

THE IMPORTANCE OF MINDSET IN RECOVERY

By Tamara Keenan and Liz R. Scott

Mindset plays a critical role in the lives of individuals with disabilities, whether recovering or adjusting to something permanent. Someone's mindset can make a significant difference in continuing to lead a fulfilling life with any type of disability and decrease the recovery duration. Historically, the concept of self-efficacy has helped guide the practice of occupational health professionals. There has been ongoing research to support that a key component of self-efficacy or the ability to believe in one's own recovery can be influenced by a positive mindset.

Research has shown that the mind can have a powerful impact on physical health and healing, with evidence suggesting that a person's psychological state can affect their physical health and vice versa (Bandura, 1977; Black et al., 2017; Lagerveld, Brenninkmeijer, Blonk, Twisk, & Schaufeli, 2017; Liu, Xin, Shen, & Liu, 2020). The relationship between the mind and the body is complex, and scientists are still trying to understand the multitude of ways in which the mind can affect the body. If we examine the research there are several well-established mechanisms by which the mind can influence the body's physiology (Alessi & Bennett, 2020; Hedlund, 2021; Liu, Xin, Shen, He, & Liu, 2020).

A person with a disability may face additional barriers and discrimination in their daily lives, which can sometimes lead to additional emotional stress, isolation or negative thoughts, which can all adversely impact the condition (Modini, Joyce, Mykletun,

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Christensen, Bryant, Mitchell, & Harvey, 2016). There is a direct correlation between one's mindset and ability to cope with challenges and find greater emotional fulfillment. There is evidence that having a positive mindset will have a significant impact on an individual's overall well-being and ability to overcome challenges leading to greater psychosocial and emotional well-being (Lagerveld, Brenninkmeijer, Blonk, Twisk, & Schaufeli, 2017; Liu, Xin, Shen, & Liu, 2020).

Mindset has been identified as important for recovery and can greatly influence an individual's ability to overcome challenges, adapt to changes, and ultimately achieve their goals (Lagerveld, Brenninkmeijer, Blonk, Twisk, J., & Schaufeli, 2017; Liu, Xin, Shen, & Liu, 2020). Research has shown that having a positive mindset has a significant impact on an individual's physical and mental health outcomes. This is particularly true when it comes to the process of recovering from an illness or injury, by leading to better mental health, improved physical health, greater motivation for return to work and adherence to rehabilitation programs (Lagerveld, Brenninkmeijer, Blonk, Twisk, & Schaufeli, 2017). Whereas, a negative mindset can lead to feelings of hopelessness, decreased motivation, and

decreased engagement in return to work efforts and rehabilitation programs, which can negatively impact recovery (Liu, Xin, Shen, He, & Liu, 2020).

The relationship between mindset and recovery can be complex and multidirectional, with recovery also affecting a person's mindset and overall outlook on life. It is important for individuals with disabilities and those recovering from illness or injury to have support and access to resources that can help promote a positive and empowering mindset. Mindset starts with the individual. However, recovering from or living with a disability becomes easier to navigate with positive encouragement and influences from their recovery support group (medical personnel, family, friends, and peers).

Self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's ability to succeed in a specific situation or accomplish a task. Having a high level of self-efficacy has been linked to improved physical and mental health outcomes, as well as better performance in various areas of one's life (Benight, & Bandura, 2004; Brouwer, Amick, Lee, H., Franche, & Hogg-Johnson, 2015; Brouwer, Amick, Lee, Franche, & Hogg-Johnson, 2015; Lagerveld, Brenninkmeijer, Blonk, Twisk, & Schaufeli, 2017; Stajkovic, & Luthans, 1998). Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall

sense of worth and value as a person. As a measure of how much an individual values themselves and their abilities, self-esteem can be influenced by various factors: life experiences, personal relationships, and one's thoughts and beliefs about themselves.

