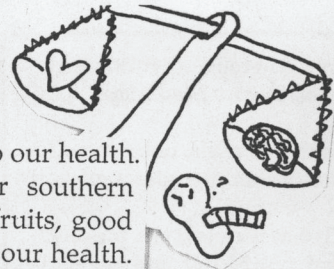


KEEPING BALANCED

We all know diet, exercise and sleep are important to our health. Any good physician, naturopath, psychiatrist, or southern grandma will tell us that eating fresh veggies and fruits, good fats, whole grains, and enough protein is the key to our health. They'll tell us to get at least 30 minutes of exercise a day, and 8 hours of sleep. Then, they may give us a prescription for a drug, homeopathic medicine, or something that may direct our attention away from our lifestyle to the magic potion we're about to possess.



Symptoms can go away if we continue with our regular routine and take the potion, but they're likely to return. I'm not going to write all the things we already know about what we should eat, because it's written, painfully detailed, in so many books available to everyone--some of which are listed in the resources section. But, instead, I'll include some of the things that I find are pretty important to know, and simple to remember.

FOOD

I find that no matter how many times I read about something, or am told something, I will not use that information until I really feel its importance to my survival. I'm asking everyone reading this to sit and think, really try and feel, about food and what food is to us. And then what food does to us, what it gives us, what it takes from us. Think about specific foods, and specific habits. What can be changed about your diet, how you can change it, and what will come from that change? Then think of the first step and take it as soon as possible! Some possible first steps could be:

- Getting a food allergy test, or testing yourself
- Eating something good for you!
- Giving away (or throwing out) food that you feel is hurting your body
- (Making a meal plan, finding recipes or buying ingredients are not first steps.)

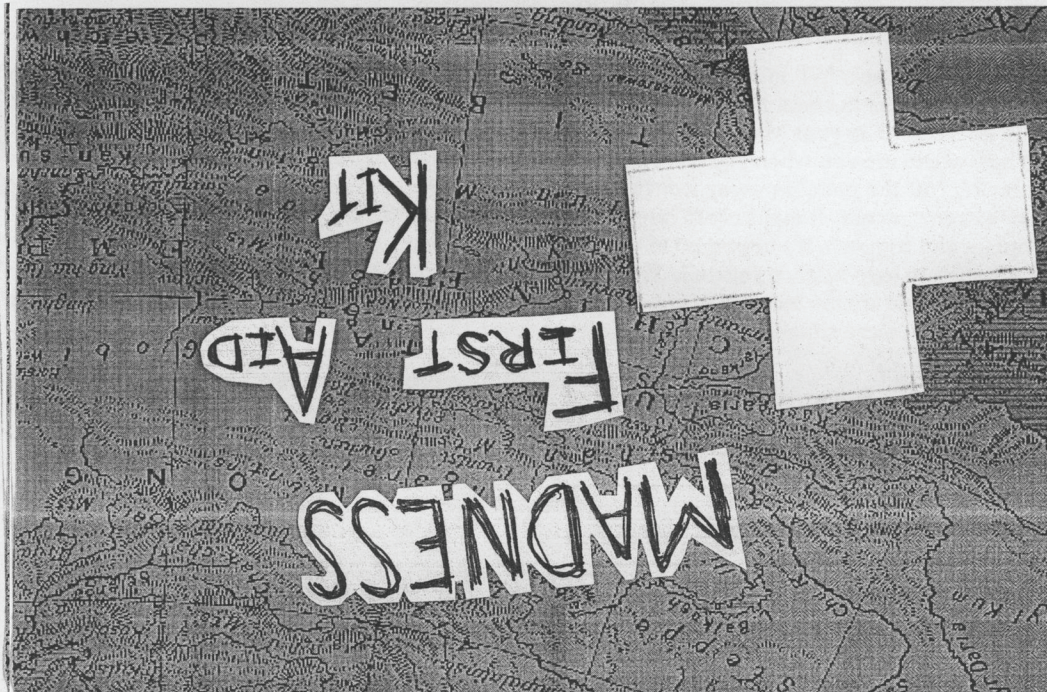
SOME TIPS:

eat a variety of food/don't skip breakfast/eat protein for breakfast/get an allergy test or test yourself/don't kid yourself if you feel something is affecting you negatively/drink water/drink a lot of water/eat fresh as often as possible/hot liquids kill food nutrients in the tummy/try to wake up at the same time each day/whole grains release energy slowly/the more food in your stomach the less blood flow to your brain/some antidepressants can cause a vitamin b6 deficiency, a key vitamin/balancing your blood sugar is balancing your mood.

