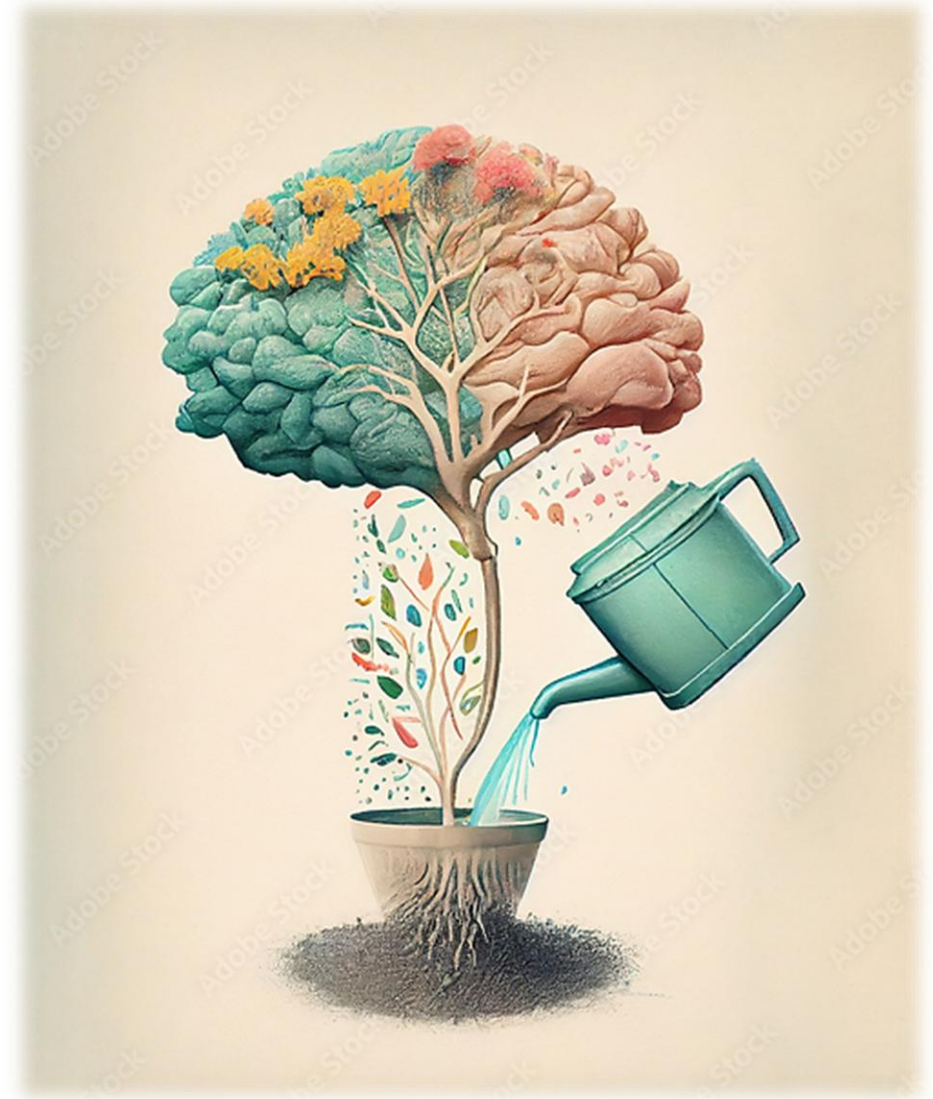


Mindsets, thoughts and Health: A spotlight on self-affirmation

Cleo Protogerou, PhD
Assistant Professor of Health
Behaviours
University of Crete, Greece

<https://www.cleoprotoogerou.com>



Question for you...

Psychology claims that our **thought patterns** can shape (even determine!) our health status...

