



# the MIND reader

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**We asked our readers to send us their most burning questions, and they did! A big thanks goes out to our loyal readers! Read on for insightful responses from our amazing team!**

**Whenever I am stressed out, I eat and eat and eat. As I have gotten older, I have put on tons of weight. Any suggestions on curbing this uncontrollable appetite of mine?**

Let me assure you that you are not alone. Eating is one of many ways people cope with stress. In order to understand how to cease a behavior, it often helps to understand the reasons why we do what we do. *Stress eating* begins as a method for soothing the unpleasant feelings that are associated with stress and quickly develops into a habit. Once a habit is developed, our brains tend to go on auto-pilot. The brain on auto-pilot *can* be very useful because it allows our brains to conserve energy. How does auto-pilot pertain to stress eating? Well, sometimes we eat in auto-pilot mode rather than a mode of mindfulness. We are often not fully aware of the realistic degree of our hunger. Tackling stress eating involves increasing mindfulness and changing automatic behavior.

Stress eating is often linked with disassociation, or “zoning-out”. When we zone-out, our brains go into auto-pilot which disengages from sensing the intensity of certain emotions. Pair the zoning-out experience with various behaviors (eating, video games, cleaning, etc.). These behaviors are often repetitive in nature and allow us to disengage from unpleasant stress. You may have noticed that none of these behaviors are “bad.” We get into trouble when we over engage in these behaviors and avoid addressing the triggering stressor.

This brings us back to our initial question, how do you curb the uncontrollable appetite? You have already connected the appetite with stress and eating. What can you do to adjust and redirect your response to stress?

First, begin by asking yourself if you are really hungry. Next, pause and consider the difference between hunger as a physiological need for food and hunger as an automatic response to combating stress. You may be hungry, but not for the fuel which food is meant to provide. It could be that your body is craving the endorphins (“feel good” neurotransmitters produced in the brain) that food produces. Your brain is likely in the habit of getting endorphins it craves by consuming food. Distinguishing between the actual need for food and craving for endorphins will assist you in determining the degree of your hunger. How do you know you are hungry? How does your body tell you that it is hungry?

Determining your body's type of hunger brings you into the present and helps you to locate your “auto-pilot” button. What were you thinking about just before you began to eat? Are those thoughts connected to a source of stress?

Being mindful of stress and your response (automatically moving toward food) provides momentum for you to replace your behaviors and responses with new ones. You can now create new habits in self-care that will have more positive outcomes than overeating. Instead of stress eating, your new found awareness offers you the choice to work on any other ongoing project or hobby you enjoy. The goal is to engage in activities which you enjoy and thereby produce the endorphins your brain craves.

There you have it. Work on being mindful about how you are feeling, addressing the stress directly, and engaging in other enjoyable activities.

**-Sarah Tilley**

## What are some tips for test taking anxiety?

Many people struggle with test-taking anxiety, procrastination, or both. Instead of binge watching the most recent season of Game of Thrones, consider some of these tips in order to stream-line your studying and keep yourself calm during the test.

Be aware of the test's content and expectations. Is the test multiple choice, fill in the blank, short answer, essay, etc? Knowing ahead of time what the test will involve will help you specify how you should study. Multiple choice, true/false, and fill in the blank generally emphasize the use of rote memory which is essentially going over the information in an organized and repetitive fashion in order to quickly memorize the content. One specific style of rote memorization involves breaking down the information into smaller sections. Emphasize the first section thoroughly then add the second section. By adding more information into your already memorized information, you can more quickly assimilate the new information. Unfortunately, rote memory does not necessarily promote long-term retention of information. Take time to go over the information after the test to help retain the information and transfer it into long-term memory.

For short answer and essay style tests, you must be able to organize content into a coherent presentation. Studying should emphasize breaking down information into bullet-point nuggets that can be elaborated on when answering the specific questions on the test. For example, a nursing student might be studying anatomy and physiology. Rather than memorizing different muscle groups or organ functions, break down the information into sections of the body as well as their specific function and interaction with other organs, muscles, tendons, etc. Hopefully, you have some guidelines that can help you organize your information such as function, injury, treatment, etc.



During the actual exam, there are a few tricks for the rote memory style questions that you can utilize to ease your anxiety in the moment. With multiple choice questions if you do not immediately know the answer, try to eliminate one or two of the possible answers to increase the likelihood of choosing the correct answer. Educated guessing is generally effective as long as the guess is informed by your studies. Blind guessing is where you will get into trouble. With true/false questions, the statements must be completely true to be marked true. Oftentimes, instructors will only make a small part of the statement false. Focus on finding the falsehoods. If you do not know the answer but cannot find a falsehood, then a guess of true is likely to be correct. Lastly, second guessing yourself can be very risky! Only change an answer if you are completely sure that the new answer is the correct one. If you are indecisive, stick with your first answer.

