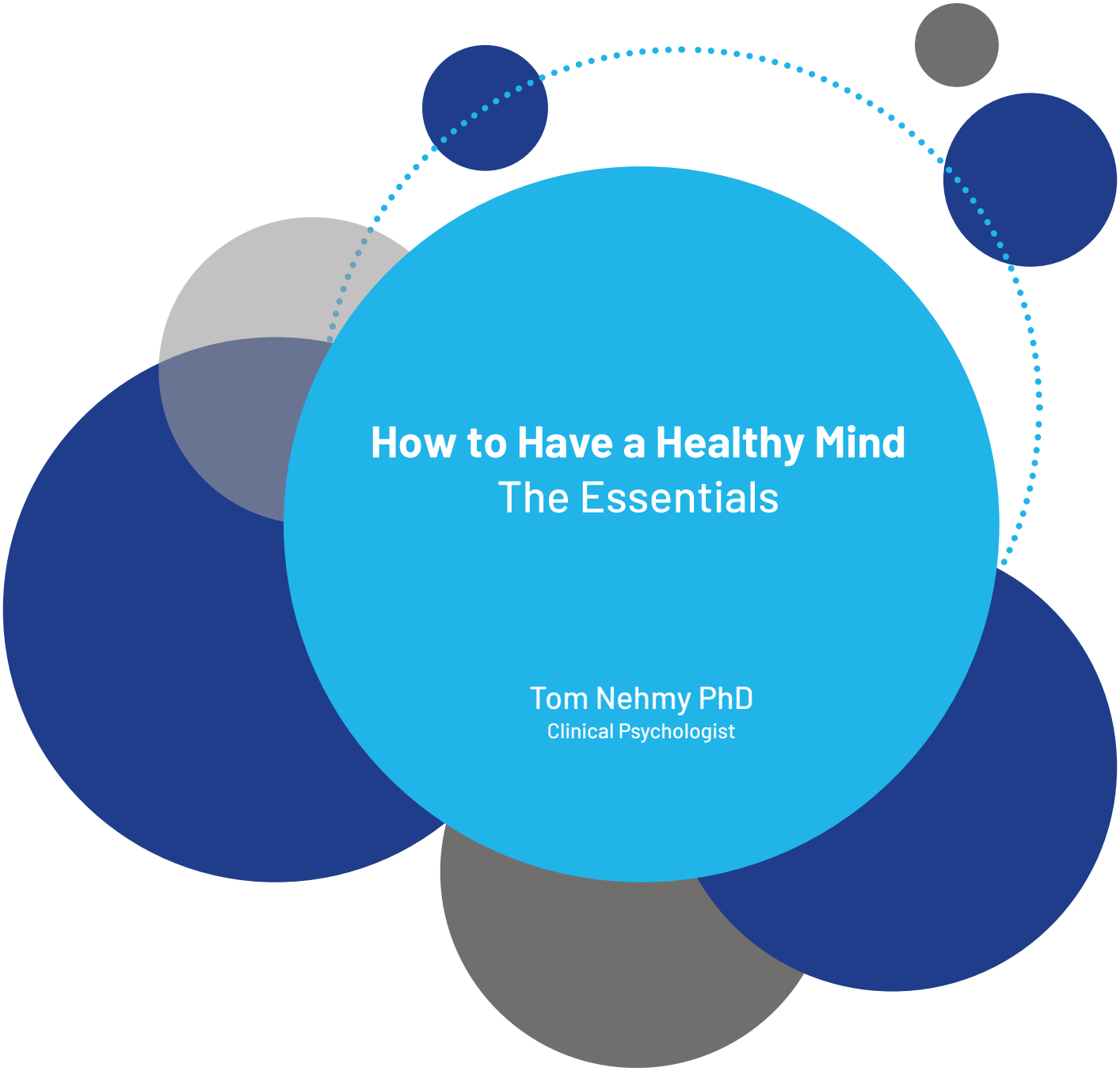


How to Have a Healthy Mind
The Essentials

Tom Nehmy PhD
Clinical Psychologist

Mind Your Melon
2026

healthyminds
Education & Training
Enhancing wellbeing. Enhancing effectiveness.