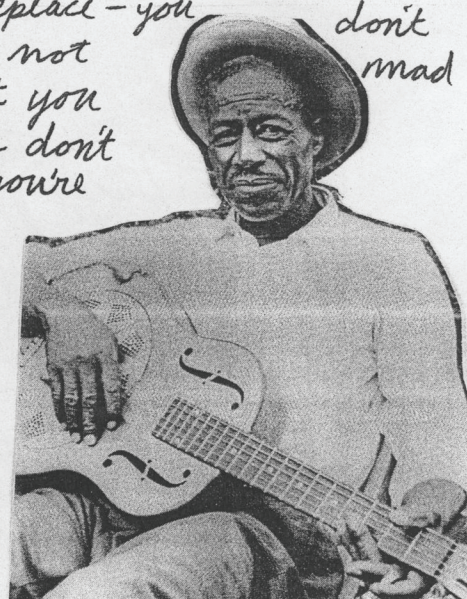


Flaxseed is magical. It's cheap, it doesn't taste that bad, it can be used as an egg replacement, and it's good for both your mind and digestion! Buy it whole and keep it in the refrigerator.

In the morning, grind it up with some water and add it to your oatmeal, pancakes, or just take a flaxseed shot, mmmm....



"you cry and cry alone; you weep alone. you wanna shut up in your room someplace - you don't want no company. you're not with the other people, but you wanna lock your door. you don't wanna hear 'em - it's not you're mad with them. you don't want no company right now. you want to sit down and concentrate in your own mind. you don't want no bothering - even with daddy, sister, mama - nobody. oh I wish they would go away." -Son House



RESOURCES

- Natural Healing for Schizophrenia and Other Common Mental Disorders, Eva Edelman
- The Food-Mood Solution, Jack Challam
- The Food Mood Body Solution, Gary Null
- Yoga for Depression, Amy Weintraub
- Meditation as Medicine, Dharma Singh Khalsa
- Making an Advanced Directive:
<http://www.bazon.org/issues/advanceddirectives/templates.htm>
<http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com/pdfs/crisisplan.pdf>
- The Icarus Project: www.theicarusproject.net
- The Bay Area Radical Mental Health Collective: <http://www.radicalmentalhealth.net/>
- National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-784-2433
- www.MindFreedom.org
- <http://www.mind.org.uk/Information/Booklets/>
- www.psychrights.org
- www.mentalhealthrecovery.com

SLEEP

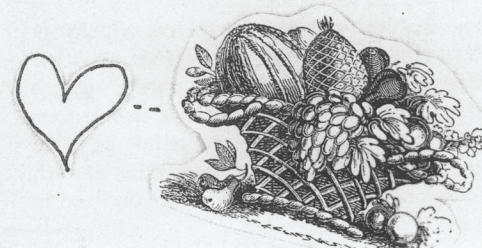
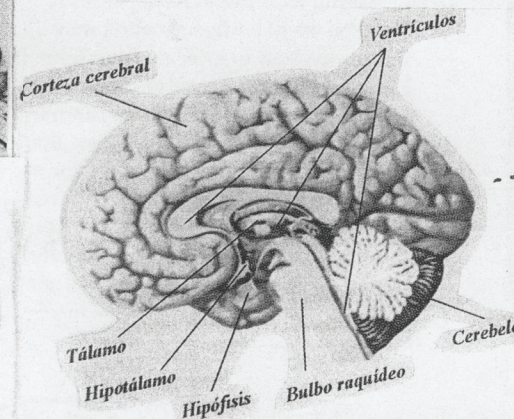
KEEPING BALANCED

