Student Wellbeing
UniSport Australia

Dr Megan Lee
Bond University
Senior Teaching Fellow
Department of Psychology

Website
www.meganlovingmeagain.com

Twitter
@MeganLeePhD

Instagram & Facebook
@ MeganLovingMeAgain

Student Wellbeing

- What is wellbeing?
- Important elements of wellbeing.
- Biological mechanisms of wellbeing.
- What this all means for student wellbeing.
- Student wellbeing and sport.

What is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing

Three dimensions of wellbeing:

- Eudaimonic wellbeing– The degree to which someone experiences joy, fulfillment & contentment.
- Hedonic Wellbeing – The pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain.
- Life Satisfaction – The degree to which someone is satisfied with life as it is.

Positive Wellbeing

- Self-acceptance: liking most parts of oneself.
- Personal growth: seeing oneself as developing into a better person; insight into own potential.
- Purpose in life: sense of direction & meaning.
- Environmental mastery: controlling environmental stimuli to meet needs.
- Autonomy: self-determination; guided by values and standards.
- Positive relations with others: warm and trusting relationships.

Social Wellbeing

Social Coherence: society seen as meaningful & understandable.

Social Actualisation: society possesses potential for growth.

Social Acceptance: positive attitude to society, accepting of differences.

Social Integration: inclusiveness, sense of belonging to & being supported by a community.

Social Contribution: a meaningful contribution to society; sees activities as useful and valued.

Flourishing

A state of positive mental health .

To thrive.

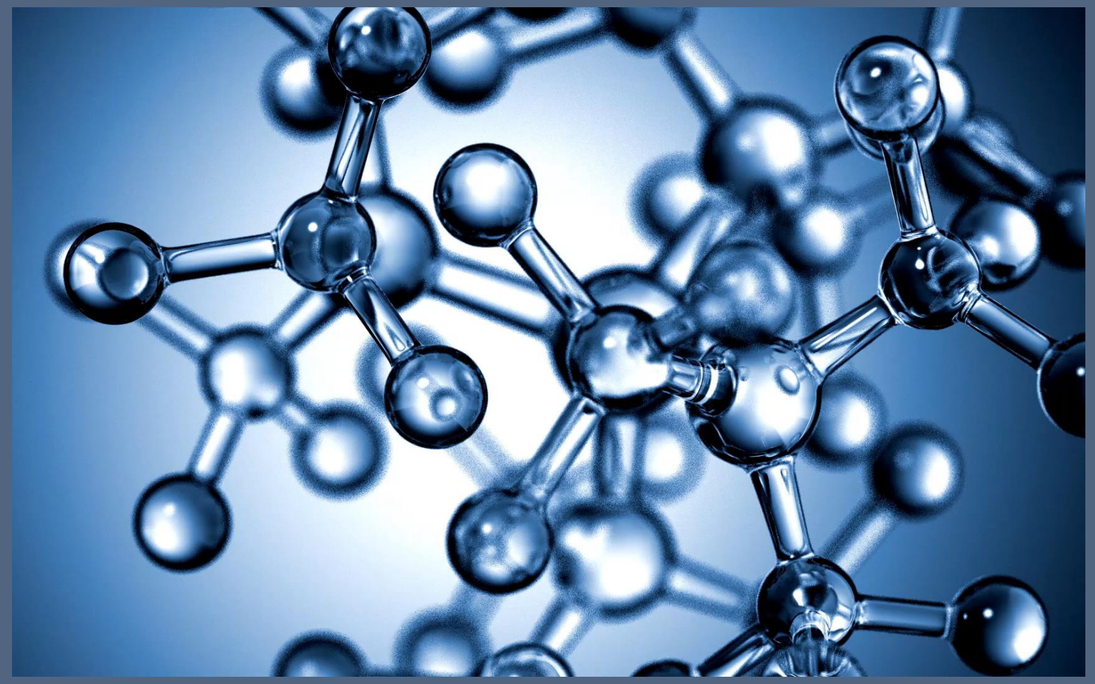
To prosper.

To fare well in endeavours.

Filled with emotional vitality.

