleep drive.

2

For example, if your average time asleep across 7 nights of the week is 7 hours of sleep a night, your optimal time in bed should be 7.5 hours – this ensures that you are not spending unnecessary amounts of time in bed awake

02

Your Morning Routine



A consistent morning routine helps stabilise the nervous system and circadian rhythm, setting a predictable foundation for mood, energy, and focus throughout the day. Beginning the day intentionally reduces stress reactivity and supports a greater sense of control and psychological readiness.



On Waking

Begin your day by getting 5-10 minutes of sunlight; this resets circadian rhythm, signals serotonin production (the happiness chemical), and will later signal healthy timing of melatonin release at night (your body's primary sleep-signaling hormone).



Morning Rituals

Engage in a ritual you enjoy to start the day positively.

- Spend your first 2 minutes lying awake in bed before rising setting your intentions for the day
- Have a morning coffee, tea or cacao
- Listen to music (create a morning Spotify playlist)
- Engage with a yoga practice
- Walk the dog
- Practice deep, slow diaphragmatic breathing
- Spend 10 minutes now setting your planned wake and rise time, and designing a calm, predictable morning ritual



When the body and mind begin each morning in a calm, consistent and predictable way, your stress response is less easily triggered and emotional resilience is strengthened throughout the day.





03

Nervous System Regulation

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Regular nervous system regulation supports mental health by reducing chronic physiological arousal and restoring balance between the body's stress and recovery systems.

When the nervous system is regulated, emotional responses are less intense, thinking is clearer, and the body is better able to recover from daily stressors.

For 10 minutes a day, practice engaging the parasympathetic nervous system – this is the body's rest-and-digest system:

Evidence-based parasympathetic breathing:

- Inhale for 4 seconds through the nose softly
- Hold for 4 seconds at the top of the inhalation
- Exhale for 6 seconds gently through the mouth, making a wooshing sound as if blowing air through a straw
- After several repetitions, extend to 8 second exhalations
- Practice for 5-10 minutes at least once a day (and preferably more)

- Practice gentle body stretches targeting major muscle groups, with a curious, open and exploratory attitude.
- This engages the parasympathetic nervous system and reduces sympathetic (flight-fight) activity, which is often goal-directed and outcome-driven



Helpful Body-Based Practices

- ✓ Practice a yoga, tai chi or qi gong routine focused on pairing slow, co-ordinated body movements with paced breathing
- ✓ Bi-lateral stimulation (co-ordinating the two hemispheres of the brain) triggers the body's rest-and-digest system
- ✓ Learn an instrument like the piano, guitar or drums to bilaterally stimulate the body effectively

04

Emotion Regulation

Emotional regulation is crucial for mental wellbeing because it allows individuals to respond thoughtfully to challenges rather than reacting impulsively under stress.

Strong regulation skills reduce emotional overwhelm, support healthier relationships, and improve resilience during difficult or triggering situations.





Emotion Regulation

During emotionally triggering experiences, remember STOPP:

- **S** – Stop (Just pause for a moment. Say it to yourself, in your head, as soon as you notice your mind and/or your body is reacting to a trigger/stress)
- **T** – Take a moment (Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out. Slowly breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth)
- **O** – Observe (We can notice the thoughts going through our mind, we can notice what we feel in our body, and we can notice the urge to react in impulsively.
- **P** – Pull back and take perspective: Don't believe everything you think! Thoughts are thoughts, NOT statements of fact.
- What thoughts are going through your mind right now? What are you reacting to? What sensations do you notice in your body?
- **P** – Proceed with the next best action you can take

- ✓ What's the bigger picture?
- ✓ What is another way of looking at this situation?
- ✓ What advice would I give a friend?
- ✓ Remember this will pass

Emotion Regulation

“

*Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose”*

- VICTOR FRANKL

✓ Name and label emotions accurately

Putting clear words to emotional experiences (“I’m feeling anxious and overwhelmed”) reduces activation in the amygdala and increases regulation by the prefrontal cortex.

This process, known as affect labelling, helps shift the brain from reactive to reflective functioning

✓ Pause and create response space

Intentionally slowing down before responding—by taking a breath, counting, or grounding attention—interrupts impulsive reactions driven by the limbic system.

This brief pause allows executive brain regions to guide behaviour more effectively.

