

Making a Break of it: Episode 3

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We hope you are enjoying your March Break. This month, we would like to make connections to our Pathways for PL Article written by Dr. Kathy Toogood, the author of *Women Thriving in Leadership*.

The month of March brings several [causes](#) to mind: it's Nutrition and Brain Health Awareness Month, International Women's Day is recognized on March 8th, and World Down Syndrome Day takes place March 21st where we proudly don our mismatched socks and, to name a few. In considering the intersectionality of these causes, let's explore how we can make time for our wellness during March.

Let's first explore the concept of thriving. Many of us feel we are working on and/or in survival mode as opposed to thriving from day-to-day. The number of external pressures can be overwhelming and heavy. Taking ideas from both Kathy Toogood and author of *Atomic Habits*, James Clear, thriving can only happen if we take small, intentional steps towards that goal. Thriving is a big word and can seem overwhelming.

How can we strive to thrive in our everyday lives? How do we wake up? What's the first thing we do and how does that impact how we show up throughout our day? Mornings can be hectic, in particular depending on how well we've slept the night before. In the list of causes recognized during the month of March, sleep is one of them. If we get good sleep, taking on the day is undoubtedly easier. A few habits that are scientifically shown to support maintaining our morning energy are:

- Natural light before blue light: neuroscience tells us that the more natural light we get in the morning, the more we can set out to maintain the dopamine stores built up by our brain and body overnight during sleep. This might mean not looking at your phone right away and use voice commands instead.
- Feed your body: Drinking water first thing in the morning gets your body ready to take on the day. If you include lemon, it helps this process even more.
- If you're going to use your phone, use it as a tool to help with getting your body ready for the day. Stay off news sites or the intake of any stressful or negative information right away. Set a timer for five minutes while your coffee brews and listen to a podcast or find a five-minute exercise routine. Getting your body moving—even for five minutes every morning—can lead to a significant improvement in our mood and our cognitive health.
- After your five minutes of activity, make sure to try to have something to eat that consists of whole foods—eggs, avocado, almonds, and kiwi are some whole foods that can contribute to a healthy start to the day. Caffeine, in

moderation, can also support maintaining our energy levels.

During the day, how do we try to avoid that midday slump? Keep moving, keep thriving. How can you incorporate movement into your day. This will look different for all of us, although our roles may have similarities, our actual work demands vary. Here are some potential ideas:

- Park farther from the entrance: whether it's at work or running errands, this simple action can support your movement goal.
- Try to get outside during the day. Sometimes, your routine incorporates outside supervision. You can try to use this time to be as active as possible—even if you're stepping in place. You could walk around your supervision area with a student(s) while also being present to the larger group. Discuss options with your supervision partner(s)/admin. If you don't have outside supervision as part of your role, look at ways to incorporate movement, inside or outside. If we are looking for opportunities to incorporate wellness, we are more likely to find them.

When we think of wellness, much like teaching, learning and supporting students, our approach is towards the whole individual. We need to turn that focus on wholeness inwards. How can we do that? When we take care of our physical body, there are direct connections to our brain. For instance, exercise releases feel-good chemicals in our brains. So does engaging in favourite creative activities. Try creating a [dopamine menu](#) for yourself. You can choose activities of different lengths, like appetizers, main courses, desserts and takeout—physical activity and creative activities can prompt our brains to release those positive-feeling chemicals. The different menu categories correspond to how long the activity will take and how often it can and will happen. Clicking on the words “dopamine menu” will take you to an article in Psychology Today that explains different ways to explore this idea.

Community Connections

We can't action any of the previous suggestions in isolation. We need to create and cultivate a circle of support to help us navigate all that our lived experience brings our way. Whether it's a trusted colleague, mentor, spiritual leader or guide, community elder(s), friends or family; we all have times that we need to draw on others for encouragement, knowledge and strength. So, what could this look like in terms of implementing our movement goals.

Perhaps we start a wellness buddy system at work with step challenges, a walking club or join a fitness group together. Perhaps you volunteer within your community for an organization that incorporates wellness and/or creativity.

Holding yourself accountable is a necessary element to setting

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and working towards any goals you have for yourself. This can be tough, and that's why having a circle of support and being willing to draw on those individuals is so important.

As you move through this month of March (see what I did there), I encourage you to consider trying some of these ideas. Whether it's a focus on physical wellness, starting small habits or creating a dopamine menu, you can embrace the opportunity to take a more active role in your wellness.

Until next time, take care of yourselves and one another!