Growing Positive Emotions

1. Understanding Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity is our brain's ability to change its internal structure based on our life experiences, emotions, and thoughts. Our brains can evolve specifically based on what we encounter or do! Every activity we engage in, each thought we entertain, or the emotion we experience has the power to mold our brains. The more we do activities, have thoughts, or experience emotions the easier they are to have or do.

This is how neuroplasticity works. You can think of it like carving new trails in a forest - the more we revisit this trail (or practice an activity), the more defined and easier to navigate it becomes.

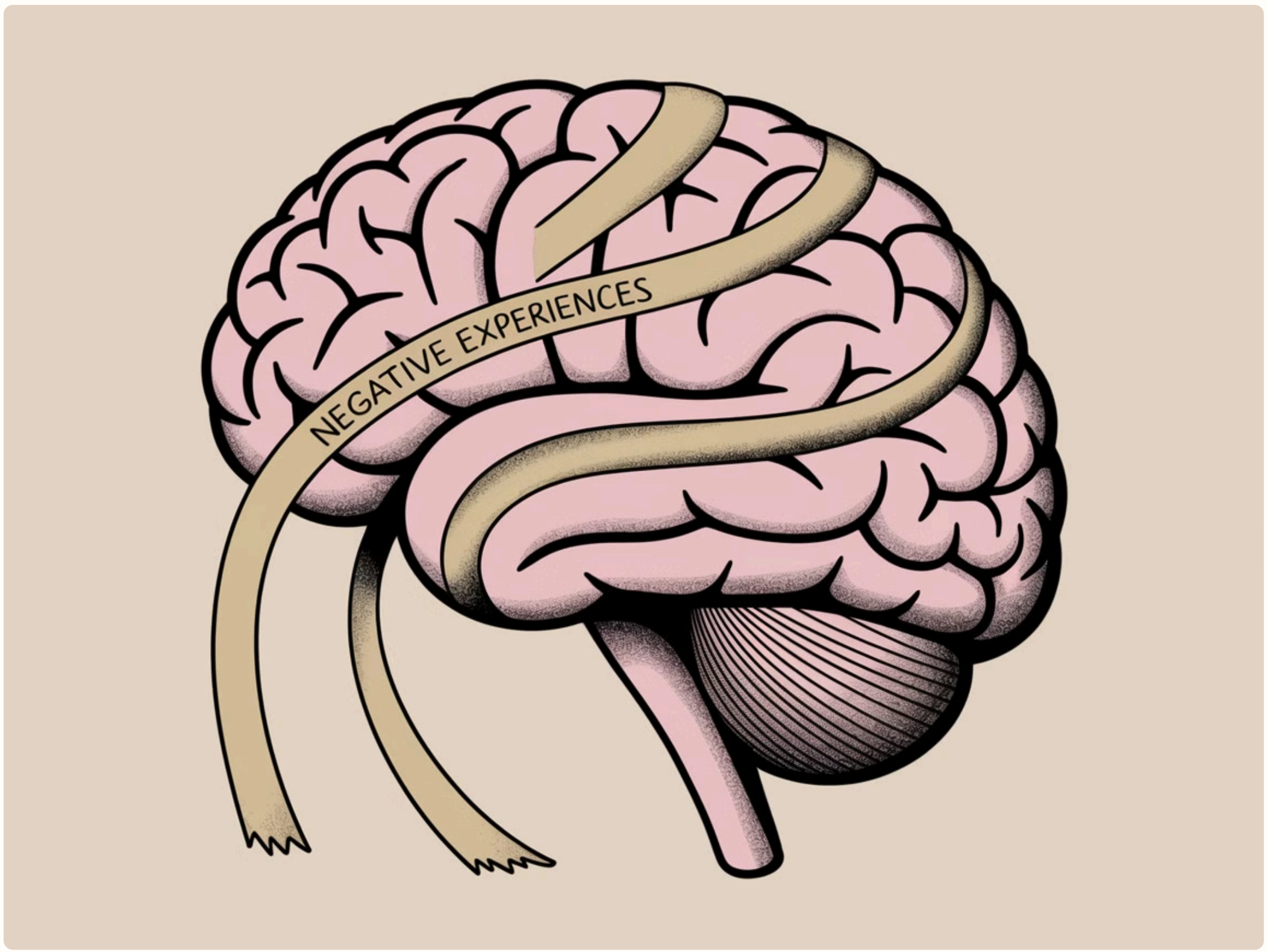


The discovery of Neuroplasticity gave hope to medical professionals helping patients recover from physical brain challenges and therapists aiming to facilitate emotional and psychological healing. This is why we know you **can** replace **old habits** with **new ones** or **old coping skills** with **new ones.** The malleable nature of our brains means that we can continually learn, enhance our skills, and embrace healing at any age or stage in life.