It is clear how self-esteem and self-efficacy play a significant role in an individual's psychological well-being and overall recovery process. When one has high self-efficacy and self-esteem, this naturally leads, to a positive sense of self-worth, which increases motivation, boosts confidence, and provides a foundation of resilience (the ability for an individual to effectively cope with and recover from adversity). Resilience is crucial as it allows individuals to overcome obstacles and challenges helping them maintain their well-being and mental health as they navigate their recovery process (Benight, & Bandura, 2004; Stajkovic, & Luthans, 1998).

Building and maintaining a positive mindset can lead to greater self-esteem and ultimately an improved ability to have self-efficacy (Brouwer, Amick, Lee, H., Franche, & Hogg-Johnson, 2015). At the most basic level, it can help individuals with disabilities to reframe their disability as a challenge rather than a deficit by focusing on one's strengths and abilities, rather than dwelling on their limitations (Brouwer, Amick, Lee, Franche, & Hogg-Johnson, 2015; Lagerveld, Brenninkmeijer, Blonk, Twisk, & Schaufeli, 2017). A study published in the *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development* found that people with spinal cord injuries who had a more positive outlook on their injury were more likely to have a better quality of life and mental health outcomes post-injury (Garms-Homolová et al., 2017). A positive mindset can also help individuals with disabili-

ties better cope with the challenges that they may face. Research has shown that individuals with disabilities who have a more positive outlook are more likely to have better social support and fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Lefebvre, 2017).

Mindset also matters when it comes to the interactions people with disabilities have with others. Adopting a growth mindset, where one looks at challenges as opportunities for growth and development, can also help individuals with disabilities to better navigate social interactions and relationships (Dweck, 2017; Garland, Hudak, Hanley, & Nakamura, 2020). A growth mindset can also be helpful in educational and professional settings, as it can lead to increased engagement in learning and a greater willingness to take on challenges and pursue new opportunities (Blackwell et al., 2007).

Mind-Body Connection

The mind-body connection refers to the relationship between our thoughts, emotions, and physical health (Alessi, & Bennett, 2020; Garland, Hanley, Nakamura, Barrett, Baker, & Reese, 2022; Garland, Hudak, Hanley, & Nakamura, 2020; Tresker, 2022). Psychoneuroimmunology is a growing field that studies the interplay between the psychological, nervous, and immune systems of the human body. It is a multidisciplinary field that draws on knowledge from psychology, neuroscience, immunology, and other related disciplines. The field is relevant to a wide range of health problems, including autoimmune disorders, chronic pain, and mental health conditions (Alessi & Bennett, 2020).

The mind-body connection is particularly relevant because the recovery process can be both physically and emotionally chal-

lenging. Studies have shown that stress, anxiety, and depression can slow down the healing process and impact physical rehabilitation outcomes (Garland, Hanley, Nakamura, Barrett, Baker, & Reese, 2022; Liu, Xin, Shen, & Liu, 2020). Whereas, positive psychological factors, such as optimism, high self-esteem, and resilience, can have a positive impact on recovery by improving motivation, boosting the immune system, and reducing the impact of stress on the body (Garland, Hanley, Nakamura, Barrett, Baker, & Reese, 2022; Garland, Hudak, Hanley, & Nakamura, 2020; Garland, Hudak, Hanley, & Nakamura, 2020; Liu, Xin, Shen, He, & Liu, 2020; Zgierska, Burzinski, Mundt, Clintock, Fox, Coe, Miller, & Fleming, 2019). By focusing on both physical and emotional well-being, individuals can optimize their chances of a successful recovery and improve their overall health and well-being.

Positive Mindset

There are many ways that we can all support each other to develop a positive mindset. By being part of a support team, individuals can help by offering information and resources that can lead to better understanding and successful disability management results (Garland, Hudak, Hanley, & Nakamura, 2020; Schuling, Huijbers, van Ravestein, Willenm, 2020). Resources can include information about the causes of the disability, as well as tips for coping with possible physical, emotional, and social challenges. Another approach is to provide individuals with opportunities for social and emotional support. This can include connecting individuals with peer support groups or mentors who have lived similar experiences, and providing access to counseling and therapy (Schuling, Huijbers, van Ravestein,

Willenm, 2020).