Sleep is important; it's your daily mind and body tune-up in a sense. Sleep can sometimes be the one thing needed to get you back to feeling healthy. Sometimes, sleep doesn't seem important compared to the projects and ideas you have, but missing a few nights sleep may make those same projects seem hopeless and impossible two days later. There is no way to catch up on sleep, but there is a way to help you get back to a balanced schedule. Here are some tips:

- Go to sleep at the same time every night
- Have your last meal a few hours before sleeping
- Don't worry about losing sleep; instead, get up and finish something and then try again
- Exercise, but not right before bed

Figure out what helps and hurts your sleeping schedule, how many hours you need to feel healthy, and what remedies work for you when you can't fall asleep. There are many herbs particularly recommended for sleep: valerian, skullcap, passion flower, kava, hops, and ginger are a few known to calm nerves and help with insomnia. Always use caution when taking herbs or nutritional supplements.

Finally, make sure there are no other underlying injuries or illnesses wrecking havoc on your body. This includes allergic reactions, which can become quite serious and even be mistaken as certain mental disorders. Listen to your body; is your digestive system functioning properly? Are you constantly coughing? Sneezing? Stopping whatever you're doing because of an awful pain in your back? Attend to any injuries and illnesses you think you may have with whatever resources you have as soon as you can. You never know what you may fix by eating fresh vegetables and fruit!



Here's the deal on the mood and brain and food connection: The brain makes neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Neurotransmitters are the messengers of the brain and regulate many things such as alertness, relaxation, and concentration. Amino acids, vitamins and minerals (all of which are nutrients) are the ingredients for neurotransmitters, and if the brain doesn't receive these ingredients, it can't make the neurotransmitters. On a larger level, protein helps produce dopamine and norepinephrine, which can increase alertness and concentration; carbohydrates produce serotonin, which can increase calmness and relaxation.

On the outside, or somewhere prominent and visible when opening your kit, write down a checklist of basic health and environment considerations. Using your mad map, pull together ten or so of things that you tend to overlook, or things that can be done to help stabilize you—even if it's just your blood sugar. This checklist can also serve as a checklist of how to use your kit, if you think a specific routine will help. Include your medication schedule if you have one. Here's an example: 1. Have you eaten? Eat a blood-sugar stabilizer (protein/fat combination). 2. Have you slept? Prepare valerian root tea. 3. Have you had coffee lately? etc...

CHECK-LIST

A Mad Map is the instruction manual to your mind, focusing on the rougher territories. It can be anything—a list, a diagram, even a real map—anything that can clearly communicate to you when you are in crisis. Keeping a journal can help bring to light some of things that should be included in your Mad Map.

Here's a list of things that should be included in your Mad Map:

- Description of the territory: What/where are you when you feel balanced and healthy? What/where are you when you feel unhealthy, in crisis, unbalanced?
- Warning signs that you are straying "off the path," or away from your balanced self: This can include descriptions of usual behavior that precedes a crisis, whether it's severe depression or extreme mania. It may help to categorize these signs on different levels.
- What leads you off the path: causes and triggers. It's important to write down what are the potential triggers of your imbalance(s), that way you can prevent further damage or adjust your situation to help balance yourself. Triggers can be verbal, physical, environmental, emotional, spiritual, nutritional, and more.
- Directions: When you're astray, directions are the most beneficial thing to have. When you get through a crisis, write down what you did, that way you can do it again if you ever find yourself in the same situation. Also include what doesn't help you get back to being balanced—that way you won't make the same mistake.

MAD MAP & ADVANCE

A psychiatric Advance Directive is a Living Will for crisis situations, and can be your only voice if you lose complete control of expressing yourself. It's similar to a Mad Map but more formal, and should be signed by a witness and given to people who you would want to be informed of your wishes in a severe crisis situation. A few versions are available online, and I list two in the resources section.

DIRECTIVE

JOURNAL

If you can, try and write down your mind during a crisis and after. Write down thoughts, emotions, events, plans, physical symptoms, images, everything. Later, when the crisis has passed you may be able to figure out what caused it, or at least some factors leading up to it. By reading over this timeline of feelings and thoughts you may be able to bypass certain pitfalls the next time around, because you know what comes next. These writings can be transcribed into your Mad Map. Writing can be a process of discovery if you let it. Translating feelings into words can make it easier to connect everything together, and to understand your own language in how you describe yourself in the world.