For short answer and essay style questions, take time during the exam to organize your thoughts. Write down those bullet-point thoughts you have learned and structure your response to make sure you fully answer the question. You will likely be able to easily answer the prompt by taking the extra time to organize your thoughts before writing out your full answer. Pay close attention to what information the question or prompt is asking for and be specific. Wasting time on extraneous information will slow you down and could cause you to rush or run out of time.

Hopefully, these tips can be useful for you in your test-taking endeavors. Take time to breathe, remember what you studied, and remind yourself that when it is all over, you can go find out what happened to Arya Stark.

**-Mark Russell**

## I am an adult student going to college, and sometimes my family feels neglected and resentful of my time on campus, and while I am studying at home. How can I get them to rally behind me and support this endeavor that will ultimately benefit us all in the long run?

While there is no one way to reassure your family that you are not neglecting them while you are away at class, I would suggest starting off by having a family meeting during which time everyone can share their thoughts and feelings in an open forum. Getting your family to rally behind you isn't an impossibility, but they are presently feeling neglected, so receiving their support might be a bit far-fetched right now. I would suggest spending time with those

family members who are feeling the most upset about your time away at college in any small way that you can such as preparing meals together or sitting together at the kitchen table to do homework or pay bills. What your family appears to be saying is not that they don't want you to succeed, but that they miss you. Let your family know that your time at school in no way means that you love or care for them any less and that you miss them too. Cultivating a sense of support and encouragement between family members is very important. Every member of your family does not only need physical care, but also human sympathy, understanding, and stimulation. If they lack these, there might be development and growth problems in the future. Helping everyone in the family work together with others and fit themselves in the social whole is of great importance. Your idea to go back to school as an adult can be a great opportunity for your family to learn this.

**- Julie Kostrey**

The other day my boyfriend raised his hand as if to strike me. He didn't but now I am scared and don't know who to turn to. Any direction you can give me will be appreciated.

Hi, Friend! Sounds like a stressful situation. With the recent coverage of Ray Rice and the NFL in the news, domestic violence has become a hot button issue. However, with all the talk going on, there isn't a lot of concrete information that a person can turn to.

*National Coalition Against Domestic Violence* defines domestic violence as the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats, destruction of property, mental and emotional abuse.

This means that even though your boyfriend has never struck you, you may fit the definition of a domestic violent relationship. Are there verbal insults when you fight? Does he throw things? Punch walls? If you feel physically threatened in the relationship at any point, for any reason, then it has in some form become domestically violent.

The NCADV also has research showing that there is a link between domestic violence and depression and/or suicidal behaviors. My next question is, how do you think your guy's mental health is? If he is not doing well, there is a chance that he could get worse physically, with you having more physical risks in the relationship. If you want to stay with your guy, he is going to need some mental health treatment of his own, to ensure your safety, and to help him feel better all around. Without it, his need for control in the relationship may get worse, increasing the likelihood that he will become physical. If you or anyone reading this is in need of help from domestic violence please take action. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), our office at: 307-509-0772, or Safehouse at: 307-637-7233

**-Lindsay Simineo**

I am constantly living beyond my financial means. This has gotten me in trouble. I am in debt and depressed. Help!!

It sounds like you are currently dealing with a lot of stressors in your life right now, and honestly the first thing to do about them is recognize that you need some help. This step is primary and easily the most challenging - facing the consequences of the choices that you have made is not easy, and you do not ultimately need to face these things on your own.

Sitting at home right now, something you can do is begin to think proactively about the ways you handle your stressors. It sounds like one of the most common ways you manage these difficult feelings is by making poor choices with your money. What are some other ways that have assisted you in the past when you have been too stressed out? Write out a list that you can read back to yourself in times of trouble, so as not to rely on memory alone. Include at least one or two people whom you can call or make plans with to support you instead of grabbing the credit card. Being proactive and thoughtful when you are not in the middle of a crisis makes your efforts to change your normal cycle of impulsive choices much more likely to succeed.

The other concern is what to do with your current levels of debt. This is not as easy to solve as one might think, as there are entire cottage industries and anecdotal evidence of different "debt counseling" agencies that are not in business with the consumer in mind. Contacting the bank or credit card company directly does seem like a good place to start - instead of adding a third party, they may be willing to work with you and even refer you to specific programs that they have worked with in the past. Outside of consolidation, there are different strategies in how to attack your debt most effectively. The following is an article comparing Dave Ramsey's snowball method and the more aggressive and practical avalanche method: <http://thebillfold.com/2012/04/paying-off-your-debt-the-snowball-plan-vs-the-avalanche-method/>

Both of these strategies need to be employed: both changing your spending behaviors and changing your repayment behaviors. Neither are easy, but permanent change cannot happen without both. In light of all of these moving parts, finding professional help for your mental health needs may be warranted. It may be the support you need to make these steps in your life more lasting.