The Wellbeing Wheel

Mind Your Melon 2026

My Wellbeing Audit

Wellbeing Domain	My Current Rating (please circle) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Primary Relationships	Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent
Biological Needs / Bodily Health	Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent
Exercise	Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent
Psychological Skills	Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent
Fun, Interests & Social Life	Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent
Values, Meaning & Purpose	Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent

Clear Radio Buttons

My Wellbeing Improvements / Strategies

1.

2.

3.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Hint: Make one of your strategies something you can achieve in the next week

My Five Things

Your Stress Signature

5 things I notice about myself (or someone else might notice) that would tell me I'm over-stressed:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Your Life Medicines

5 Life Medicines – everyday things I can do that reduce stress, relax me, or boost my mood:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Mind Your Melon
2026

My Gratitude Letter

Dear

Mind Your Melon
2026

Happiness vs. Wellbeing

When people refer to being 'happy' they tend to think about positive mood states. In other words: feeling good. This is part of mental health, but it is only a piece of the picture. When the phrase 'mental health' is mentioned, many people find their mind going to psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety, and the need to prevent these problems or to seek help to recover when they occur. This is another piece of the picture.

While it includes each of these things, being truly mentally healthy is about more than just feeling good—because feelings are usually temporary and transient—and it is about more than simply not being anxious and depressed.

True mental health is about building and maintaining personal *wellbeing*. Wellbeing is more stable than mood alone, and is more encompassing than psychology alone—there are many components to being well. It is possible to experience low mood, but to still have a high level of wellbeing. And as we experience the various emotions and mood states of day-to-day life, our wellbeing is the stable foundation we return to, that largely determines our quality of life.

Six of the key ingredients to personal wellbeing are depicted in the Healthy Minds *Wellbeing Wheel* (see page 2). This provides a useful frame of reference to think about, self-assess, and enhance wellbeing.

> Our wellbeing is the stable foundation we return to that largely determines our quality of life.
>
> Mind Your Melon 2026

The Continuum

Having high levels of wellbeing (which includes being mentally healthy) also enables people to function at their best. The promise for people who consistently and proactively manage their wellbeing is that it will help them fulfil their potential, because wellbeing, mental health and performance are all parts of the same continuum:

Unable to function — Fulfilling potential

Deconstructing Buzzwords: **Resilience**

The word *resilience* refers to coming under stress, and then returning to prior good functioning. In the case of an object, resilience means returning to prior shape, size and form. For people, it means getting back to the normal or 'baseline' state we came from before the stressor came along.

Resilience can also mean being able to withstand or adjust to change or difficult circumstances. Since a meaningful, goal-directed life will necessarily come with challenges and growth, resilience is an important quality to develop. Some people refer to it as being able to 'go with the flow' (be adaptable) or to have 'grit' (tolerate discomfort) when times are tough.

In fact, having some mild to moderate challenging times across the lifespan is preferable (from a personal development point-of-view) to being overly protected. While on one hand we can see why someone might enjoy a very smooth, protected life, if we were to have this all the time it would not be conducive to developing the ability to deal with stress, challenges and changing circumstances.

Challenging times doesn't have to mean something inherently bad, it just means *being challenged to a degree that takes us out of our comfort zones*. A job promotion might take us out of our comfort zone and be challenging. Having to make a speech at a wedding might take us out of our comfort zone and be challenging. Likewise, the ending of a relationship and having to regroup and adjust to single life usually takes us out of our comfort zone, and can be challenging.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Deconstructing Buzzwords: **Resilience**

A good formula for personal development is to expand our comfort zones and our personal capability when exposed to challenges in a *graded and gradual way*. Some of these challenges are by choice, others are thrust upon us by life circumstance, or through naturally increasing responsibilities as we mature.

Becoming capable and effective at any important and challenging thing—life included—requires us to master levels of increasing difficulty in a step-by-step fashion. This often requires an increasing skill-set (as in learning a musical instrument) or an increasing capacity (as in developing fitness).