THE CONTAINER

Where you should store all this stuff depends on what you want to store and what you have. Any box will do, but having four pieces of paper and some tea in a huge shoebox may depress you to look at. Searching through piles of unorganized scraps and items in a small coffee can may make your kit more of a hassle than a help. I use a flat, wide box, for my papers and letters, and a small treasure box, like the illustration, for my other items. Whatever you use, decorate it and make it personal, and keep it somewhere easily accessible.



HERBS, OILS, TEAS, ETC.

Any regimen, whether it's medication, herbs, vitamin supplements, yoga or acupuncture, should be regularly maintained (or carefully removed) to avoid huge swings in mood and mind. Keeping herbs, teas, oils, and nutritional supplements in your kit can be very helpful in giving you something to do and keeping you within your body during crisis situations. Making a cup of tea can be an extremely empowering activity if it seemed impossible to get out of bed ten minutes earlier. Or having a nutritional bar, or vitamins, ready to re-supply an undernourished brain and body can be helpful when there are people in the kitchen you just don't feel like seeing.

DEPRESSION

JUMP-START

There are tons of books and people out there that can tell you what to do when depression paralyzes you to the point of not being able to move. They are readily available at libraries, book stores, and clinics. Some will suggest drugs, some suggest yoga, some acceptance and some coffee. For me, a combination of breathing, acceptance, observance and actually embracing the depression help to at least let me feel some form of beauty while stagnant in bed. I've found that, though I have an abundant amount of energy to create when filled with "mania," my senses are more keen and receptive, open like a wound when I am filled with "depression." And I've learned to embrace these moments as beautiful and, thankfully, impermanent moments, which makes it a lot easier for me to appreciate them. But, that is what helps me during paralysis. Why am I telling you this? Because your kit can't really be used if there's no motivation to use it. And sometimes, the fact that it may be stored in a closet, which is on the other side of a cold room, makes it seem impossible to even reach. So a depression jump start needs to be something readily available, whether it's a known process you can access in your memory, written sentence on your wall next to your bed as a memory trigger, tattoo, or written list kept stuffed in your pillow. But what that process is, you must figure out. Keeping a journal of your moments of crisis may help.

"Take a small step, even if it's imperceptible to anyone around you. Your first small step may simply be that you sit up in bed instead of lying down. Your next small step may simply be inhaling deeply through your nostrils, holding the breath for a moment, then exhaling. Maybe you'll do that five times, maybe twenty. Notice how you feel. You might just have mustered enough energy to climb out of bed." -Amy Weintraub, Yoga for Depression

PLACES

Put a list of places that you enjoy being in your kit, along with pictures, directions, maps and reasons why you like being at each place. Try to include at least one place that inspires you, one place that calms you and one place that reminds you of the beauty in being alive and who you are. You can also include directions to places you haven't been before if you think you would react well to them. The idea is to take you into another place, which can take you into another perspective. Another important reason for changing places during stagnant depression is that it gets you moving. Be sure to detail possible problems that you may encounter at each location so you can avoid what you need to avoid.

INSPIRATIONS

Anything that inspires you, reminds you of beauty, or reminds you of your own beauty should be kept in your kit. Photographs, books, scraps of writing, quotes, music, paintings, movies, and a list of goals you have, or projects you're working on. Though you should probably have all your art supplies out and around your living space, you can keep some small reminding tools in your kit. It can be depressing to read a list of plans that haven't been accomplished, so be sure to include goals already completed and things you're proud of. I usually keep a few things that remind me to appreciate depression and the beauty of being open to what's around me. The idea is to motivate you to work on something, or gain something from your current crisis. Most importantly, these should remind you of how beautiful you are and the world can be, and how the two connect through you doing the things you love to do.

LETTERS

Keep a few stamped envelopes in your kit, addressed to people that you've been meaning to write and/or to friends you feel comfortable writing anything to. The idea is to connect and communicate with those in your support system and other people in general. Not everyone will always be available to talk to, this way you can collect your thoughts and give a gift at the same time...everyone likes to receive a letter.