**-Doug Blocksma**

What's the youngest and oldest client ever seen at Mind Spa?

The youngest client to receive individual treatment is 3 years old. However, our belief is that when you treat one person in a family, the whole family ends up getting treatment simply by the impact the change in that one person brings. That being said, we have worked with many expecting mothers and women who found out they were expecting while still in therapy. So you could say our youngest client ever has been the 1 day old embryos of those wonderful women we have worked who became pregnant. The oldest client to receive treatment is 91 years old. Its hard to imagine that someone at 91 years old hasn't gotten life totally figure out yet. But that is just part and parcel of the human condition. We are ever changing, we never fully have things figured out, and we never "grow out of" the need for other people in our lives for support and/or guidance. It was a privilege to work with someone in that stage of life.

**-Dr. Sheri Fluellen**

### When did Mind Spa first open their doors?

Mind Spa officially became a business on July 6, 2010. It opened its doors at our first location, 518 E 18th Street, on Dec 6, 2010 and the first patient was seen in that same month. The business plan for the start up of Mind Spa says in the employee section, " End result will be a total of 4 practitioners and 1 administrative individual as employees of Mind Spa within the first three years." We have really exceeded the original expectation of our work in the community and it is amazing!! At the end of the first three years (Dec 2013), we had 7 therapists and 3 administrative team members, and since then we have been able to add a couple more amazing therapists. We have an incredible team that I couldn't be more proud of!!



- Dr. Sheri Fluellen

### What does HIPAA Stand for?

HIPAA stands for Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. (I am slightly perfectionistic when it comes to some things, and it is a pet peeve of mine when I see people refer to this as **HIPPA**. I've even read a document written by a medical lawyer who referred to it as HIPPA rather than HIPAA.) It was an attempt at healthcare reform passed by Congress in 1996. It has two major objectives: to ensure people could maintain health insurance between jobs (i.e. COBRA policies) and to ensure the security and confidentiality of patient information (e.g. as it related to electronic transmission and financial data of patient information). What are the main pieces of information you should know as an educated consumer?

\* The Privacy Rule within the Act states that the following personal identifiers must be protected at all times: Name, Address (including zip code), Dates (birth, admission, discharge, death), Telephone numbers, Fax numbers, E-mail addresses, Social security numbers, Medical record numbers, Health plan beneficiary numbers, Account numbers, Certificate/License numbers, Vehicle identifiers and serial numbers (including license plate), Device identifiers and serial numbers, Web Universal Resource Locators (URLs), Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, Biometric identifiers (including finger and voice prints), Full face photographic images and any comparable images; and Any other unique identifying number, characteristic, or code.

\* The Privacy Rule allows for your healthcare providers to use and disclose PHI without patient written authorization for the purposes of *treatment, payment, and health care operations*.

\* Specific written authorization from patients must be obtained for anything outside those uses, and additionally for disclosing psychotherapy notes.

-Dr. Sheri Fluellen

### How did you come up with the name Mind Spa?

I think names are very important, and I didn't come to the name "Mind Spa" quickly. I spent hours brainstorming with some of my favorite creative people. I wanted the name to invoke a feeling or image of what therapy should be like. I settled

on Mind Spa because when you leave a health spa, you feel relaxed, rejuvenated, more enthusiastic and ready to face life and reality. That is ultimately what therapy is about. Granted, not every single session leaves you feeling amazing (because therapy is hard emotional work)! But the overall experience from start to finish should leave you feeling less anxious and more rejuvenated. I also believe that visual images are important as well and I went through many iterations of what the Mind Spa logo would look like. Here are some of the prototypes that were ultimately dumped. Maybe you like one of them better though...



- Dr. Sheri Fluellen

## How would I know it's time for me to get counseling?

Everyone has a different ability to tolerate stress, to self-correct when life's path is going awry, to cope with depression, etc. There isn't a one size fits all approach to when someone could really use therapy. If someone makes an appointment for therapy, then I would say that 99% of the time they

have been able to self-identify their need for help. For those that are still contemplating "to therapy, or not to therapy", I tend to focus on functionality. Here's an example to help clarify my perspective of functionality. You are a 29 year old person who recently went to California on vacation. While on vacation, you spent time swimming and playing in the ocean. During all your frolicking, you found yourself being pulled away from shore by a current. You panic and you scream for help, but before anyone can reach you to help, you have 2 terrifying minutes of struggling to stay afloat and breathe. You ultimately go unconscious and wake up on the shore, having been rescued by another swimmer. It is now 3 months after this incident, and you have developed a phobia of the ocean from your traumatic experience. Now let's examine the idea of functionality. If you are from Wyoming and never expect to encounter the ocean again, your phobia of the ocean may have almost no impact on your ability to live life well. However, if you are native to Florida and own a deep sea fishing rig that is your livelihood, you might find your fear of oceans quite debilitating, and it would behoove you to receive treatment right away to help you move beyond the crippling fear of the white caps. The gray area between these two extremes is where the majority of us struggle in figuring out what to do. Ask yourself if you are really able to function in your life in the way you want to, or is something holding you back? If that something is too big, too complicated, too sensitive, too unknown, too scary to deal with, then chances are you may seriously benefit from counseling.