Resilience is very much a reflection of the interaction between life experiences taking us out of our comfort zone, and the psychological skills segment of the Wellbeing Wheel helping us to cope with these demands.

Encountering and enduring challenges are necessary to build our capacity to handle future challenges.

Resilience is coming under stress and not getting stuck in a state of psychological disorder.

Resilience is having distress tolerance skills.

Resilience is about being able to cope effectively with 'negative' emotion.

Resilience is about building competence and confidence through an expanding comfort zone.

Resilience comes naturally when our personal wellbeing is high.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Key Concepts: **Perfectionism**

Unhelpful Perfectionism

Unhelpful perfectionism is the striving to meet high standards in such a way that it gets in the way of achieving those standards, and adversely affects wellbeing. This often occurs through: being very concerned about making mistakes; taking too long on tasks; being overly critical; hyper-competitiveness; focussing on minute details at the expense of the big picture; procrastinating; giving up when things get tough; and not trying things that are outside one's comfort zone.

Overcoming perfectionism often involves:

- Challenging the importance of extremely demanding, self-imposed standards
- Setting time limits on tasks that we are taking too long trying to do perfectly
- Being willing to seek feedback as a part of self improvement, rather than taking feedback as personal criticism
- Setting 'good-enough' standards for those tasks where it is appropriate to do so
- Cultivating a 'growth mindset' which sees learning from effort and experience as more important than short-term outcomes, and encourages trying new, different and challenging things
- Emphasising values that are not based on achievement. For example, spending more time on relationships, having fun, and assisting others in a way that is non-competitive.
- Looking for the value in mistakes, failures and challenges.

Mistakes are a vital feedback process in learning and growth.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Key Concepts: **Thoughts & Feelings**

Where do feelings come from?

It is often assumed that emotions are simply the result of life events. While this may be partially true, psychologists have learnt that it is actually our interpretation or *thoughts* about events in our lives that cause our feelings. For example:

Event	Thoughts	Feelings
I get passed over for a job promotion.	"My time will come soon. Applying shows my willingness to improve."	Hopeful, determined
	"I'm hopeless... I always miss out."	Sad, dejected, helpless
	"The boss has never liked me!"	Frustrated, angry

Unhelpful Thinking 'Errors'

While our thoughts have a big role in causing our feelings, they are not always accurate. We are all prone to 'thinking errors' which are a result of our brains trying to take short-cuts in information processing. For example:

Black-or-white thinking	"If I don't get a high distinction I am a failure"
Overgeneralising	Having an argument and thinking "this relationship is crap"
Fortune-telling	"That meeting tomorrow is going to go terribly"
Mind Reading	"That person thinks I can't handle the pressure"
Emotional Reasoning	"I feel embarrassed, so I must have made a fool of myself"
Catastrophising	Always thinking the worst-case scenario
Discounting the positive	"They only complimented me to be nice"

Mind Your Melon 2026

Key Concepts: **Thoughts & Feelings**

Certain habits (or 'styles') of thinking lend themselves to particular emotional states. For example:

Anxious thinking	The tendency to over-estimate the chances of something going wrong, or how bad it would be if something did go wrong.
Depressive thinking	The tendency to overly personalise events, and to think in overly negative ways about the self, the world, or the future.
Angry thinking	The tendency to attribute hostile intent to other people even in situations when they do not have hostile intent.

Healthy Thinking

Healthy thinking is thinking that is *realistic* (accurate); *balanced* (not extreme, biased, or black-or-white); and *helpful* (it assists us in our lives—to either feel better or to make good decisions about what to do). To practice this type of thinking, use the **Helpful Thinking Process** in Appendix A (see page 16). You might also wish to use the Debating Method.

Understanding Emotions

Emotions have evolved to be messengers to us. Whether positive or negative, emotions serve a functional purpose. Historically the presence of emotions such as fear, have enabled us to survive in environments with many mortal threats. Emotions drive behaviour in that they give us urges to react. Sometimes going with these urges can be helpful, and at other times unhelpful. Skilled emotion-regulation is about making good decisions in the face of reaction urges. For example:

By utilising self-control in the face of strong reaction urges—what we call **'psychological muscle'**—it is possible to make good decisions and respond to emotions in helpful ways. By doing this, we are less likely to become 'stuck' in a state of negative emotion, or to develop a psychological disorder.