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2. The Negativity Bias

We've talked about how ADHD brains cling to negative experiences, like velcro, while letting positive ones slide away as if coated in teflon.



In fact, all brains have this tendency; it's just a little more pronounced in ADHD brains. This is a survival mechanism from our ancestors' times. **Remembering threats was crucial for survival.** This is known as the **"negativity bias."**

This is where **Neuroplasticity** comes into play. Just as we can shape our brains to learn new skills, we can also train them to hold onto positive experiences more strongly - transforming our brains from teflon to velcro for positivity. Neuroscience shows this is possible. Techniques like **savoring** positive experiences, **mindfulness** practices, and **gratitude** can build up positive neural pathways. When we intentionally take time to enjoy and reflect on good moments, our brains start to register and remember these experiences more readily.

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📍Reflections

Instructions: Reflect on what stood out to you. Write as little or as much as you like!

1. What's One Thing That Surprised You About Neuroplasticity? 💡 Maybe you didn't realize your brain was this flexible, or that your habits are shaping it every day! ✍️

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2. What's One Idea That Feels Encouraging or Interesting? 💡 Did something give you hope or make you curious? ✍️

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3. What's One Thought, Emotion, or Habit You Noticed More After Reading?

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In this module, we'll dive into these strategies and help our brains welcome positivity more naturally.

Let's start with our first strategy, gratitude

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Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria

Many women with ADHD suffer from rejection sensitivity dysphoria or RSD; being sensitive to rejection has its basis in **registering and reacting to threats from other people** or **your own thoughts about your ability or worth.**



This is a coping skill valuable for survival as a child in an environment where lots of criticism exists!

It may be less beneficial as you get older. RSD might lead to unnecessary emotional, physical, and psychological distress.

📍Reflections

1. Do you have RSD?✍️

2. Have you ever thought of it as a survival skill?✍️

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Gratitude Benefits



Promotes Safety and Reduces RSD

Gratitude, **recognizing and appreciating the good in our lives,** offers a powerful **antidote to this conditioned fear response.** Practicing gratitude can **help your brain relax and feel safe.** The safer you feel, the less likely you are to perceive and react to threats when you don't need to.



Enhances Mental Health

Gratitude significantly influences mental health by helping manage anxiety and shifting focus away from worries. It acts as a natural mood enhancer by stimulating **dopamine** and **serotonin** production - crucial neurotransmitters for mood regulation.

- [ ] Gratitude also promotes happiness by fostering **contentment,** leading to increased positivity and resilience.
- [ ] It serves as a **buffer against negativity,** contributing to a more optimistic mindset.

Scientific studies have provided evidence to support the healing powers of gratitude that are uniquely suited to balance out some of the stress of being an ADHD woman in this world. *A 2016 pilot study revealed that* ***keeping a gratitude journal for two months reduced patients' inflammation markers and increased heart rate variability (HRV).*** *This is particularly significant for ADHD women, as adhd is often associated with* ***increased inflammation, high blood pressure, and decreased HRV.***

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How should you express gratitude ?

- **Recognize the Benefits:** Gratitude is about noticing both big and small gifts—kindness from others, your health, your job, or everyday comforts.
- **Appreciate the Present:** It means recognizing when you have enough and finding contentment in what you already have.
- **Express Gratitude Broadly:** You can be grateful for anything—people, animals, nature, even yourself.
- **Find Gratitude in Adversity:** True gratitude includes appreciating challenges, recognizing the growth, strength, or unexpected benefits they bring.
- **Acknowledge Spiritual and Social Gifts:** Many express gratitude to a higher power or the universe, often appreciating nature as a spiritual gift. Gratitude for relationships—family, friends, mentors, and community—deepens connections and enhances well-being.



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How to Practice Gratitude

Three Good Things

Write 3 things.