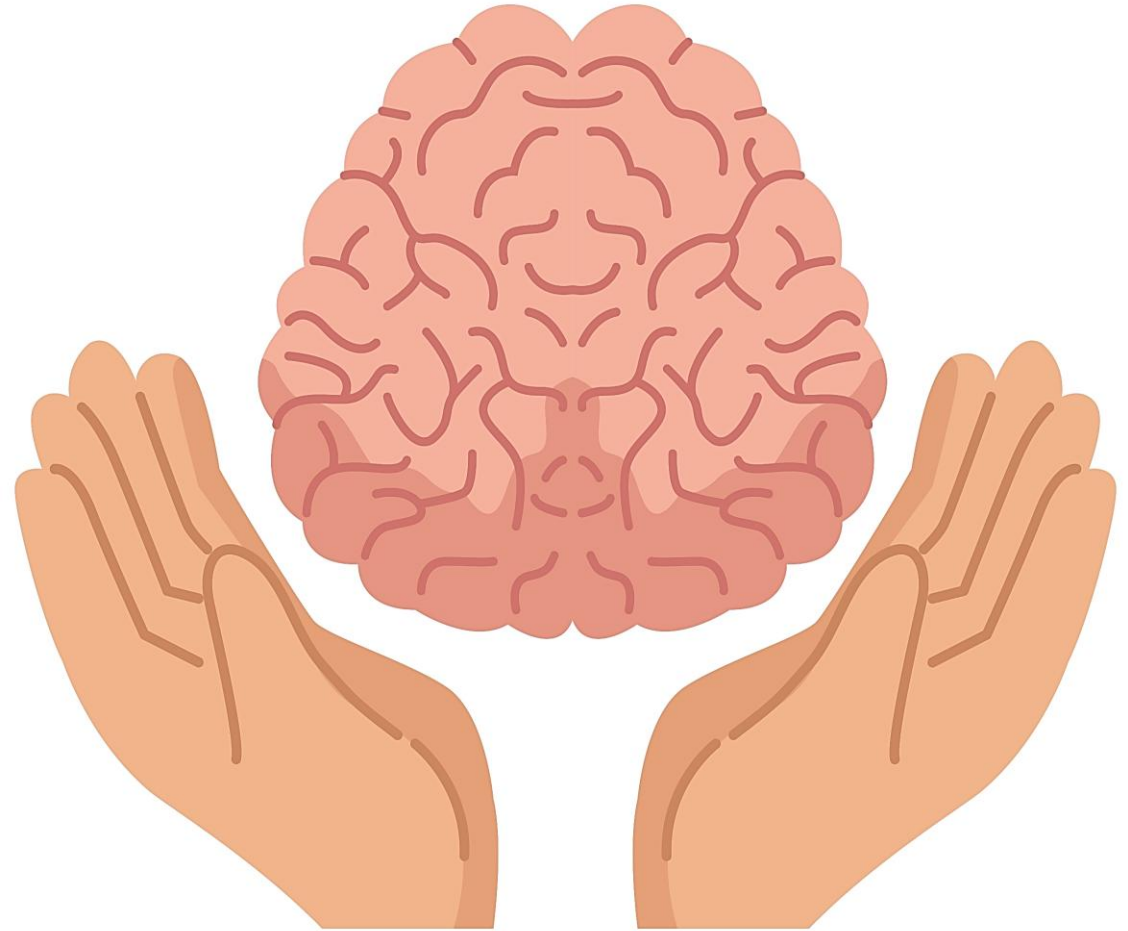
? **How** might this happen? **How** can our **thought patterns** determine our health?



Activity

**Grow longer ...grow
longer...grow longer...**

8



**How did that
happen?**

How did our
mind(set)
“shape” our
body?

**"THE BODY ACHIEVES
WHAT THE MIND
BELIEVES"**





Mindset: a set of beliefs, thought patterns & attitudes we hold about the world

- Fairly stable and well-established (like a “worldview”)
- Determines our decision-making & courses of action

WHAT EMOTIONS & COURSES OF ACTION RESULT FROM EACH MINDSET?

MINDETS ABOUT HEALTH (aka, health mindsets)

