

FINDING A CURE FOR THAT SUNDAY FEELING
NEW EPISODES EVERY SUNDAY

The
WISDOM *podcast*

truth serum, a-ha moments ^{AND}
practical wisdom for life, love and self-realization

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From infancy, each of us has a natural inclination to self-soothe. Self-soothing is a way of relaxing our central nervous system; of calming the body and mind; of experiencing relief and the absence of whatever stress we may be facing. We experience self-soothing from our caregivers as touch, as love, as food and sustenance, and as a comfortable and safe environment. For example, having the comfort of our favourite toys or blanket always available, a means of exploring our surroundings safely; and to feel secure knowing that our needs are always taken care of. Parents who are sensitive and attentive to their child's needs, and who also encourage their child to soothe themselves in healthy ways foster the important ability in their child to self-nourish and learn self-care from an early age.

As a child we instinctively look to calm our self in moments when we feel anxious, scared, angry, or sad. Learning to self soothe is vital for healthy development and it is an important skill for nurturing emotional and physical well-being.

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ANATOMY of AN EPISODE

Truth Serum

A-ha Moments

Practical Wisdom

EPISODE TIMESTAMPS:

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Mechanism: 11:40 | The Power of Self-Soothing: 12:37 |
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What do you do to self-soothe? Consider for a moment what you instinctively do to make yourself feel better? to escape? to cope? to unwind and relax?

The ritual of self-soothing continues throughout life. How we are comforted and soothed as a child influences the habits that we adopt to soothe our self as adults. We often don't consider self-soothing as a strategy for feeling comfort, ease, and relief each time we feel anxiety, fear, sadness or any other unpleasant state; and yet it is perhaps the most important means of feeling better. We may not make the direct connection between what we or our caregivers did to comfort and soothe our self in childhood, and what we continue to do today to alleviate tension, anxiety, fear; and to calm ourselves, to feel better, to escape momentarily from our life and to recover after uncomfortable, unpleasant, or threatening situations (usually situations where we have a lack of control, where there is conflict, or unrelenting stress; and in some cases - trauma). Self-soothing tendencies can be a healthy form of **self-regulation** and a means of creating **optimal balance between mind and body; if we choose behaviours that are helpful and healthy.**

Self-soothing as a healthy life skill is one form of self-care and the instinctive nurturing that is needed by all living beings in order to feel whole, well being, and self-love. When we are taught how to provide for our needs as a child, we develop the confidence that we can offer our self - soothing and self-regulation in moments when we feel restless, anxious, and when our racing mind needs to quiet and soften, when we need a healthy 'escape' or 'break' from the busy routine of life, and as we aim to live in balance; to exist in an optimal state of functioning.

We have all learned how to soothe ourselves in ways that allow for feelings of calm, relaxation, and comfort. Just think about any of the moments of your childhood where you felt nurtured and loved and ask yourself, "How was I shown love, nurturing, and care?" "What did others say, or do, or provide for me that allowed me to feel nourished, soothed, and loved?" and "How did I give myself nourishment and care?" Simply notice what memories are stirred here and what your reaction is, of these.

In contemporary life, present generations are being raised with a reliance on technology; and often the absence of parental attention or even presence.

Parents "soothe" their young children by allowing them to "play with" a cell phone or other device; children are often provided with gaming technology to both occupy their time, and as a means of entertainment that in many ways replaces (or rivals) playing with friends, being outside in nature, or having quality face-to-face interaction with family members.

The habit-forming activities that subconsciously soothe children (and adults alike), providing distraction from discomfort and agitation and from other real world situations, can be constructive and meaningful or they may provide a means of avoidance of what is uncomfortable. Further, our ability to 'connect' with friends and others through our technology, means that we may be relying more on the brief messaging that is said or not said, and the constant comparison of what we see and consume through social media and the internet as the new normative habits meant to 'soothe' us, when really much of this can cause or inflame our pre-existing anxiety, insecurity, and self-loathing.

When we feel anxious, anger, sadness, fear, or any other uncomfortable emotion; our natural inclination is to self-soothe.

What we immediately want is to feel the absence of that unpleasant emotion. Without realizing, what we are really craving whenever we reach for our technological devices; or as we open the pantry or fridge in search of something to eat (especially when we are not hungry), or for a particular drug of choice; is indeed the calming, soothing, and pleasant feeling that is preferred - and often similar to our experiences from an earlier time.

Different forms of self-soothing may also be a strategy learned as a coping mechanism in a home where there was much tension, conflict and duress. These self-soothing solutions become adopted instantaneously and often without sorting through our emotions to figure out what we might actually need.

“Self-soothing” may come in many unhealthy forms; some of which are less healthy and may include: alcohol, (prescription and nonprescription) drugs, smoking, pornography, gambling, shopping, and sex.

While self-soothing is instinctive, the method by which we actively soothe our self to achieve a state of calmness (or any preferred state) is something that is *learned* and therefore, can be replaced with a healthier method, specific to what our true needs are, and often with less effort than we might think.

The range of desired feelings and states of being that we are often in search of include some of the following: relaxation, comfort, escape, relief, and energized.