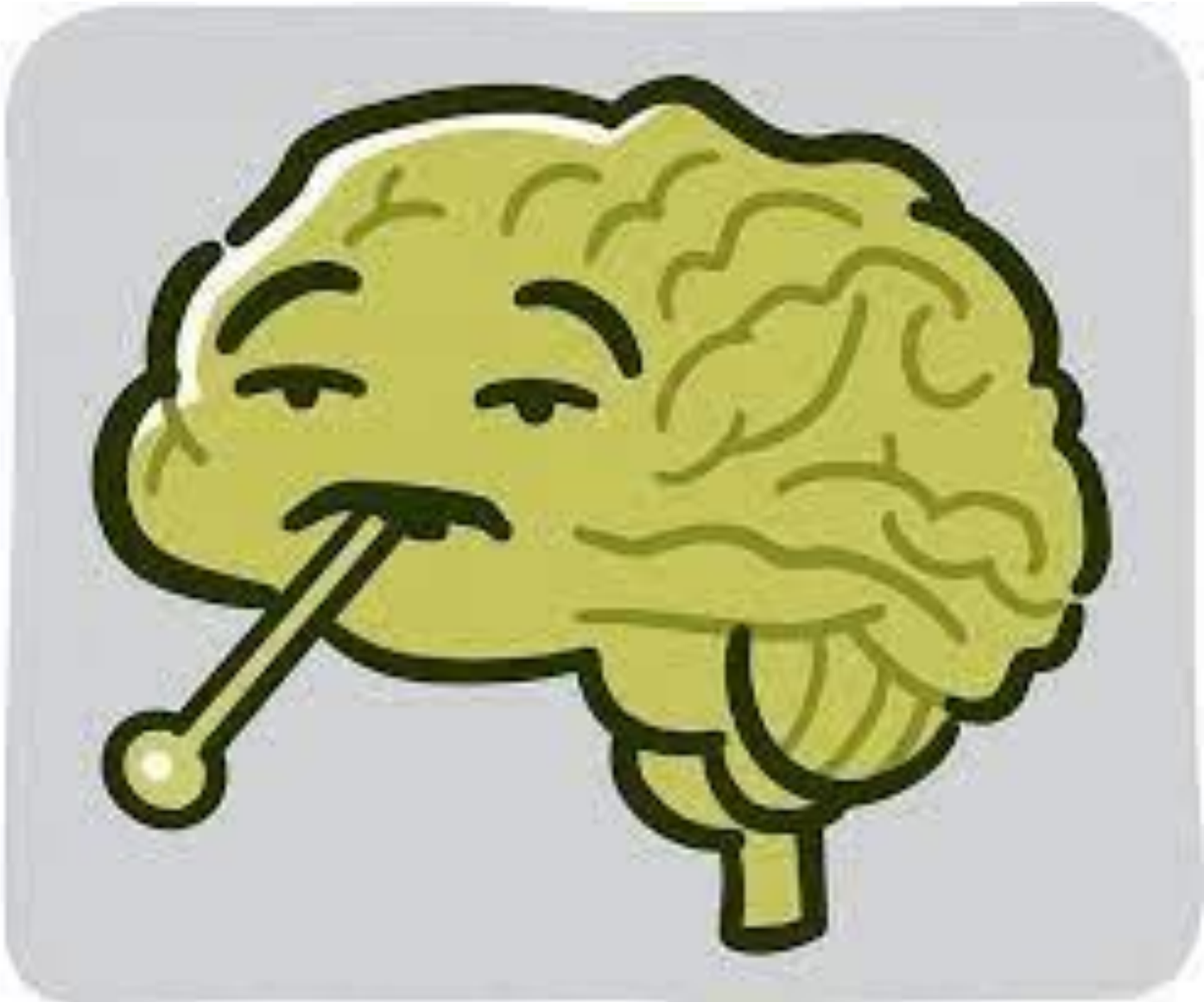
Functioning positively in private and social realms.

Biological Mechanisms Related to Wellbeing



Inflammation

- Inflammation is an important part of our bodies protective system when we get unwell.
- Cytokines rush to an area of injury or sickness and clean the area to remove the invading germs.
- But cytokines leave behind oxidative waste.
- CHRONIC inflammation is bad news for our bodies where we are constantly in a state of inflammation and always have oxidative waste in our system.
- Chronic inflammation impacts the body, brain, mood and wellbeing.