**- Dr. Sheri Fluellen**

## What does DBT, CBT and EDMR stand for?

Acronyms can be used as a pneumatic device designed to help us remember larger chunks of information with a smaller amount of data. It helps increase the efficiency of our brains. Even if they have some usefulness, they can be annoying because not everyone understands them equally. Having

lived 17 years connected to the world of the military, the use of acronyms became almost second nature (PT, BDUs, AFIs, TDY, PCS, TLF, BOP, LOC, UCMJ, AAFES, PRP, PDI, and the list is virtually endless). In the field of psychology and therapy, acronyms will also be found. There are three acronyms that you may encounter and I will shed some insight into what they mean.

CBT: No, this is not "computer based training". It stands for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. CBT is one of the most researched modalities of therapy, and it has demonstrated effectiveness for many issues for many people. In a synopsis, CBT combines helping people recognize their dysfunctional thought patterns (i.e. cognitions) in order to think about things differently and focusing some efforts of change on outward behaviors as well. It is the intersection of change in both of these categories that lead to some significant growth. Most therapy, to some degree, will employ aspects of CBT. They are very foundational skills taught in most counseling programs.

The second acronym is DBT. This stands for Dialectical Behavior Therapy. DBT is actually a more specialized form of CBT. It uses a more structured approach and has been found to be very effective in helping people who have chronic suicidality and other co-occurring severely dysfunctional behaviors. It starts with helping people keep themselves safe and ultimately moves in the direction of helping people find the most fulfillment out of life.

The third acronym is EMDR. This stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. This form of therapy has been developed mostly in the treatment of trauma. According to [www.emdr.com](http://www.emdr.com), "EMDR psychotherapy is an information processing therapy and uses an eight phase approach to address the experiential contributors of a wide range of pathologies. It attends to the past experiences that have set the groundwork for pathology, the current situations that trigger dysfunctional emotions, beliefs and sensations, and the positive experience needed to enhance future adaptive behaviors and mental health." The most memorable aspect of EMDR is the use of "tapping" or finger moving, which allows the patient's brain to become engaged with both sides simultaneously (called bilateral stimulation). While there is still some mystery as to the exact mechanism that causes change (this is true of many therapies), many people have found significant benefit from engaging in this form of treatment.

**-Dr. Sheri Fluellen**

**Mind Spa has  
recently added  
Dr. Lisa Brandes,  
family physician,  
to our practice for  
mental health  
medication management!**

We are thrilled to announce the addition of Dr. Lisa Brandes MD as our newest provider to the Mind Spa team. Dr. Brandes' expertise expands our psychological services available in Wyoming. Our goal is to offer complete mental health care through our team, and now we can include mental health medication management! Your Mind Spa team can easily and competently integrate your mental health care, to include therapy and medications. Please call our office for more information 307-509-0772.

I would love some tips on being mindful with how you interact and teach children. As their parent, how much of REAL life do you allow them to observe you experiencing, or how much do you shelter them from? Is it healthy for a child to see you stressed, but it is equally unhealthy for them to think the world is only happy? What's an appropriate age to introduce them to these concepts. I suppose the more general topic is how to support the emotional development in children.

Supporting emotional development in children is something that begins very early on as a child's emotional "perceptions" begin developing in utero. During the first three years of a child's life his or her brain is rapidly developing, he or she is forming attachments

and on some level making "decisions" about if the world is safe and good. By the time a child is three, his or her brain is roughly 80% developed, so a lot is going on during those crucial first three years.

When it comes to "real life" situations, children need stability, security and love from their caregivers as they or their caregivers face difficult situations. The kind of "real" life children are exposed to greatly impacts who they become and how they perceive the world and themselves. For instance, chaotic and abusive environments (which for some people are real life), often create a child who has trouble regulating themselves, has anxiety or behavioral issues or who shuts down emotionally as form of self-protection.

Children of all ages need to know that the people who are caring for them can regulate their own emotions and teach them how to self-regulate. As parents we can't always do this perfectly, but allowing our children to see how we deal with stress, anger, sadness and loss are very important concepts for them to learn via our example. Sheltering our kids from *normal* everyday stressors can be counterproductive because those moments are teaching moments. Even when we mess up and don't react perfectly to stressors, it is still an opportunity to show how to humbly admit our mistakes and seek forgiveness.

- Sara Bryan



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