✓ Reframe unhelpful thinking patterns

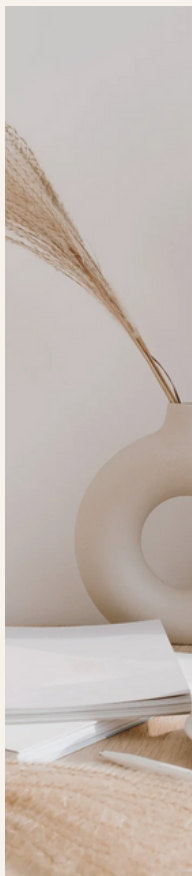
Cognitive reappraisal involves gently questioning automatic thoughts and considering alternative perspectives.

This technique, central to cognitive-behavioural therapy, reduces emotional intensity by changing how the brain interprets stressful events.



05

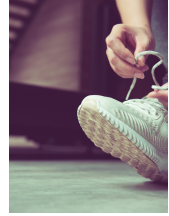
Exercise



Research has demonstrated the importance of engaging in “Zone 2 Cardio” for improved mental health. This type of cardio lowers stress hormones like cortisol, releases mood-lifting endorphins, promotes growth of new brain cells, improves sleep, and can provide a peaceful time for self-reflection or mindfulness without overtaxing the body.



Zone 2 cardio involves any low-to-moderate intensity exercise that engages 60-70% of your maximum heart rate. Breathing is elevated but conversation is still comfortably possible.

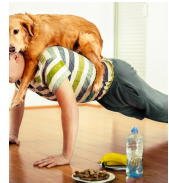


Example:

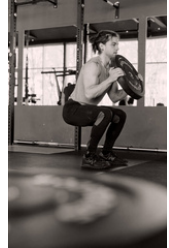
Jog for 1 minute, walk for 2 minutes, for a period of 30 minutes.

Resistance training

- Longevity is strongly correlated with muscle mass. We lose muscle mass every year after the age of 30 (approximately 3-8% per decade)
- Resistance training triggers the release of endorphins, and reduces stress hormones like cortisol in the long term

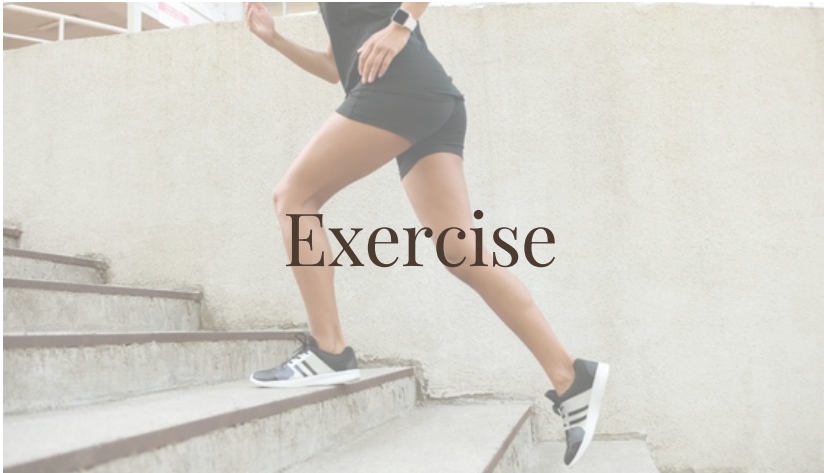


Training with weights has been proven clinically effective in:



- Reducing symptoms of depression
- Stimulating brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BNDF)
- Increasing brain plasticity

Long-term benefits of Zone 2 Cardio occur with 2-3 sessions per week



Training with weights has been proven clinically effective in:

- Lowering baseline physiological arousal
- Reducing anxiety sensitivity (ie fear of bodily sensations)
- Reducing panic attacks
- Improving emotional stress tolerance
- Improving sleep efficiency and depth
- Improving working memory, processing speed and executive functioning

- ✓ Reduction in chronic pain
- ✓ Improved executive functioning
- ✓ Improved working memory
- Reduction in chronic
- ✓ inflammation and autoimmune flares



06

Mindful Awareness

“

Practising mindfulness daily tends to produce broad, cumulative benefits across mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, even when the practice is brief or informal.

At a very general level, its value lies in changing how a person relates to their experiences, rather than trying to control or eliminate them.