Each day, write down three things that went well or made you feel good and why they happened. Writing them down creates a lasting record and strengthens the positive impact. Your list can include small moments or big milestones, such as:

- **"My partner made coffee today."**
- **"My grandparents smiled when I brought them groceries."**
- **"My coffee tasted really good."**

Follow these steps:

- **Give the event a title** (e.g., "I received a compliment on something I worked hard on").
- **Describe what happened in detail**, including where you were, what you said or did, and how others reacted.
- **Reflect on your emotions**, both in the moment and now as you remember it.
- **Identify the cause**—what led to this event? Did your actions contribute? Recognizing your role builds a sense of agency.
- **Write freely**—don't worry about grammar or structure; just let your thoughts flow.
- **Shift focus if needed**—if negative thoughts creep in, gently redirect your attention to the positive aspects. This gets easier with practice.

By making gratitude a habit, you can train your brain to notice more of the good in your life.

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Simple Gratitude Exercises

Here are three practical ways to build gratitude into your daily life:

1

The Gratitude Jar

Create a special jar where you (and your family) can store daily gratitude notes. Each day, write down something you're grateful for and add it to your collection. When you need a mood boost, pull out and read these positive memories.

2

Dinner Time Sharing

During dinner time, make it a habit for everyone to share something they appreciate about their day. This promotes a culture of gratitude within your family.

3

Daily Gratitude Texts

Partner with someone and commit to sending each other one daily gratitude text. Share appreciation for simple things like a delicious meal, an extra hour of sleep, a kind person, something you did well, or a kindness someone showed you.

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More Gratitude Exercises

Writing Gratitude Letters

Once a week, pen a letter to someone expressing your thanks to them. Whether it's a close friend, a family member, or a mentor, the act of writing a letter helps consolidate feelings of gratitude.

Social Media Gratitude Posts

Post a daily gratitude update on your social media platform of choice. Sharing your gratitude publicly can inspire others to do the same and helps to foster a positive online environment.

Gratitude Partner

Find a gratitude partner. Each day, share with each other one thing you're grateful for. This can strengthen your relationship with your partner and motivate you to keep finding things to be grateful for.

Thanks before a Meal

Giving thanks for food to the people who brought the food to the table or prepared the food is a great and simple way to express gratitude and generate benefits every day three times a day.

📍 Reflections

1. What's thing big or small that you feel grateful for right now? 💡 It can be tiny—like a good cup of coffee, a funny meme, or a moment of peace. ✍️

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2. What's One Idea From This Section that you might want to try? ✍️

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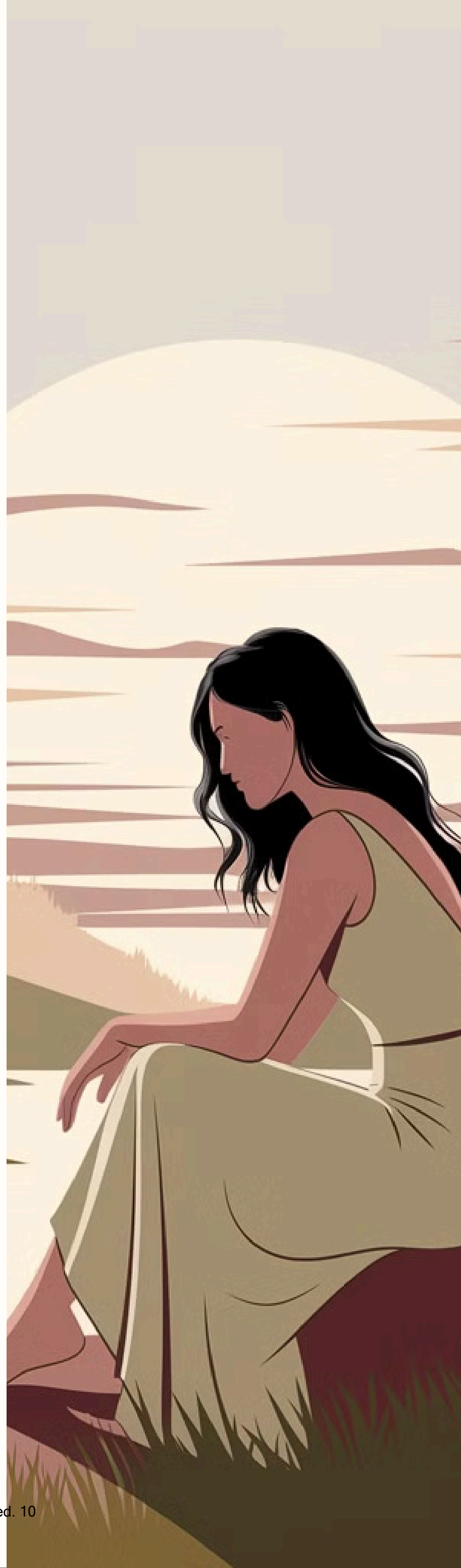
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Savoring

Savoring is stepping out of your normal flow of time to intentionally engage in thoughts and behaviors that heighten the impact of positive events and emotions. In other words, it's about fully immersing yourself in the present moment to enjoy positive experiences to their fullest. Research shows that savoring has several benefits:

1. It enhances our positive emotions, leading to increased levels of happiness and satisfaction.
2. It helps reduce stress and anxiety by shifting our focus from the past or future to the present.
3. It can strengthen our relationships, as shared positive experiences often lead to stronger bonds.