Improving Mindset

There are many known strategies that can be used to improve or create a positive mindset and outlook:

1. *Practice gratitude:* When focusing on everything you are grateful for, rather than dwelling on what is wrong in your life, it can help improve your overall mood and increase feelings of happiness and contentment.
2. *Engage in positive self-talk:* Be mindful of the words you use when you talk to yourself, and make sure they are positive and encouraging. Avoid self-criticism and negative thoughts, and instead focus on what you are capable of achieving.
3. *Develop a growth mindset:* Believe that your abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and experience. This way you can persevere in the face of challenges, seeing them as opportunities to learn, and seek out opportunities for growth and development.
4. *Engage in mindfulness practices:* Mindfulness, such as meditation and yoga, can help improve your ability to focus and be present in the moment. When you are present in the moment, this helps reduce stress and anxiety.
5. *Seek support:* Connecting with others who are going through similar experiences can provide a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation.
6. *Surround yourself with positive people:* The people you spend time with can have a big impact on your mindset. Try to surround yourself with people who are positive, supportive, and who will encourage you to think positively.
7. *Take care of your physical health:* Practicing self care such as eating a healthy diet, getting enough sleep and exercise, and managing stress can all help to improve your physical health, which in turn can improve your

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mood and overall mindset.

8. *Set and achieve realistic goals:* Setting and achieving goals can help boost your self-esteem and self-efficacy. Accomplishing goals also gives you a sense of purpose and direction. If it's a large goal, then break it down into smaller, manageable steps so that you can track your progress and celebrate your accomplishments one milestone at a time.
9. *Seek professional help:* If necessary, seeking help from a mental health professional can help address any underlying psychological or emotional issues that may be impacting the recovery process.

Benefits

The benefit of a positive mindset supersedes the recovery from a disability and can also lead to greater social and emotional well-being. People with disabilities may experience additional emotional stress, isolation, and societal discrimination, and a positive mindset can help them cope with these challenges and find greater emotional fulfillment (Garland, Hudak, Hanley, & Nakamura, 2020; Hedlund, 2021). Mindset is important for recovery because it can greatly influence an individual's ability to overcome challenges, adapt to changes, and ultimately achieve their recovery and return to work goals. Research has shown that having a positive mindset can have a significant impact on an individual's physical and mental health outcomes, particularly when it comes to recovery from illness or injury (Hedlund, Å., 2021; Liu, S., Xin, H., Shen, & Liu, 2020; Schuling, Huijbers, van Ravestein, Willenm, 2020; Schuling, Huijbers, van Ravestein, Willenm, 2020).

It's worth noting that a positive mindset alone may not be enough to fully recover from an illness or injury. However, it can make

the recovery process less daunting and more manageable. Alongside a positive mindset, other factors such as adequate medical care, rehabilitation programs, and support from family and friends, can help improve outcomes in the recovery process. As with any shift in behaviours, these methods may take some trial and error to find what works best. Development of a positive mindset is a continuous process that requires time and effort, but with persistence and dedication, it is possible to change the way we think and improve our overall well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, mindset matters particularly for people with disabilities. A positive mindset can lead to greater self-esteem, self-efficacy, increased self worth, resilience, better coping strategies, and more fulfillment in life. Encouraging people with disabilities to see challenges as opportunities for growth, connecting them to social and emotional support, and providing them with information and resources can help them develop a more positive outlook on their disability and return to work.

Along with adequate medical care and support, mindset is a powerful tool for individuals recovering from illness or injury. Having a positive mindset is a valuable asset, as it leads to better academic, professional, physical, and mental health outcomes. It is an essential part of the recovery process, as it can influence an individual's ability to overcome challenges and adapt to changes.

In conclusion, mindset and training the mind to be positive can have a significant impact on physical health and healing.

Positive thinking, mindfulness practices, and other psychological interventions can help individuals cope with stress, anxiety,

and chronic pain, and may even accelerate the healing process to ensure a successful return to work and recovery.

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