A regular mindfulness practice helps people with:

- ✓ Noticing emotions earlier
- ✓ Responding rather than reacting
- ✓ Experiencing intense feelings with less escalation

Over time, this shows up as:

- ✓ Fewer emotional spikes
- ✓ Quicker recovery after stress
- ✓ A greater sense of inner balance

This can improve:

- ✓ Concentration
- ✓ Decision making
- ✓ Cognitive clarity under pressure

Mindfulness trains attention to return to the present moment, which:

- ✓ Reduces habitual rumination
- ✓ Interrupts worry loops
- ✓ Lowers ongoing stress arousal
- ✓ People commonly report feeling less mentally “busy” and more able to pause.



Daily Mindfulness Strengthens the Ability to:

- ✓ Focus on one thing at a time
- ✓ Notice distraction without frustration
- ✓ Sustain attention more comfortably
- ✓ See thoughts as events, not facts
- ✓ Be less driven by self-critical or anxious thinking



Mindfulness Techniques:

Sit quietly and comfortably, and notice:

- 5 Things you can see (describe)
 - 4 Things you can hear
 - 3 Things you can smell
 - 2 Things you can touch
 - The surface of your skin in contact with the seat, floor or couch
- Become aware of any surface sensations on your skin
 - Become aware of any sensations inside your body (breathing, heart rate, rise and fall of your stomach)
 - Observe any mental phenomena, one awareness at a time (thoughts, memories, sensations, impressions, associations, feelings)

- ✓ Notice where your attention goes, and name this: "Now I'm aware of..."
- ✓ Watch your next thought, and name it: "Now I'm having a thought of..."
- ✓ Allow each thought to come and go, without resistance, or attempting to think positively

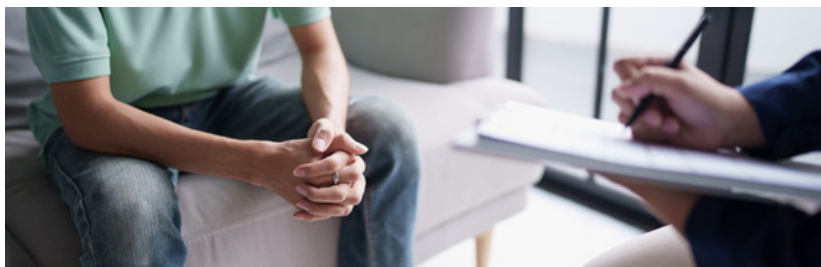
07

Problem Solving

Structured problem-solving and end-of-day to-do lists are simple practices with disproportionately large benefits for mental health. Their value lies in helping the mind complete the day psychologically, rather than carrying unresolved tasks into the evening and night.



Why Problem Solving Matters for Mental Health



01

Reduces mental
load and
rumination

Unfinished tasks tend to stay “active” in the mind, driving worry and mental replay.

Writing them down allows the brain to off-load responsibility onto an external system, reducing rumination and cognitive overload.

02

Improves emotional
regulation and stress
recovery

When tasks are organised and prioritised, the nervous system receives a clear signal that things are contained and manageable. This supports a shift from a stress-driven state into rest and recovery, particularly in the evening.

03

Enhances Sleep
Quality

An organised plan for the next day reduces pre-sleep arousal and worry. Many people find it easier to fall asleep when they know tasks are captured and scheduled, rather than floating unstructured in their thoughts.

Why Problem Solving Matters for Mental Health



04

Increases sense of control and self-efficacy

Structured problem-solving transforms vague stress into specific, actionable steps. This increases a sense of competence and agency, which is protective against anxiety, burnout, and low mood.

05

Prevents overwhelm and decision fatigue

Making decisions at the end of the day (when demands are low) reduces the number of decisions required the next morning, conserving mental energy and improving follow-through.

A Simple End-of-Day Routine (10-15 minutes)

Step 1: Brain dump (3–5 minutes)

Write down:

- Everything still on your mind
- Tasks, worries, reminders, ideas

Do not prioritise yet — just capture.

Step 2: Structured problem-solving (5 minutes). **For each item, decide:**

- **Do:** Can this be done quickly tomorrow?
- **Defer:** Schedule it for a specific time or date
- **Delegate:** Can someone else handle this?
- **Discard:** Is this actually necessary?

This turns mental noise into clear decisions.



Further Problem Solving Strategies

Step 3: Create a Realistic To-Do List (3-5 Minutes)

Choose:

- ✓ 3–5 priority tasks for the next day
- ✓ Include at least one manageable or energising task
- ✓ Keep the list intentionally short — this supports success rather than pressure.