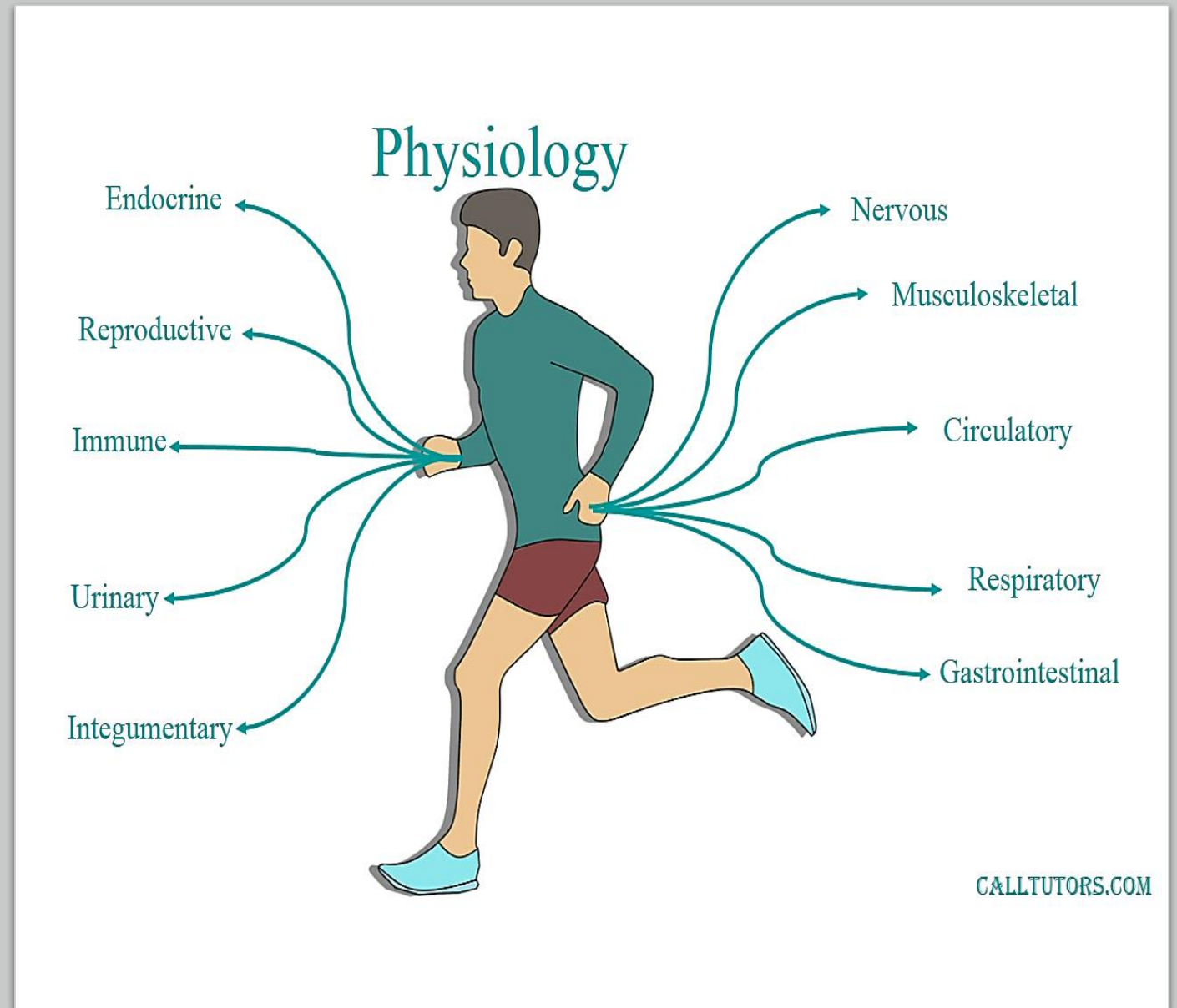


- Autoimmune diseases are caused by genes/heredity $\neq$ Autoimmune diseases are caused by lifestyle.
- I am healthy — I recover quickly $\neq$ Every winter I get severely ill with the flu.
- Weightlifting makes me stronger $\neq$ Weightlifting is exhausting.
- Stress makes me resilient $\neq$ Stress makes me ill.
- Housework is good exercise $\neq$ Housework damages the joints.
- My thoughts impact to how fast I recover from illness $\neq$ Thoughts are unrelated to illness.

Mindsets influence our health through:

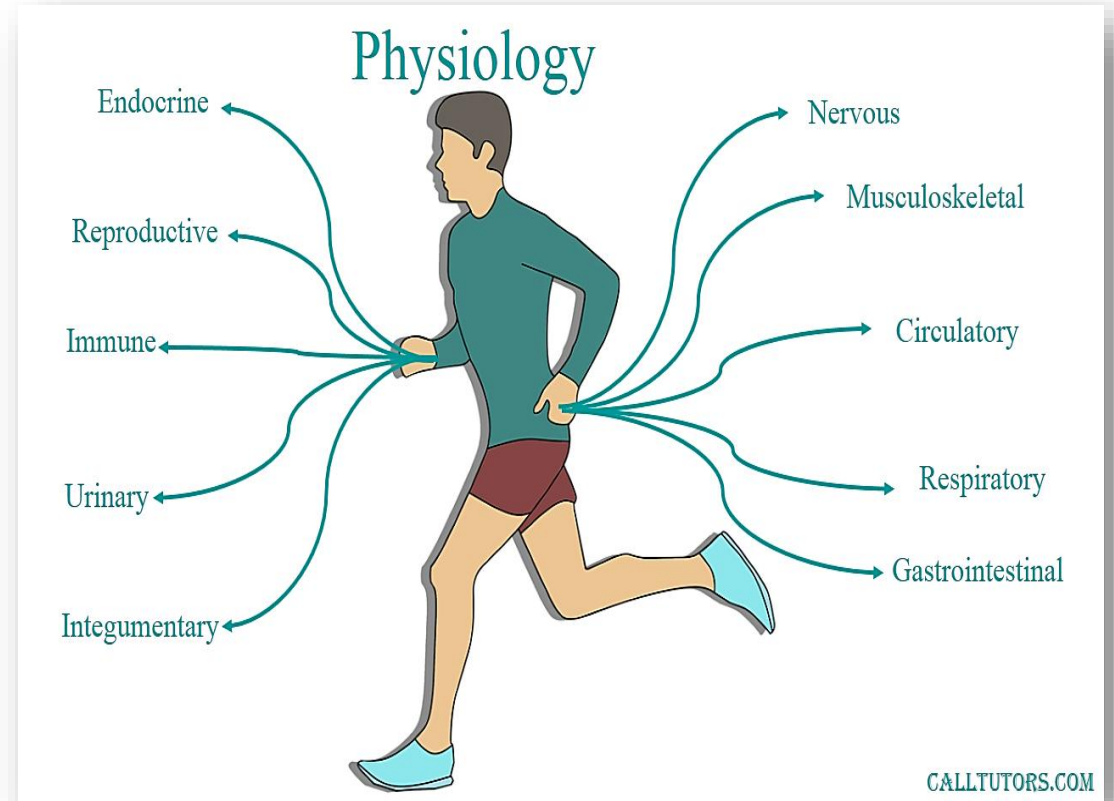
- Health behaviours
- Underlying physiology

Mediating factors



Mindsets:

- Activate brain regions associated with specific emotions and behaviours.
- Trigger bodily responses in the cardiovascular, endocrine, respiratory, nervous, and immune systems.



Different mindsets activate different physiological systems, with different effects on health.

Mindsets → ill health

The intermediate boxes are **mediators**: mechanisms that **explain** the relationship between depression and cardiac disease.

