

# The Healthy Mind Platter



*The Healthy Mind Platter, for Optimal Brain Matter*

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## ***Seven Daily Essential Mental Activities to Optimise Brain Matter & Create Wellbeing***

**Sleep Time:** *When we give the brain the rest it needs to consolidate learning & recover from the experiences of the day.*

**Physical Time:** *When we move our bodies, aerobically if medically possible, which strengthens the brain in many ways.*

**Focus Time:** *When we closely focus on tasks in a goal-oriented way, taking on challenges that make deep connections in the brain.*

**Time In:** *When we quietly reflect internally, focusing on sensations, images, feelings & thoughts, helping to better integrate the brain.*

**Down Time:** *When we are non-focused, without any specific goal, & let our mind wander or simply relax, which helps the brain recharge.*

**Play Time:** *When we allow ourselves to be spontaneous or creative, playfully enjoying novel experiences, which helps make new connections in the brain.*

**Connecting Time:** *When we connect with other people, ideally in person, &/or take time to appreciate our connection to the natural world around us, richly activating the brain's relational circuitry.*

## ***The Healthy Mind Platter: Overview***

With an obesity epidemic, attention to healthy eating choices & habits is critical & will encourage people to be aware of how they compose their day's food intake. We need to pay close attention to establish & maintain **physical** health. Our mind is embodied in our extended neural circuitry & embedded in our connections to others & the way we relate to our world. We also need to pay careful attention to establish & maintain **mental** health. Even for individuals in stable environments, modern life is filled with an overwhelming focus on the outer world & we can experience being isolated from meaningful connections with others. Multi-tasking, with its fragmented attention & the sense of becoming overwhelmed with information overload, frequently fractures a sense of wholeness. With negative conditions like these, the embodied & socially embedded requirements for a healthy mind are not being created in daily life. Many people neglect a daily regimen necessary for mental wellbeing.

So what would be included in a *healthy mind platter*? A belief about the mind proposes that a healthy mind emerges from a process called **integration**; the linkage of different components of a system. That system can be, for example, the body as we connect upper & lower regions to one another. Integration can also include how we connect with others in a family or a community, honouring differences & promoting compassionate linkages with each other. If we embrace interpersonal neurobiology's proposed definition of a key facet of mind as an embodied & relationally embedded process that regulates energy & information flow, how can we take a practical approach to mental habits that can help people with their diet of *daily essential mental nutrients*? How can we use the focus of attention to strengthen integration in our bodies & in our relationships on a daily basis? What would the fundamental components of such a health-promoting daily regimen of mental activities look like?

To address these questions, Rock & Siegel created *The Healthy Mind Platter*. Here's a description of the elements for a healthy mind & personal wellbeing.

***The Healthy Mind Platter*** has seven daily essential mental activities necessary for optimum mental health. These seven daily activities make up the full set of *mental nutrients* that your brain & relationships need to function at their best. By engaging every day in each of these servings, you promote integration in your life & enable your brain to coordinate & balance its activities. These essential mental activities strengthen your brain's internal connections & your connections with other people & the world around you.

We're not suggesting specific amounts of time for this recipe for a healthy mind, as each individual is different & our needs change over time too. The point is to become aware of the full spectrum of essential mental activities, & as with essential nutrients, make sure that at least every day we are bringing the right ingredients into our mental diet, even if for just a bit of time. Just as you wouldn't eat only pizza every day for weeks on end, we shouldn't simply live on *focus time* alone with little attention *sleep time*. The key is **balancing** the day with each of these essential mental activities. Mental wellness is all about reinforcing our connections with others & the world around us; & it is also about strengthening the connections within the brain itself. When we vary the focus of attention with this spectrum of mental activities, we give the brain lots of opportunities to develop in different ways.

One way to use the platter idea is to map out an average day & see what amounts of time you spend (or **could** spend) in each essential mental activity. Like a balanced diet, there are many combinations that can work well.

It is important to eat well, & we applaud a healthy eating plate. As a society we are sorely lacking in good information about what it takes to have a healthy mind. Since the mind is both embodied & embedded in our connections with others & our environment—both natural & cultural—these seven essential times help strengthen our internal & relational connections, & since the brain is continually changing in response to how we focus attention, we can use our awareness in ways that involve the body & our connections to create a healthy mind across the lifespan. We hope that *The Healthy Mind Platter* creates an appetite for increasing awareness of how to **nourish** your mental wellbeing each day too!

*(Adapted from: Dr. David Rock, Exec Director of NeuroLeadership Institute, & Dr. Dan Siegel M.D., Exec Director of Mindsight Institute & Clinical Prof at UCLA Sch of Medicine)*

### **Notes to self:**

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