Step 4: Close The Day (1-2 Minutes)

- ✓ Consciously acknowledge:
- ✓ “The day is planned.”
- ✓ “I can return to this tomorrow.”
Then step away from work-related thinking.

Why This Matters

Doing this routine before the evening wind-down:

- ✓ Prevents stress from spilling into personal time
- ✓ Supports psychological closure
- ✓ Improves recovery and sleep
- ✓ Builds long-term stress resilience



Further Problem Solving Strategies

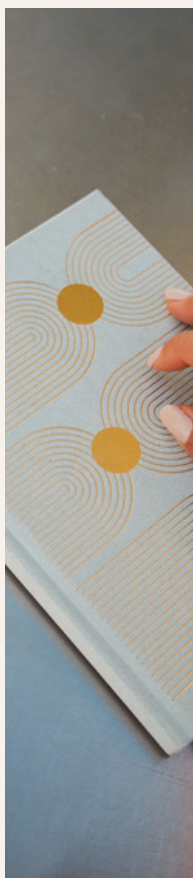
The Bottom Line?

A brief, structured end-of-day planning routine reduces stress by externalising mental load, restoring a sense of control, and allowing the nervous system to stand down.

Over time, this practice supports better mood regulation, clearer thinking, improved sleep, and overall wellbeing — not by doing more, but by ending the day more intentionally.

08

Journalling & Gratitude



Journalling and gratitude are simple, low-cost practices that support mental health by helping the mind process experience, regulate emotion, and notice what is going well, rather than becoming stuck in stress or rumination.





Benefits for Mental Health

Emotional Processing & Clarity

Journalling creates space to:

- ✓ Put thoughts and feelings into words
- ✓ Make sense of experiences
- ✓ Reduce mental clutter
- ✓ This often leads to greater emotional clarity and less internal pressure.

Reduced Rumination & Stress

Writing thoughts down helps interrupt repetitive worry by:

- ✓ Moving concerns out of the mind and onto the page
- ✓ Creating distance from distressing thoughts
- ✓ Many people feel calmer after journalling, even briefly.

Regular journalling increases awareness of:

- ✓ Emotional patterns
- ✓ Triggers and stressors
- ✓ Helpful and unhelpful coping strategies
- ✓ This awareness supports more intentional choices over time.

Together, journalling and gratitude support psychological flexibility, improve tolerance of difficult emotions, and strengthen the ability to hold both challenge and appreciation at once.

Brief Daily Journaling Exercise

✓ A Brief Daily Exercise (5 Minutes)

Once per day, preferably in the evening:

1. Journal (3 minutes)
2. Write freely in response to one prompt:
 - “What’s been on my mind today?”
 - “What felt difficult or important today?”

Don't edit or analyse — just write.

✓ Gratitude (2 Minutes)

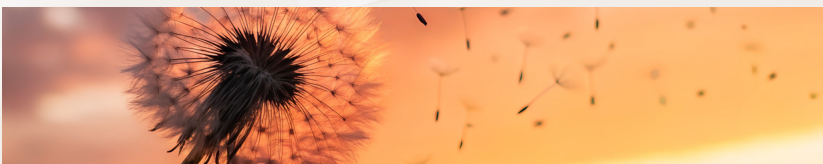
Write down 3 things you appreciated today, however small:

- A moment of calm
- A conversation
- Something you did for yourself

“

Journaling helps you process and understand experience, while gratitude helps you broaden perspective and stabilise mood.

Practised briefly but consistently, these habits can reduce stress, support emotional regulation, and improve overall mental wellbeing over time.



Conclusion & Next Steps

Self-care is not about doing everything perfectly, but about making small, consistent choices that support your nervous system, emotional balance, and long-term wellbeing.

By prioritising sleep, creating supportive daily routines, regulating stress through the body and mind, engaging in regular movement, practising mindfulness, organising mental load, and cultivating reflection and gratitude, you build a stable foundation for resilience and clarity.

Over time, these simple practices strengthen your capacity to cope with challenges, recover from stress, and stay connected to what matters most. When approached with flexibility and self-compassion, self-care becomes a sustainable way of caring for both your mental health and your life as a whole.



For more information, or to book a consultation with Simon, visit Liminal Mind Psychology at the details below.



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