

Practical tipsheet

bounce forward

How to fuel your brain for resilience



oranges
toolkit

Resilience and agility at work

www.theorangestoolkit.com.au

About this tipsheet

At The Oranges Toolkit, we strongly believe in the power of self-awareness. When you understand yourself and how your brain and body works, you can choose intentional activities to support your wellbeing and that of others.

This tipsheet features some brief insights into how the human brain works and what you can do to refuel your brain to help you to adapt to and embrace the changes occurring in our fast-paced world. We encourage you to share this resource with others. If you're interested in other practical tools or wellbeing training programs for you and your workplace, please get in touch.

What is resilience?

Resilience is commonly defined as 'the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties' – often described as 'bouncing back'. At The Oranges Toolkit, we think of resilience as our ability to 'bounce forward' from the challenges, difficulties and changes we face. In our definition of resilience, we not only recover from the difficulties we face, but we also learn and grow from them.



Resilience levels can go up and down

Resilience is essential to managing heightened physiological and emotional states, but it can be hard to know when your resilience reserves are low or depleted.

In challenging times and when dealing with volatility and uncertainty, levels of stress and anxiety can increase and we can react in unpredictable ways. This is why it's important to take everyday steps to ensure your resilience reserves are well-fuelled.

Many of us will refuel our resilience levels naturally by living a healthy lifestyle and maintaining balance, but when we are busy and there are a lot of changes happening around us, it's easy to let self-care and healthy habits slip.

The important thing is to get your habits back on track proactively as soon as you're aware your resilience reserves are getting low.



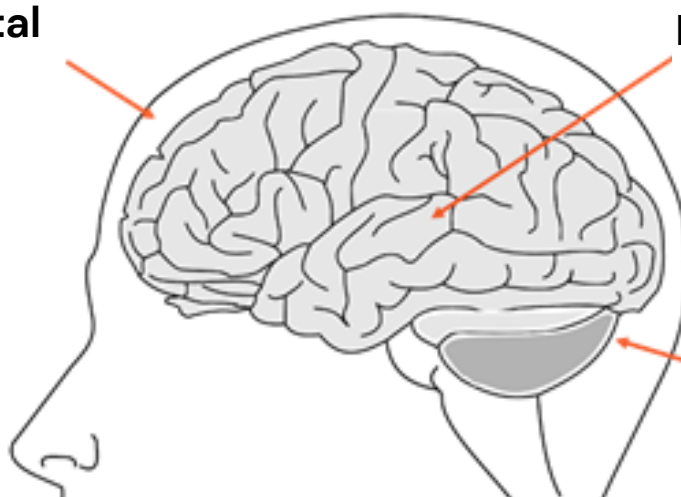
Your brain needs fuel for resilience

Anybody with a mobile phone will know it needs to be recharged to function. The brain is the same – it needs fuel for optimal performance, resilience and emotional agility.

Understanding some of the key regions of the brain, how they function, and how they are fuelled, can go a long way towards creating habits that support positive wellbeing.

the 3 main parts of our brain

Pre-Frontal Cortex



Limbic system

Reptilian brain

Neuroscience suggests that each part of the brain plays a role in how we respond to changes around us. Every part of our brain requires fuel to function well.

The oldest region of the brain is commonly known as the reptilian brain. This is the primary driver of our three basic survival needs – eating, sleeping, and reproducing. This part of the brain requires the least fuel to operate.

The limbic system is mainly responsible for our emotions, our memory and habits.

Within this region there are two almond-shaped structures called the amygdala, which governs our emotions, detects potential dangers and alerts us to changes in our environment.

The limbic system is automatic and very efficient. However, sometimes when our brain fuel levels are low, or we experience heightened stress, our amygdala can take over and we can behave in less rational ways – known as an 'amygdala hijack'.

The Pre-Frontal Cortex needs lots of fuel to support your resilience

The last part of the human brain to evolve is called the pre-frontal cortex, or PFC. The PFC is mainly responsible for our executive functioning, strategic planning, problem-solving, decision making, paying attention, regulating our emotions and supporting our creativity and empathy. We can think about this part of the brain as being our emotional filter. The PFC requires a lot of fuel to function at its best – and is the part that supports our resilience the most.



When we are lacking fuel, our brain reverts to the more energy-efficient, limbic system. This is why we may end up making decisions that are highly emotional, rather than well-considered.

Types of fuel to power resilience

To demonstrate optimal mental agility, all three parts of your brain need to be fuelled, but the PFC has the biggest role to play in powering our resilience and optimal performance. There are two types of fuel for our PFC – glucose and dopamine.

glucose

Glucose is the main type of sugar in our blood, delivering energy to our cells.

We get glucose from the food we eat.

dopamine

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter – it passes messages from one nerve, pathway or cell to another.

We get dopamine from:

- Eating healthy food
- Sleeping well
- Exercising
- Experiencing positive emotions

Dopamine is actually on a seesaw with the stress hormone, cortisol. Therefore, when you are highly stressed, it is likely you have high cortisol levels and lower dopamine. This can make us become a little snappy when we're under pressure. One way to manage stress and its influence on our behaviour is to intentionally increase our dopamine levels by experiencing positive emotions.

practical tips to fuel your brain for resilience

5 ways to fuel your brain with glucose



Eat low GI (glycemic index) food to sustain your energy levels for longer throughout the day, especially when you're busy. e.g.

- Oats with berries for breakfast
- Wholemeal grains, protein & salad for lunch
- Fish or lentils with veggies for dinner



Prepare snacks in advance, ready for when you notice your energy levels dropping. Nuts, chopped fruit, veggie sticks are healthy choices.



Eat high-glucose sweet treats in moderation – a couple of squares of chocolate or a muffin, every now and then.



Plan ahead and do your meal preparation in advance – even one or two days ahead of time will help you make healthy and sustaining meal choices when you're busy.



Eat regularly to keep your fuel reserves up – 3 main meals and a couple of snacks is great way to keep energy going to your brain and body throughout the day.

5 ways to fuel your brain with dopamine



A healthy and balanced Mediterranean-style diet supports dopamine production – a mix of fish, lean meats, vegetables, legumes and healthy fats.



Call someone you care about, just for a chat. Connecting emotionally, rather than just for transacting information, creates positive emotions.



Aim for 7-8 hours sleep per night – you may need to set an alarm to go to bed!



Say thanks to someone, explaining why you're grateful – perhaps even do a random act of kindness to show your appreciation. The giver and receiver will benefit emotionally.



Find a way to build in at least 20 minutes of moderate exercise into each day – perhaps take a walking meeting, get off the train or bus earlier and walk the rest of the way, or do some fun dance breaks during the day. This small amount of exercise has been shown to boost moods for up to 12 hours.



Support kids facing cancer in Australia

The Oranges Toolkit is Camp Quality's social enterprise and a certified Social Trader. We support Camp Quality to give kids facing cancer the chance to be kids again through the wonderful programs they deliver in hospitals, online, at schools and at camps.

want more wellbeing tips or training?

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