When we use a host of 'other' behaviours as self-soothing mechanisms, most often what we are in search of is the quick release or relief from anxiety and duress; and to feel better immediately and effortlessly. As much as we may not feel comfortable being alone with our thoughts, especially if we tend to remain fixated on a problem or an ongoing problematic situation; if we use our technological devices as distractions; if we use food or other addictive substances to soothe and "relax" us; 'numbing' our anxiety and worrisome thoughts, we never learn how to achieve calmness and a soothing state of comfort, contentment, and inner peace - *naturally*.

Ironically this feeling of inner calm; yet alert, clear mindedness happens to be what our natural blissful state is; one that we feel when we are 'in balance' or in a state of equilibrium.

The power of self-soothing lies in your ability to recognize the importance of being self-aware (mindful) of your needs at any given moment. When you are out of touch with, or not attending to your basic fundamental needs; or if you do what you've always done to self-soothe rather than take notice of what you truly need; and how you might best give this to yourself, you will likely resort to the well-learned strategies that are already in place; most of which originated out of what you were taught and perhaps what you developed out of necessity in order to evoke feeling a way that is desirable for you.





In those precious few micro-moments as you first awaken; before your brain jumps to thoughts about all of what you have to do today, and what problems or situations may be awaiting you; there is - however brief - a gentle, yet alert calmness; a state of blissful inner peace that is there if you look for it.

Your mind and body begin in this state upon waking; it's just that you too quickly pull yourself out of this equilibrium into worry, needing to "do" versus "be", and focusing on the near and distant future rather than the experience of the present moment. It may be our human nature to actively focus on all that is needed to be done; however we tend to focus on the problems rather than actively working towards the solutions.

As calmness and relaxation are what we experience naturally after exercise and physical activity, and in being outdoors and in nature; these may be considered among the best solutions for self-soothing. We don't need to experience an intense workout to feel the effects of clarity and alertness of mind, and calmness in our body. Often (as I remind clients) a simple 15-minute walk outdoors where you can focus intently on your breathing and how you feel in your body is more than enough to shift your mood state, and allow for some of the natural 'high' that comes from the release of endorphins during exercise. the breathing of fresh air, and the beauty in nature. Ideally, you want to find an activity (or a variety of them) that you can look forward to and that becomes one of your "go to" sources for alleviating stress and tension, while soothing and calming you; and to use these often. If you can practice bringing your attention into the present moment; to be consciously aware or mindful as you are physically active (as much as possible), it will only heighten both your experience of that activity and your skill of being present, calm, and soothed.

Healthy self-soothing is important and necessary
for creating and maintaining balance
and a naturally induced positive affect.

A feel good state is what we are all in search of. It is also a feeling that we have become reliant or dependent on; and at times - even addicted to - if we have the means of accessing what will give this to us - even if it is short-lived. A simple example of how we are dependant (and addicted) to a particular state of being lies in a simple behaviour for so many who begin the day by ingesting a stimulant to ramp them up; to help them 'be' productive, 'alert' and 'sharp minded' and which gives us a hit of adrenaline all easily contained in the acceptable caffeine buzz of our morning beverage.

In a different example, if we are trying to calm our brain which seems to always be "on" and which becomes difficult to silence, by slowing it down with alcohol or drugs, or consuming high fat and/or carbohydrate laden foods; we may feel a numbing and physical slowness of our mind (and body), which is followed by a state of "zoning out" or sleep. These self-soothing strategies are also not an ideal way to experience relaxation or restful sleep since we are reliant on a chemical or food to relax us.

By being willing to examine your habitual behaviours and learned strategies for self-soothing, you can identify which habits are less healthy. Acknowledging what is not an ideal solution to the stresses of life and any emotional or physical pain, allows you to then seek sustainable ways in which you can be in control of how you feel, and your choices. A healthy means of self-soothing supports productive life practices, contemplation and understanding rather than avoidance and distraction from what may need your attention to heal and feel whole.

If we can use one or ideally all of these healthy self-soothing strategies in moments when we are anxious, agitated, feeling 'out of control', upset, when we 'crave a comfort food or substance', when we are angry, fearful, or conflicted, etc; we will radically feel "in control", able to continue functioning at a high level and in balance, and feel successful in our ability to thrive in the world.

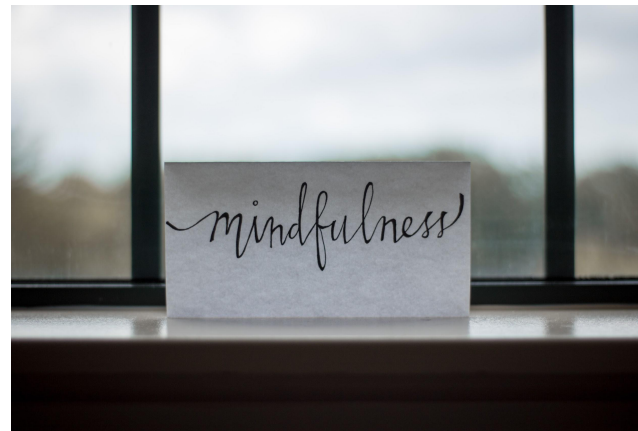
Learning to self-soothe in healthy ways and to do so often throughout the day, means a greater likelihood that you will feel at your best, since you are able to curate this often – and as needed. You will also be able to overcome what unhealthy habits and/or addictions you may have been using, and which have maintained a powerful hold 'over you', since you now understand your natural and instinctive yearning for feeling positive, comforted, nourished, and loved; all have their origins in self-regulation, self-soothing, and in being able to take care of your needs in a healthy way.