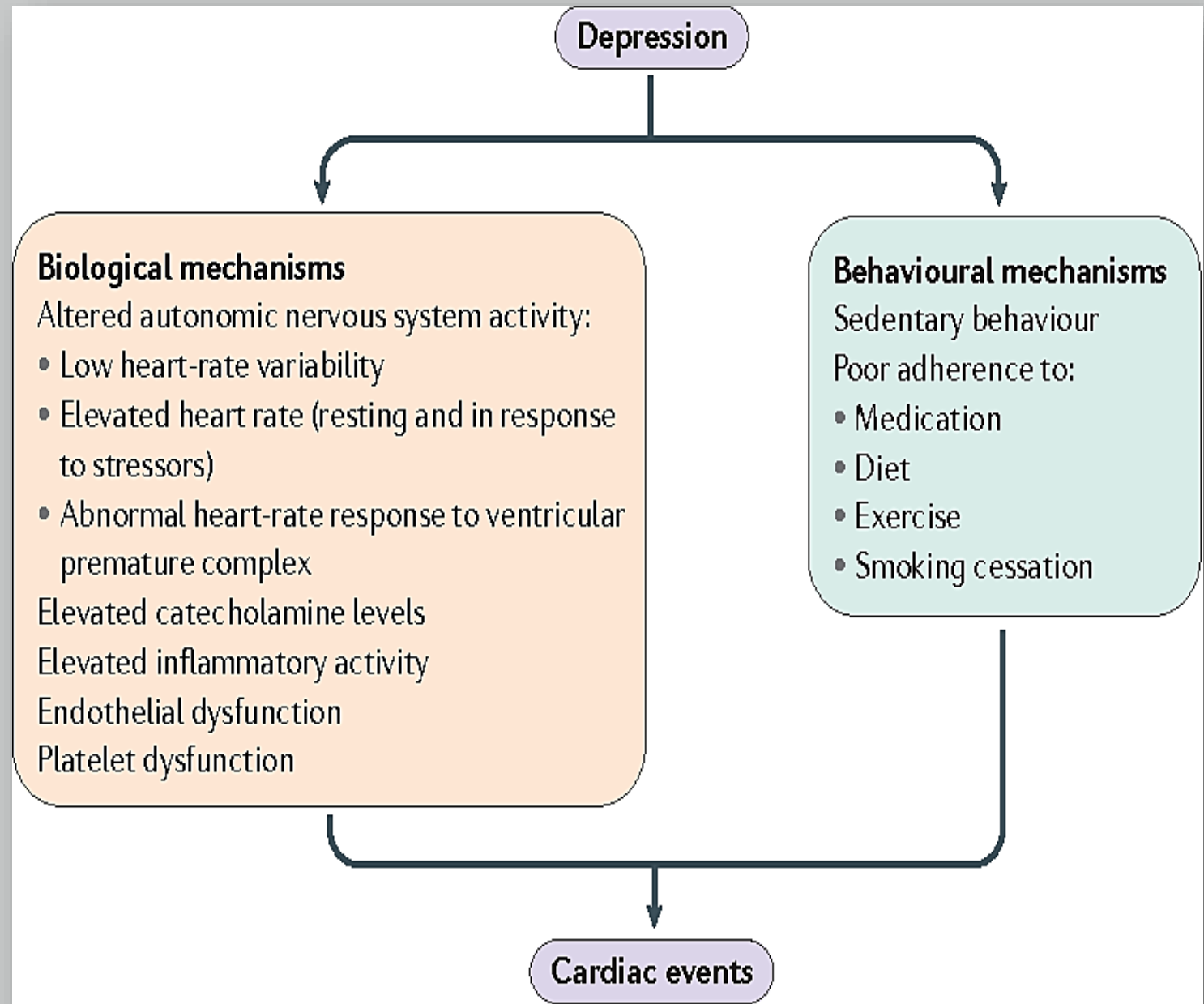
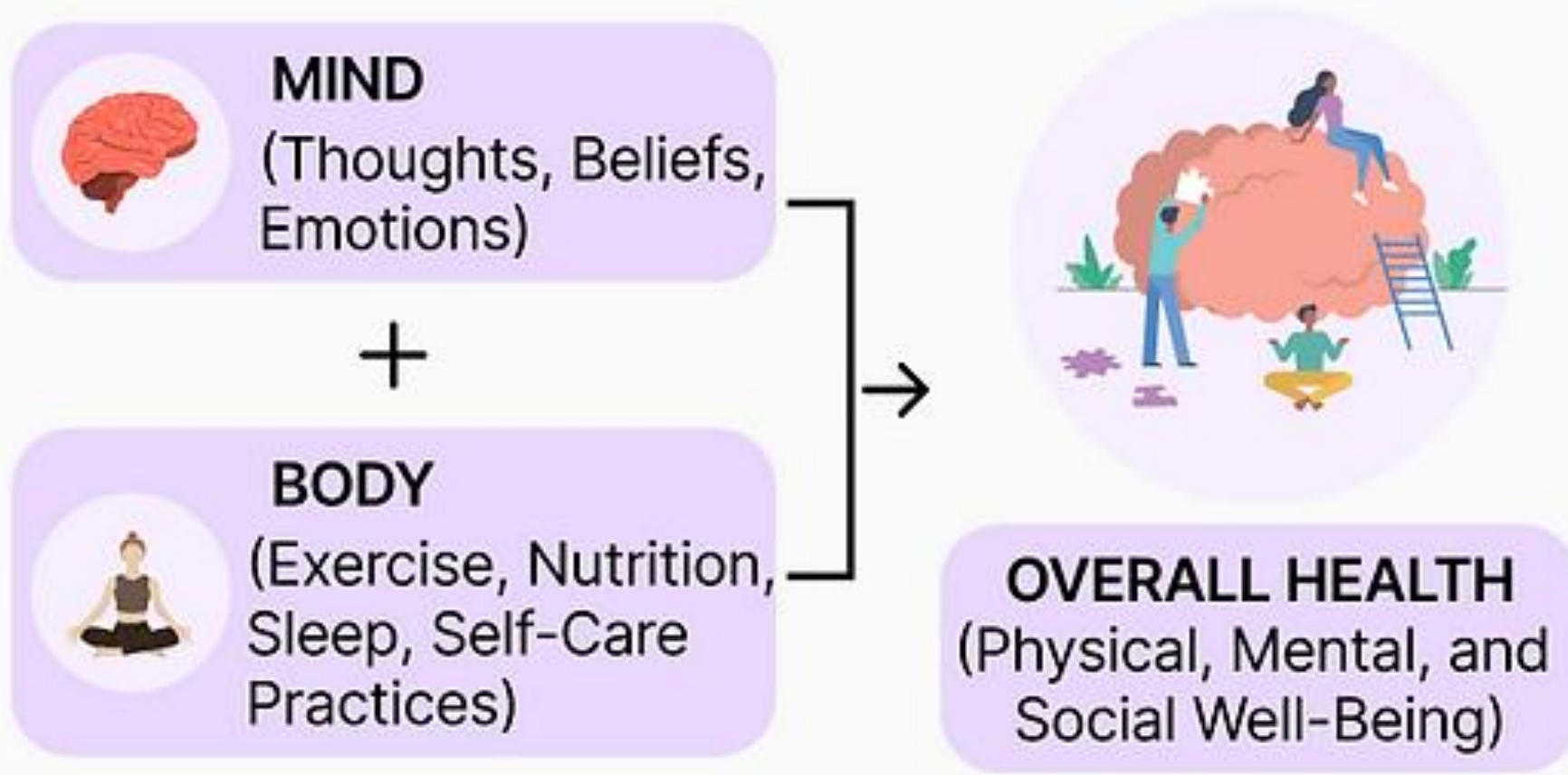