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Strategies for Savoring

To maximize positive experiences and enhance your enjoyment of life, follow these key strategies:

Practice Mindful Presence

Be fully present in the moment by engaging all your senses. When enjoying experiences like a meal, focus intently on the taste, texture, aroma, and appearance rather than letting your mind wander.

Reflect on Happy Memories

Actively reminisce about past positive experiences by looking at old photos or discussing cherished memories with friends and family to enhance your current mood.

Anticipate Future Joy

Take time to visualize and look forward to positive future events. For example, when planning a vacation, deliberately imagine the enjoyable experiences you'll have.

Share Your Experiences

Talk about positive events with others to make them feel more real and extend the positive emotions. Sharing helps cement these experiences in your memory while strengthening social bonds.

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Taking in the Good: Savoring Exercise (Rick Hanson)

1. **Notice the Good**
    - Actively look for positive moments throughout your day—a kind word, a delicious meal, or a beautiful sunset
    - Pay attention to positive qualities in yourself and the world around you
    - Pause and fully experience the moment
    - Do this at least six times daily, spending about 30 seconds on each moment
2. **Savor the Good**
    - Stay with the positive moment—don't just move on
    - Hold the positive feeling for 20-30 seconds, allowing it to settle in
    - Imagine the experience spreading through your body like warmth or light
    - The longer you focus on it, the stronger it becomes in your memory
3. **Absorb the Good**
    - Visualize the good experience sinking into you, like warmth filling your body or golden syrup soothing old wounds
    - If visualization isn't your style, just acknowledge that your brain is rewiring
    - Remember that neurons fire and wire together to strengthen positive pathways
    - If you feel resistance (guilt, self-doubt, or fear of being selfish), notice these thoughts but gently return to the positive experience

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4. Reflect on the Good (Optional)

- At the end of the day, write about the good moments you noticed and how they made you feel
- Reflect on how savoring and absorbing them affected you
- Over time, this practice can increase unconditional happiness, making it less dependent on external circumstances
- Regular practice trains your brain to hold onto positive experiences, improving emotional resilience and overall well-being

📍 Reflections

What's One Small Good Thing That Happened Today? 💡 Could be tiny—something you enjoyed, laughed at, or appreciated.

✍️ _____

2. Did You Let Yourself Enjoy It, or Did You Move On Quickly? No judgment—just noticing!

_____

3. What's One Thought From This Section That Stood Out to You? 💡 Did anything make you see things differently?

✍️ _____

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Metta Practice

Metta: A Simple Way to Cultivate Kindness and Well-Being

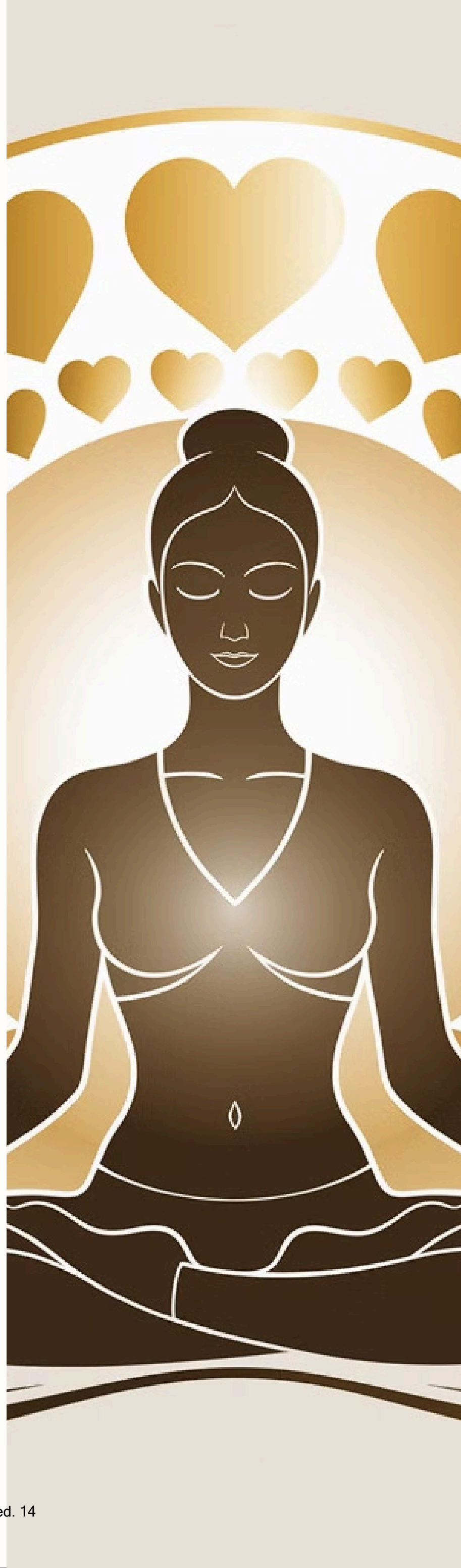
Metta, or **loving-kindness meditation (LKM)**, is a practice where you focus on sending warm, compassionate feelings to yourself and others. Research shows that doing this regularly can improve your **mood, brain function, and overall well-being**.