Three of the most readily available and natural sources of feeling in-balance and in-control as productive means of self-soothing are: exercise, sleep, and meditation (which can also include prayer).



For my client David* – a high functioning business owner and entrepreneur who began using alcohol some ten years earlier as an immediate means of relief from the pressures of the day, and as an escape from the constant churning of thoughts that he felt helpful to control; **meditation, exercise, and a return to a healthy sleep regime became the most effective means of bringing his life back into balance, for calming and quieting his mind deliberately, and for recharging his body naturally.**

*The name of my client has been changed to maintain confidentiality. Additional details or circumstances may have been altered in order to ensure the utmost privacy.



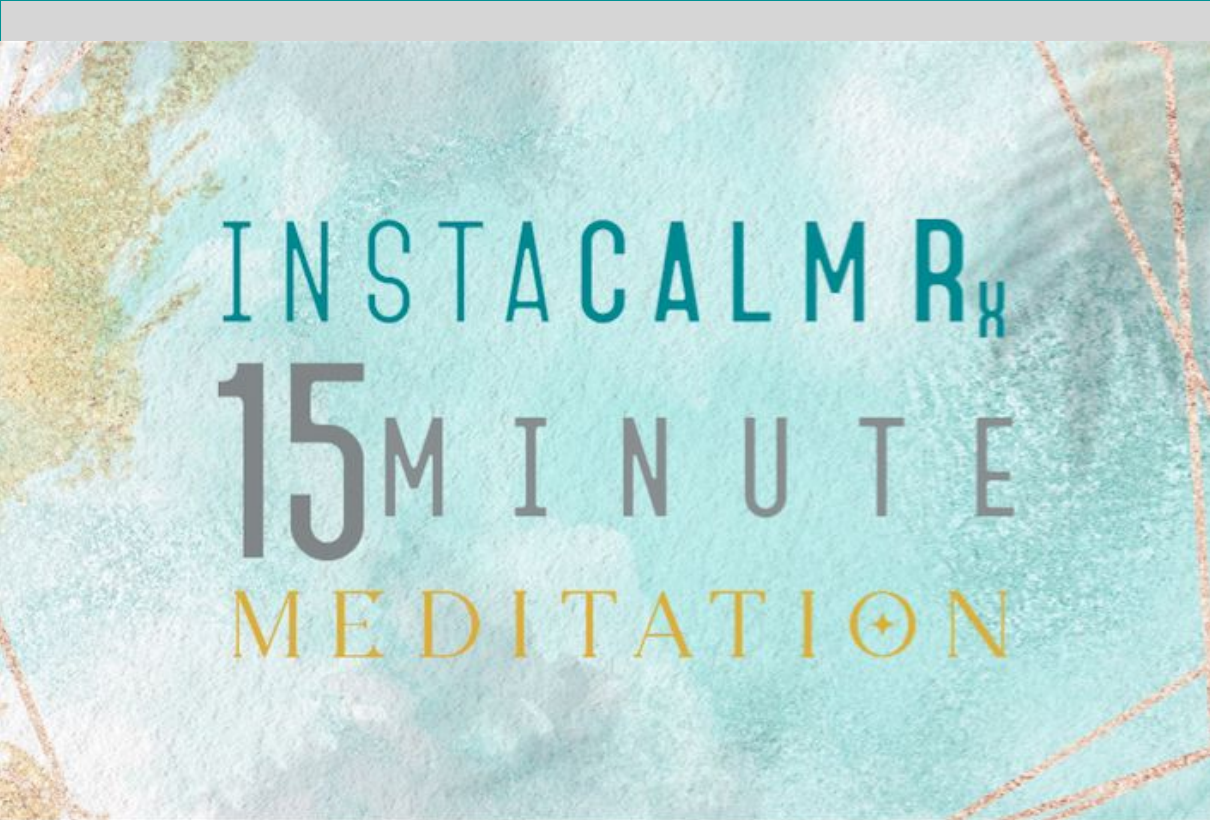


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Use a combination of these healthy practices throughout your day - as short 10-15 minute mini-breaks - as you need to refresh or soothe your mind and body - and when you are pushing your self too hard. All are a perfect and health'ful' means of self-regulation, self-care, and self-soothing.

There are many ways to use meditation, both as a formal and an informal practice; to experience the 'moving' of one's body whether through unstructured activity or formal exercise, and to explore the many benefits of sleep as rest; including power naps of specific lengths as well as deep and healing sleep.





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