Figure 1 | Potential mechanisms linking depression and coronary heart disease.

The Mind-Body Connection



Activity: Your reaction to messages about your health (behaviours)

THINK: A friend tells you that the exercise programme you have been following for a long time is “not right” and that you should change it! 😞

WRITE:

- **Thoughts and emotions** that **immediately** come to your mind.
- What will you **say** to the friend who questioned your exercise programme?
- What will you **do** after your exercise programme was questioned and **WHY**.

SHARE WITH THE CLASS...



**The message (or the person) made
you...**

Want to change?

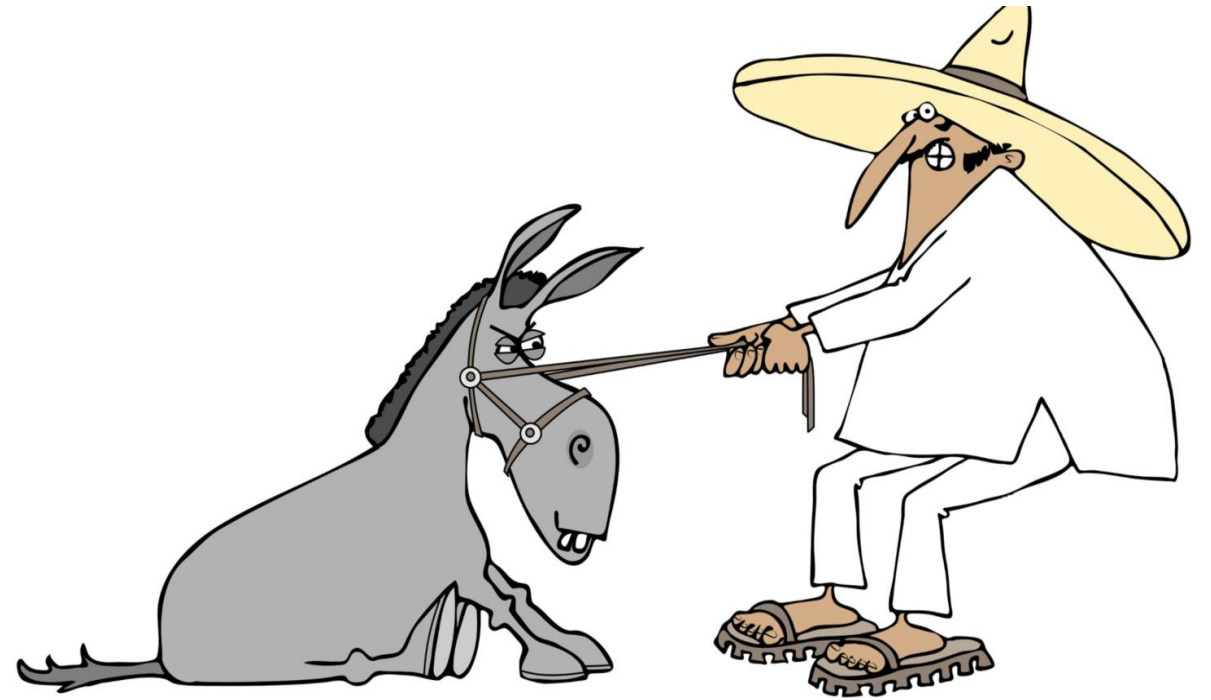
Resist change?

Defend yourself?

Feel anger? Anxiety? Fear?

Curiosity?

Tell yourself “I know what I’m
doing, I’m right”? (self-
affirmation)...



QUESTION FOR YOU

Why do we
resist
information that
challenges our
existing beliefs
and habits?





