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# Spirituality and the Brain

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CDM Counseling & Consultation Services

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## How Does Spirituality Affect the Brain?

Psychiatry and clinical psychology have a long history of ignoring the relationship between spirituality and mental health (Rosmarin et al., 2022). However, new findings are showing that an emphasis on the importance of spirituality may in fact present neurobiological benefits. Spirituality is now being shown to be a protective factor against developing depression, particularly for people who have a family history of depression.

Spirituality creates a psychological resilience against developing inherited depression (Rosmarin et al., 2022). Active spirituality is associated with lower reactivity to negative stimuli. Some studies have suggested that spirituality as a young adult predicted fewer depression symptoms as far as twenty-five years later.

Spirituality is associated with several neurological correlates (Rosmarin et al., 2022). It has been connected to greater cortical thickness, a decreased default mode network, increased posterior alpha, and slower event-related potential responsiveness, all of which are associated with a lower risk of depression (Liu et al., 2017).



## Depression and the Brain

Studies have shown a widespread reduction in cortical thickness in individuals with an elevated risk of depression. However, greater cortical thickness has been shown in individuals who have the same elevated risk of depression, but who report higher levels of spirituality. A study by Liu et al. (2017) found a contrasting effect between spirituality and familial risk of developing clinical depression.

Spirituality importance works as a resilience factor in individuals. It helps to buffer against the biological risks that may contribute to clinical depressive symptoms. However, some questions still remain (Liu et al., 2017; Rosmarin et al., 2022). Exactly how

spirituality importance and risk of depression interacts at the molecular level and cause the changes in cortical thickness requires further examination. It is unclear whether spirituality works as a protective factor against cortical thinning or works to actually increase cortical thickness.

Other unidentified factors may also contribute to cortical thickness. Spirituality has an effect on multiple environmental and social factors, such as parenting, peer support, and self-regulation. It is unclear whether spirituality alone contributes to cortical thickness, or if it is a combination of all the various psychological benefits that spirituality has to offer.



Depression and spirituality effect the cortical region of the brain in opposite directions.

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### Alcohol Use And Spirituality

(Rosmarin et al., 2022; Verghese, 2008)

Studies have found that people who regularly engage in prayer are shown to have less alcohol cravings and show an increase in the neural processes associated with attention and control. Lower levels of spirituality have been associated with higher substance use.

### Depression And Spirituality

(Rosmarin et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2017)

Depression affects the brain by thinning the cortical region of the brain. Spirituality has been shown to be a protective factor against this cortical thinning, either by increasing cortical thickness or preventing the cortical thinning.

### Grief And Spirituality

(Christian et al., 2019)

Spirituality has been shown to be correlated with fewer grief symptoms and less depression. However, grief can also cause people to question their spiritual beliefs. Individuals will benefit from ongoing spiritual support while they are pursuing meaning in their loss.

## Increase Spirituality and Decrease Depression

At CDM Counseling and Consultation Services, we believe that taking a holistic view of personal wellness is the key to lasting psychological health. Focusing on spirituality will not only strengthen our relationship with God, but it is also of vital importance to our ongoing mental health.

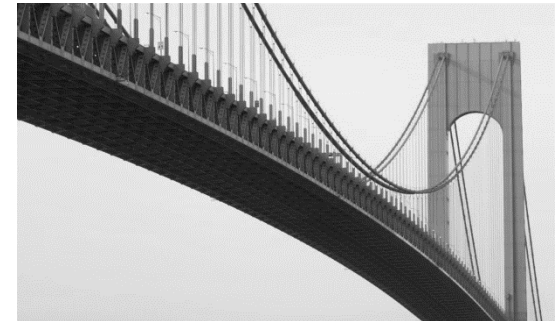
Mental health has two main dimensions, the absence of mental ailments and the presence of a well-adjusted personality that contributes to wellness in both personal and communal aspects (Verghese, 2008). Accomplishing the former is done through prioritizing therapy sessions, trusting the process, and taking responsibility for our spiritual and mental health (Moorer, 2023). Contributing to personal and communal wellness can be accomplished through acceptance of

uncertainty, flexibility, involvement in social activities, having the courage to take risks, practicing self-control, and keeping a harmonious relationship to ourselves, others, and nature (Verghese, 2008).

Spirituality is an important aspect of mental health (Verghese, 2008). A lack of spirituality can interfere with interpersonal relationships. Spiritual beliefs and practices are proven to be helpful tools to buffer the impact of life's many stressors. A loss of interest in our religion can sometimes be a common symptom of depression.

To best achieve lasting psychological wellness, it is imperative to seek the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things

we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Meaning in life is sought by seeking meaning for each and every day (Verghese, 2008). Keep a focus on acceptance, hope, and forgiveness, and meaning and purpose will be achieved!



## How to Stay Healthy in a Demanding World

The latest updates to get you through the day

Self-care is the key to performing at our top capacity. However, socializing with friends or having lavish spa days are not the only types of effective self-care. Spending time alone, watching a show or movie, reading a book, or even just sitting in silence can all be great ways to recharge your energy. Self-care should focus on four distinct categories. Physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual self-care are all essential components of mental wellness.

Physical self-care can include activities such as eating healthy and regularly, exercising, getting enough sleep, and

taking time off when needed.

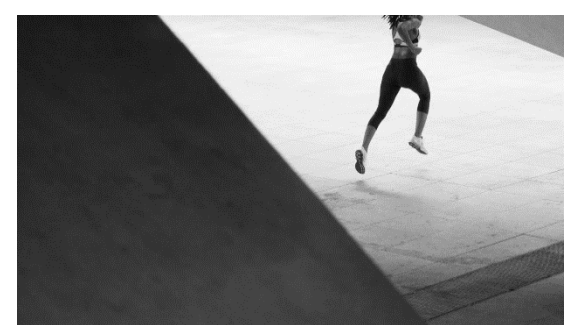
Psychological self-care may include making time for self-reflection, writing in a journal, or just saying "no" to extra responsibilities. Remember, "No." is a complete sentence.

Emotional self-care should focus on self-love. Spend time with loved ones, stay in contact with important people in your life, and engage in comforting activities. Spiritual self-care includes making time to connect with God, spending time in nature, and finding spiritual connections in your community.

## Focus on Physical Activity

Physical Activity is an important aspect of self-care and an excellent means for improving psychological health (Zuo & Yue, 2020). Physical exercise has been shown to help people acquire a more positive attitude towards challenges and improve social relationships. However, exercise does not have to include strenuous, time consuming, or difficult activities. Some people may enjoy weightlifting, running marathons, or climbing mountains, but those types of demanding exercises are not suitable for everybody. Choice of exercises should be targeted to your individual development.

Even mild exercise can improve negative emotions by alleviating the harmful effects of stress and work. Activities such as bike riding, swimming, or beginners' yoga are excellent low-impact exercises for people who need a lighter form of physical activity. Minor changes in your routine can also have a lasting impact. Choosing to take the stairs instead of the elevator, parking further away from the door, or taking the dog for an extra walk around the block are quick and easy ways to add more physical activity to your daily routine!



## Individualized Self-Care Plan:

1. List the physical self-care activities you are using or would like to use.

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2. List the psychological self-care activities you are using or would like to use.

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3. List the emotional self-care activities you are using or would like to use.

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4. List the Spiritual self-care activities you are using or would like to use.

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Today, I commit to...

Tomorrow, I aim to...

When I need support, I will contact...

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You are important, you are strong, you can do this!!!

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