One key benefit of metta is that it **boosts oxytocin**, a hormone that creates feelings of **safety, connection, and comfort**. Oxytocin is the same hormone released in women during nursing, which helps create a deep sense of warmth and bonding.

Studies using brain scans show that metta meditation increases activity in two important areas:

- **The Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC)** – helps with **emotional regulation, impulse control, and empathy**.
- **The Insula** – processes **sensory information and internal feelings**.

For people with ADHD, these areas can work differently, making **emotional regulation, sensory processing, and impulse control more challenging**. Metta meditation may help **strengthen these brain functions**, making it easier to manage emotions, stay calm, and feel more balanced.



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Metta and Executive Functioning

Some studies suggest that **metta may improve executive functioning** by increasing **gray matter density in the prefrontal cortex**, the part of the brain responsible for **decision-making, attention, and emotional regulation**.

This raises an important question: **Could metta support executive functioning in ADHD?** While more research is needed, early findings are promising.

Physical and Emotional Benefits

- A study published in *Psychoneuroendocrinology* found that just **seven weeks** of loving-kindness meditation **reduced stress and inflammation markers**.
- Another study in *Psychological Science* found that practicing for just a **few minutes a day** over several weeks increased **positive emotions**. Over time, this led to **greater mindfulness, a stronger sense of purpose, better social support, and fewer illness symptoms**.



The Importance of Consistency

While benefits can appear **within weeks**, everyone's experience is different.

Like any practice, **regularity matters**—the more consistently you engage in metta, the greater the potential for lasting change.

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How to Practice Metta (Loving-Kindness Meditation)

1. Get Comfortable

- Find a position that feels good—sitting, lying down, or even walking.
- Make sure you can stay in this position for a few minutes without strain.

2. Choose Your Loving-Kindness Mantra

Silently repeat these phrases to yourself:

- May I be safe.
- May I be healthy.
- May I be happy.
- May I live with ease.

3. Expand Your Circle of Kindness

After sending kindness to yourself, extend it to:

- Someone you love
- Someone neutral, like a stranger or acquaintance
- Someone you've had conflict with
- All living beings

4. Practice Regularly

- Even a few minutes a day can create a lasting impact.
- Over time, this practice will feel more natural, and the warmth of loving-kindness will grow.

Tip: If directing kindness toward yourself feels difficult, start with others first and gradually bring that same compassion inward.

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📍 Reflections

1. What's One Phrase from Metta That Feels Comforting to You? 💡 Examples: "May I be safe," "May I live with ease," or create your own! ✍️

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2. How Did It Feel to Direct Kindness Toward Yourself? Hint : Was it easy, hard, or somewhere in between? No wrong answers!

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3. What's One Thought From This Section That Stood Out to You? Hint: Did anything surprise or encourage you?

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FINAL THOUGHTS: YOU'RE ALREADY DOING AMAZING

💡 **Your brain is always learning.** Every time you pause, reflect, or notice something good, you're **rewiring your mind for more joy.**

Some days will be easy. Some won't. Both are okay. What matters is that you keep going—**at your own pace, in your own way.**

✨ **You deserve positivity. You deserve self-compassion. You deserve to thrive.** ✨

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