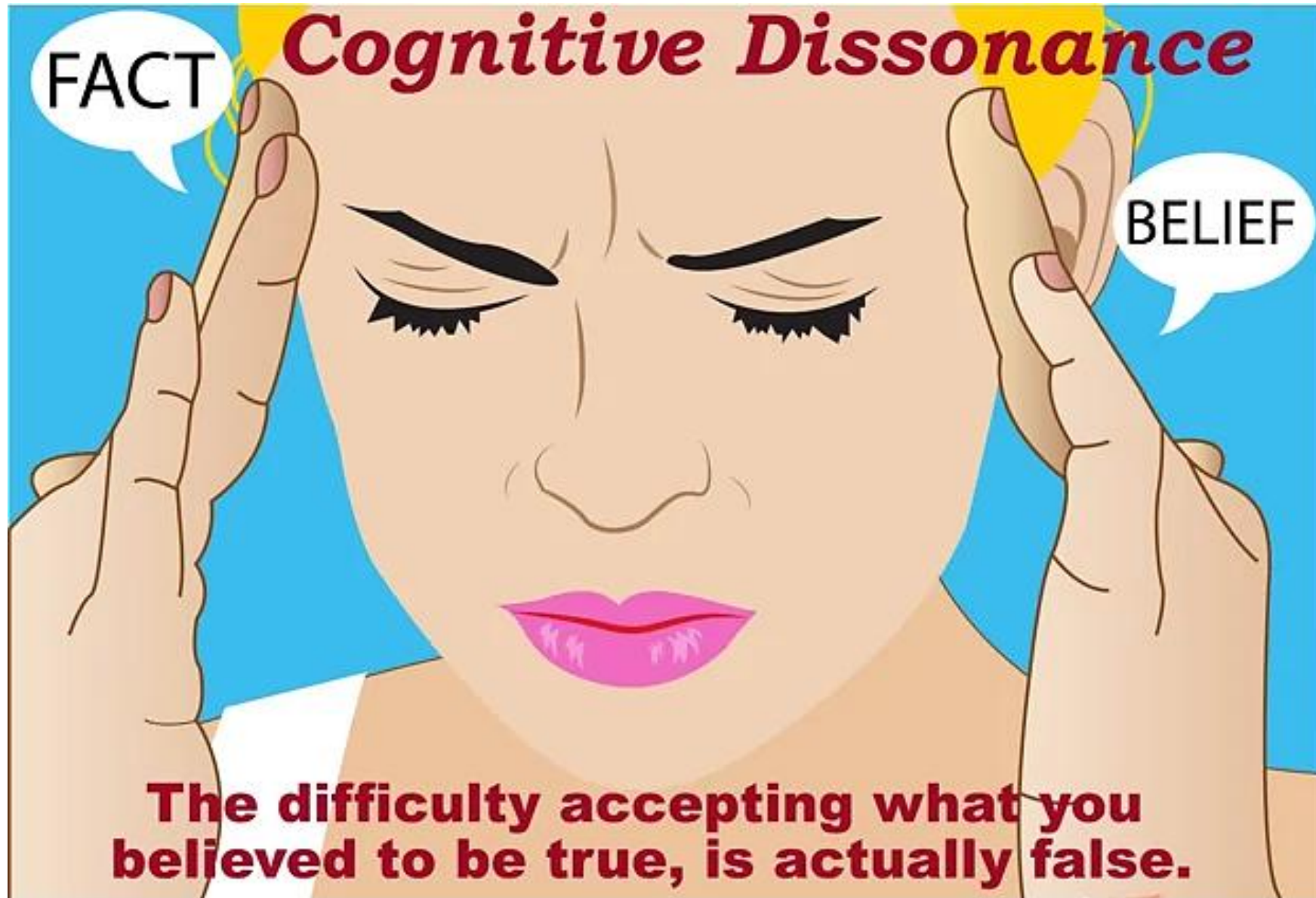
Cognitive Dissonance → DISCOMFORT

Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957)

Dissonance = conflict; disagreement; inconsistency

A state of psychological **discomfort** (tension, pressure, anxiety, uncertainty) resulting from **conflicting** beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours..