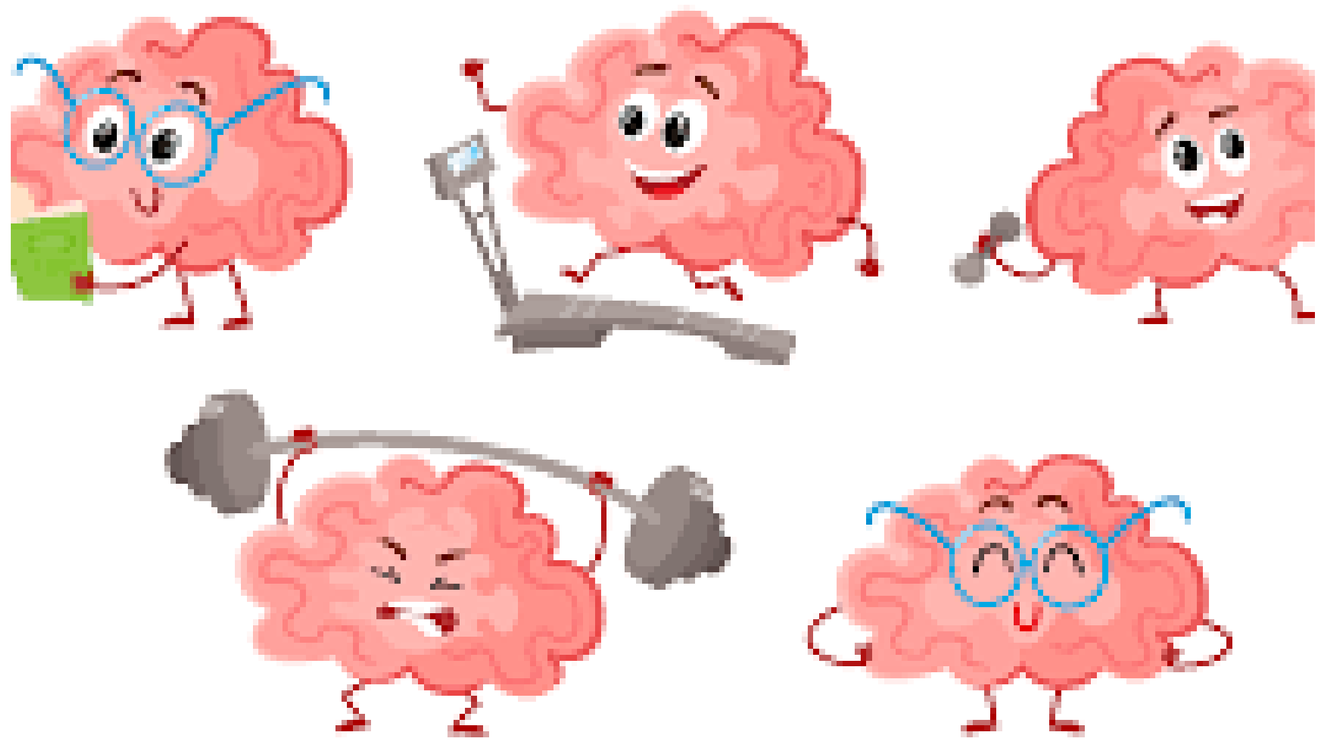


Gut Brain Axis

- The gut is considered our second brain.
- 90% of feel-good chemicals like serotonin are produced in our gut.
- The gut microbiome is a living environment of good and bad bacteria that live in our bodies mainly in our intestines.
- We are more bacteria than human as 99% of our makeup is bacteria.
- Th gut and the brain are connected and speak to each other.
- When the good and bad bacteria in our gut is unbalanced this can impact our wellbeing.

Neurogenesis

- The process where new neurons and connections are made in our brain.
- Stress produces cortisol and constant exposure to cortisol causes neurons to die and shrinks the hippocampus.
- Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF) helps neurons to grow and survive and protects the hippocampus.
- Insufficient BDNF in your system can lead to lower mood and negative mental health.