Emotion	Reaction Urge	When the urge is helpful (example)	When it is not helpful and we should consider doing the opposite
Anger	Lashing out	When we have no other option but to defend ourselves	When engaged in a disagreement with a colleague
Anxiety / Fear	Escape or avoidance	When we are in imminent physical danger	When we have to give a presentation
Sadness	Withdrawal	When we *temporarily* need to rest and recover from a disappointment	When our low activity levels cause us to feel down and depressed

Mind Your Melon 2026

Key Concepts: **Self-compassion**

The importance of self-compassion

While many people would readily agree with the virtue of treating others with compassion, it is important to recognise the importance of treating ourselves kindly. Self-compassion involves treating oneself with the same kind of kindness, encouragement, and forgiveness that we would somebody we really cared about. Recent research suggests that people who are able to cultivate self-compassion will be less likely to experience symptoms of depression, anxiety or other problems. For example:

Event / situation	Harsh self-critical thoughts	**Activate self-compassion**	Self-compassionate thoughts
I forget to submit an important assignment by the deadline.	*I'm a complete idiot. I don't deserve to do well.*	**[What would you say to someone you really cared about, in this situation?]**	Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. You can fix this. You've got so much on your plate at the moment, it's no wonder you forgot something. Under the circumstances, you've been doing well to keep on top of most things.

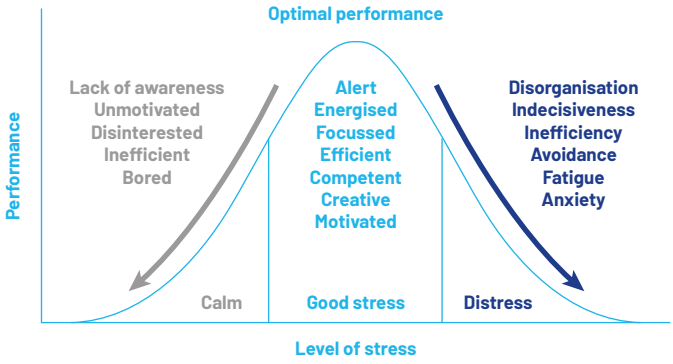
Treat yourself with the same kindness, encouragement and forgiveness that you would somebody you really cared about.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Key Concepts: **Stress**

Understanding stress

Contrary to popular opinion, stress is not inherently bad. Rather, we can benefit greatly from having the right amount of stress. The Yerkes-Dodson Law, pictured right, shows that on most tasks, as we increase from a low-stress state, our performance will actually increase as stress increases, until the stress becomes too strong, and then it will inhibit our performance.



Know your 'stress signature'

By recognising the signs of over-stress, you can take action to remedy the situation. Often when we *are* over-stressed our attention is focussed on the problem or task(s) at hand and we therefore lack the self-awareness of being over-stressed. These signs of over-stress can be different for everyone.

Common signs of being over-stressed include irritability, sleep disturbance, excessive sweating, loss of humour, rushing around, speaking faster, and not being able to concentrate.

Knowing your personal signs of being over-stressed—your *stress signature*—is crucial to enable you to be self-aware and to take action when you have too much on your plate.

Use 'life-medicines' to discharge stress

Once we know we are in the over-stressed range, we can take action to reduce stress and bring us back into the 'optimal performance' zone. One of the effects of being over-stressed is that *we tend to do less of the things that discharge stress*. By implementing the small everyday things we would normally use to release stress, relax and boost our mood (which we call '*life medicines*'), we can reduce stress effectively. These can be things like: going for a run, taking your dog for a walk, calling an old friend who always makes you feel better, having a hot bath, listening to music, and meditating. We tend not to do these things when over-stressed as we don't believe we can afford the time. Yet, what we lose in time, we gain back in *efficiency*. While doing one of your life medicines once may not make much of a difference, if you plan to include several of these each week for a couple of weeks, it might reduce your subjective stress levels by 10%-15%, and bring you back from the over-stressed range.