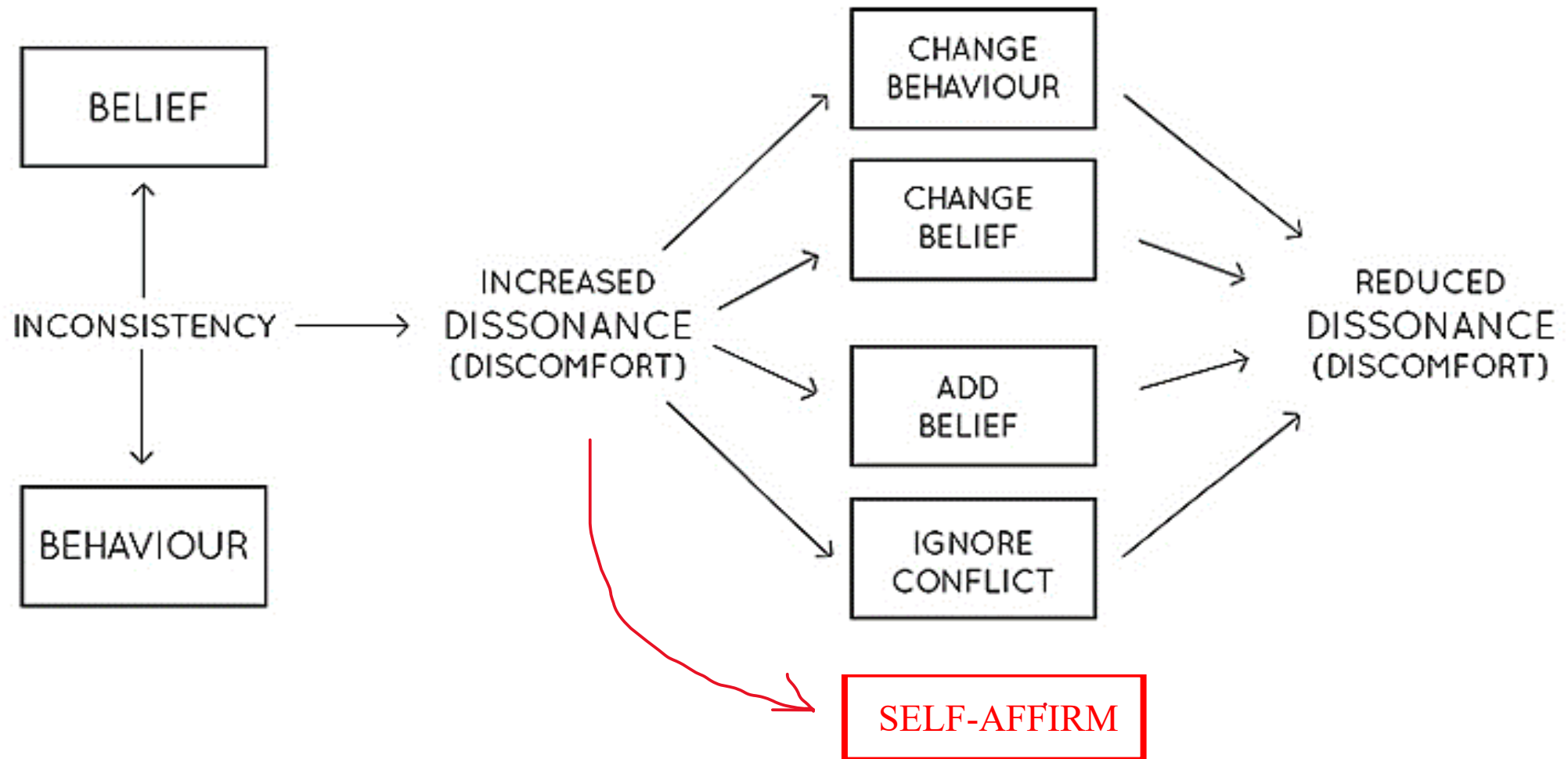


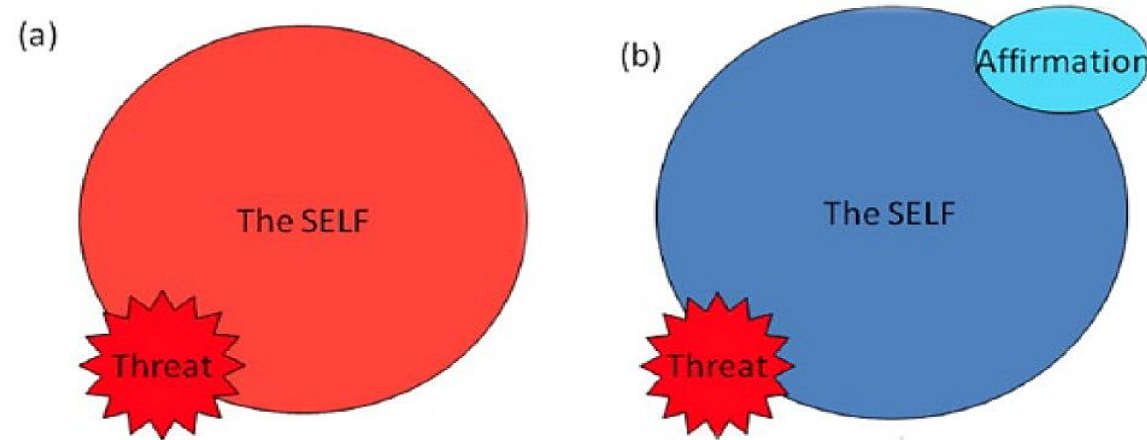


Question for you:

