

# Workplace Wellness



## Building Mental Immunity: Providing Dental Hygienists with a Mental Skill Set That Allows Them to Flourish

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The year 2020 presented dental hygienists with many unpredictable challenges: developing and adhering to new COVID-19 protocols; managing the disjunction between the different regulatory bodies; mitigating our own vulnerability to the virus while providing care to our clients; learning to master our craft while wearing an N95 mask, a shield, and disposable gown (not an easy task while experiencing a hot flash!); managing our clients' anxiety; acquiring new verbiage to explain to our clients why we are not using ultrasonics or polishing their teeth; and worrying about transmitting the virus to our families. Just to mention a few. During this time, we all saw some of our colleagues decide not to return to work due to the stress of dealing with these and many other issues.

The varied acute and chronic stresses arising from the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous. There is no better time than now to learn the skills that can help us cope with so many of the changes we are experiencing on a daily basis. Even better, if we can negate the harmful effects on our minds and bodies of the present-day stresses of uncertainty and change we will be healthier. Maintaining a healthy mental attitude helps us to reach our potential; a strong mental immunity is the key to stabilizing our emotional stress. When the time comes to elicit change there is no better place to start than our mind.

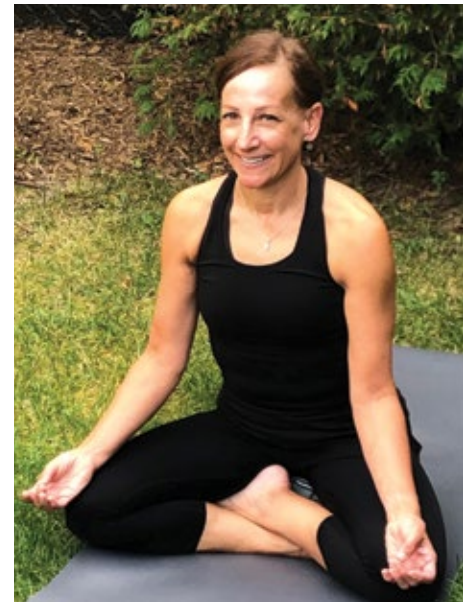
Mental immunity is the skill set, armamentarium or toolbox of competencies that we draw from during times of anxiety, change, challenge or mental stress. It has taken me many years to acquire the skills I have needed to help me flourish in this life. Many years ago, I suffered from both acute and chronic anxiety. It was not until I was in my 40s that I really understood the power of the mind. I began my quest to overcome my anxiety and stress. I had no idea what mental immunity was and that I could develop a skill set to offer

me a peaceful, joyful mind. Today I have a healthy mental immunity that I have honed to near perfection.

So much of what we do as dental hygienists is out of our control. The dentist, the dental assistant, the office staff, the clients, our fellow dental hygienists, the mental and physical health of our clients, and our dental hygiene

process of care are all moving parts of our daily work lives. All of these elements affect how our day will flow and how successful we are at delivering care. The only thing we can control is our mindset—our attitude and our perspective—which in turn shapes our ability to successfully perform our duties and responsibilities to our clients. Imagine knowing that you can handle, with grace and confidence, whatever up, down, sideways or turn-around events your day presents. This is what a strong mental immunity offers.

Life is a journey. There are good days, great days, not so good days, challenging days, and bad days. I equate the day in the life of a dental hygienist with going for a run, skiing or cycling. If you have honed your skills, you can manage any terrain, any type of snow (granular, powder, ice), any uneven pavement or any large hill you are preparing to



ascend. You can coast along and get by, but occasionally you hit a bump, an icy patch, a big hill, a difficult client, an annoying colleague, a tenacious piece of calculus. All of these obstacles, no matter how big or small, can affect the outcome of your day, your run, your ride or your day on the slopes!

Any sport or physical activity we succeed at requires the proper training and skills. This preparation is equally important for a skilled dental hygienist. Although we have worked hard at acquiring our clinical skill set and learning new techniques, do we regularly hone our mental skill set? Perfect our emotional ability to deal with our day? By developing skills for our mind and regularly maintaining our mental immunity we are better equipped to deal with whatever circumstances life presents.

Mental immunity is specific to each individual because each individual has a unique set of triggers that make overcoming challenges or circumstances difficult. As a mindset coach, I work with clients to unravel the limiting beliefs, triggers or challenges that have prevented them from fully achieving their potential. Coaching sessions allow the client to express their thoughts in a safe, confidential space and, as the session evolves, a shift occurs. The client recognizes a new perspective or option to move forward. Together coach and client work on techniques, skills or processes that help the client to manage and overcome their challenges. One of these skills is developing a solid mental immunity that is built specifically for the client.

As a mindset coach I have helped many individuals reach a state of peace, joy, emotional and spiritual growth, and contentment. Our limiting beliefs can hold us back from reaching our true potential and reaching a healthy level of joy. Strive to build a solid mental immunity that works for you.



### My unique mental immunity toolbox, skill set, briefcase, sack looks like this:

1. **Meditation**—a morning ritual of sitting on my meditation pillow, staying present in the moment, focussing on my breathing.
2. **Setting a daily intention**—a statement or word that brings me back to the centre of my soul. Patience is usually my intention for the day.
3. **Breathing techniques**—I have two forms of breathing that elicit a calm state of mind: a deep yoga breath or two quick inhalations followed by a long exhalation. I apply them as needed (when I am running 10 minutes behind for my next client).
4. **Movement**—my structured daily workouts include one or two of the following: running, isometric exercise, weightlifting, cycling, walking, skiing, playing pickle ball.
5. **Sleep**—my sleep hygiene consists of dim lighting after 8:00 pm, unplugging from technology 30 minutes before I get into bed, reading before going to bed, and a breathing exercise.
6. **Nutrition**—a plant-based diet.
7. **Massage**—1 to 2 treatments a month.
8. **Osteopathy**—1 treatment every 3 months.
9. **Attaining a joyful disposition**—gratitude, generosity, humour, humility, perspective, forgiveness, acceptance, compassion. Sometimes I make one of these attitudes my intention for the day. Thank you, Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama.