Gratitude

Research shows that focusing on what we're grateful for, and in particular expressing that gratitude, has significant benefits for our wellbeing. Interventions focusing on building gratitude have been associated with increased mood, improved sleep quality and increased life satisfaction. Cultivating gratitude can be as simple as a dinner table discussion topic, or can involve journalling and 'gratitude letters'.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Quick Reference Guide

Low mood

- Increase activity levels
- Exercise
- Engage social supports
- Apply self-compassion
- Use life-medicines
- Use the Helpful Thinking Process

Worried / Anxious

- Use the Helpful Thinking Process
- Try not to avoid
- Engage supports
- Graded exposure—try one step toward the goal behaviour

Over-stressed

- Use life medicines
- Engage social supports
- Exercise

Under-stressed or inefficient

- Bring deadlines forward
- Increase responsibility
- Increase challenges

Angry / Hostile

- Use the Debating Method to challenge hostile automatic thoughts
- If also over-stressed, apply tips for 'over-stressed'

Mind Your Melon 2026

Advice, Support & Counselling

The support person within my organisation is:

Our organisation's EAP or counselling contact is:

Options for support:

- See your General Practitioner
- Seek a referral for a psychologist under Medicare via your GP
- Talk to a good friend, spouse or parent
- Call BeyondBlue on 1300 224 636 or visit BeyondBlue.com.au and click 'Get Support'
- Call Lifeline (24/7) on 13 11 14

In case of emergency:

- Call 000 (Australia)
- Call 111 (New Zealand)
- Present to your local emergency department

Seek support
when you need it.

Appendix A: **The Helpful Thinking Process**

Step 1

'What is my automatic thought?'

Write it down.

What is the feeling?

How strong is it out of 10?

Step 2

'What are three other possible outcomes or explanations?'

Write them down.

Step 3

'What has happened in the past in this situation, and what is most likely to happen now?'

Write it down.

Mind Your Melon 2026

Appendix A: **The Helpful Thinking Process**

Step 4

'What would my thinking brain say, compared to my emotional brain?'

Write it down.

Step 5

'How would I advise a friend in this situation?'

Write it down.

Step 6

Given what I've written above, how could I rewrite my original thought (from Step 1), to make it more:

- Balanced
- Realistic
- Helpful

What is the feeling?

How strong is it out of 10?

My helpful course of action is:

Mind Your Melon 2026

Appendix B: **7 Secrets to a Healthy Mind**

1

Life is not perfect, and there is value in imperfection. Reject perfectionism and embrace the benefits of challenges, mistakes and failure!

2

Thoughts affect how you feel, but they aren't always accurate. Thinking errors are common.

3

Emotions are natural and have evolved to help us. They are like the weather, it's only a problem if we get stuck. Stress is neither good nor bad, it's about having the right amount.

4

Emotions do not control our behaviour, our choices do. Identify unhelpful reaction urges and use psychological muscle. Use the Magic Question: *What is the helpful thing to do now?*

5

Learn and live the Helpful Thinking Process. Save the PDF template and use it to work through your thoughts and feelings in challenging situations or when you feel 'stuck'.

6

The most important relationship in your life is the one you have with yourself. Apply self-compassion rather than self-criticism.

7

What you focus on, you amplify in your awareness. Attitude counts—practice gratitude! Deliver your gratitude letter.

Mind our Melon 2026

Appendix C: **Take Away Messages**

True happiness is about wellbeing and resilience, in addition to regular positive mood states

Wellbeing is more important than trying to feel happy 24/7, which is not normal. Treat your wellbeing like a project.

Wellbeing and performance are two sides of the same coin. Routine conversations about wellbeing are an implicit part of managing performance.

More about Healthy Minds

Find us

healthymindsprogram.com

Phone us

T: +61 401 678 893

Refer us

If you think other businesses or schools would benefit from the Healthy Minds Program please refer us.

My Notes

Mind Your Melon
2026