Diet and Wellbeing

- A diet rich in fresh, whole foods such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains, and water increase wellbeing.
- A diet high in ultra-processed, refined and sugary foods and drinks decreases wellbeing.
- Only 5% of the population eat the recommended 2 fruit and 5 vegetables per day.
- Aim to eat more than 30 **different** types of plants each week for optimal physical and mental health.

Diet and Wellbeing

A diet high in dietary fibre (mostly in plant foods):

- Decreases inflammation.
- Increases the diversity of gut bacteria.
- Increases BDNF and therefore promotes neurogenesis and protects the shrinking of the hippocampus.

Physical Activity and Wellbeing

- A physically active lifestyle increases wellbeing.
- A sedentary lifestyle decreases wellbeing.
- Incidental physical activity is often more effective than structured exercise we force ourselves to complete.

Physical Activity and Wellbeing

Moderate physical activity for more than 30 minutes each day:

- Decreases inflammation.
- Increases gut motility (food moving through the gut).
- Increases BDNF and therefore promotes neurogenesis and protects the shrinking of the hippocampus.

Sleeping Patterns and Wellbeing

- Sleeping in line with our circadian rhythms increases wellbeing.
- Ignoring our circadian rhythms (like working night shift) decreases our wellbeing.
- < 7 hours and > 10 hours of sleep per day increases mortality and illness.
- Good sleep hygiene increases our wellbeing.
    - Going to bed at the same time each night.
    - Sleep in a very dark and cool room.
    - Dimming house lights before bed.
    - Eliminating white light before bed.

Sleeping Patterns and Wellbeing

Getting enough sleep:

- Decreases inflammation.
- Improves gut health.
- Increases BDNF and therefore promotes neurogenesis and protects the shrinking of the hippocampus.

Sunlight Exposure and Wellbeing

- Getting 20 minutes of early morning and late afternoon sun increases wellbeing.
- Vitamin D is absorbed through the skin by the sun and is very important to get every day.
- Australians are so sun smart that we are now facing national Vitamin D deficiencies.
- Although we should try and avoid direct sunlight exposure in the peak hours of the day.
- Getting sunlight exposure directly into our eyeballs first thing in the morning helps to set your circadian rhythms for the day.

Sunlight Exposure and Wellbeing

Getting enough morning/afternoon sun:

- Decreases inflammation.
- Improves gut health.
- Increases BDNF and therefore promotes neurogenesis and protects the shrinking of the hippocampus.

Social Connectedness and Wellbeing

- One of the best ways to increase positive wellbeing is through being socially connected.
- Social isolation decreases wellbeing.

- Make plans.
- Connect with friends & family.
- Help others.
- Meet new people.
- Join a community.

Social Connection and Wellbeing

Increasing social connection

- Decreases inflammation.
- Increases BDNF and therefore promotes neurogenesis and protects the shrinking of the hippocampus.

- You’re starting to get the idea ☺

Alcohol, Drug Use and Wellbeing

- Moderating alcohol and drug use increases wellbeing.
- Excessive alcohol and drug use decreases wellbeing.

But ……

- How do we define moderation and excessive use?

Alcohol, Drug Use and Wellbeing

Alcohol and drug ingestion:

- Increases inflammation.
- Decreases good gut bacteria.
- Decreases BDNF and therefore neuron death and shrinking of the hippocampus.

Student Wellbeing and Sport: Tying this Altogether

Student Wellbeing and Sport

- We know that all these areas of wellbeing do not work by themselves they work in concert with each other.
- These habits stack on each other – Involvement in sport (physical activity) increases the chance of eating healthy, getting better sleep, being more socially connected, and reducing alcohol and drug use.
- It is also important to think about how we can increase student wellbeing by promoting better habits in the other wellbeing areas outside of sport involvement.
- Other things to be mindful of in this age group are students who become to health or body image focused and this can come hand in hand with sport involvement.
  - Orthorexia.
  - Disordered eating.
  - Social comparison.
  - Body dysmorphia – looks different for boys and girls

Questions?

Dr Megan Lee
Bond University
Senior Teaching Fellow
Department of Psychology

Website
www.meganlovingmeagain.com

Twitter
@MeganLeePhD

Instagram & Facebook
@ MeganLovingMeAgain