How do you reduce or eliminate the **discomfort of cognitive dissonance?**

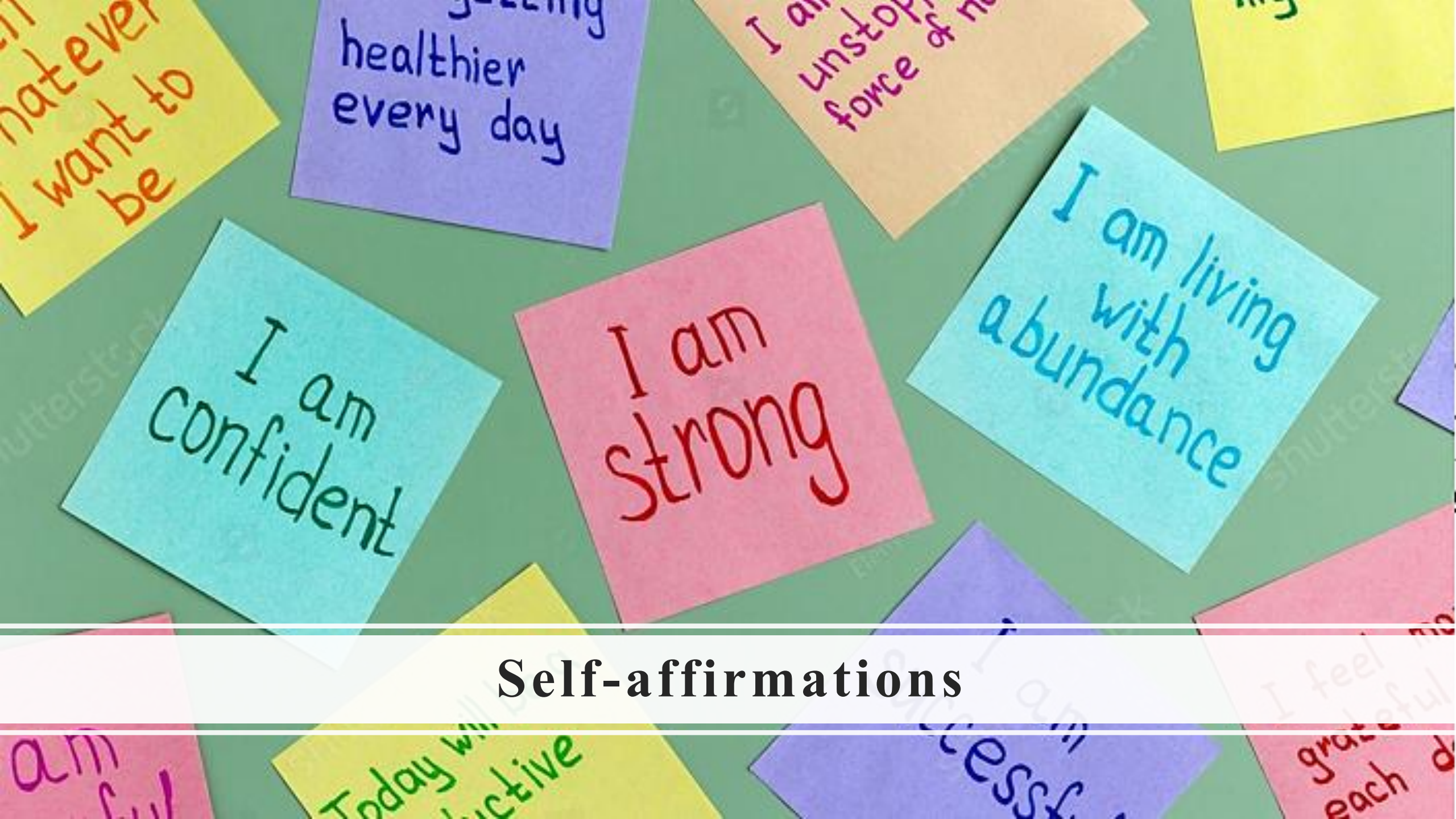
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE





Self-Affirmation Theory (Steele, 1988)

- We have a strong need **to see ourselves positively** (positive self-regard).
- Cognitive dissonance threatens our overall self-worth (global self-integrity).
- Threatening messages about our health threaten our overall self-worth, revealing inadequacies.
- We can reduce the threat to our self-worth by affirming our values, strengths, and achievements.
- Self-affirmations are typically, **non-specific, broad, statements about our self-worth; they tend to not focus on specific behaviours or outcomes.**



Self-affirmations

Self-affirmation: Positive self-talk.

- Reduces discomfort.
- Strengthens self-worth at a broad/ global level (global self-integrity).
- Reduces resistance to change.
- Occurs spontaneously or intentionally.



Self-affirmations

Positive statements about
our self-worth



**I AM
WORTHY**

I love myself

I am good

I am successful

I am enough

I am resilient

I am strong

I am wealthy

I accept myself as I am

**I am capable of taking care of
myself**

I forgive myself now

I respect myself now

I believe in myself

Benefits of self-affirmations for health:

Reduce cognitive dissonance, defensiveness, stress, resistance to new information, risk-taking.

Promote health behaviour engagement

Strengthen resilience during periods of change or difficulty.

Change behaviour in high-risk groups



High-risk groups strongly resist health messages



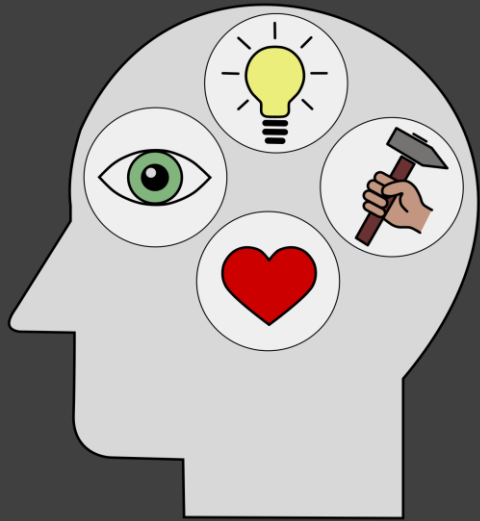
Self-affirmation activity



1. On one side of paper **write 3 positive statements about yourself**, beginning with “I...” words “I am...” “I have...” Statements should be very brief (up to 3 words max).
2. On other side of paper write **the one** most important positive statement of yourself.
3. Shout **OUT LOUD AND WITH PRIDE** the **ONE** best aspect of yourself.

Successful self-affirmations:

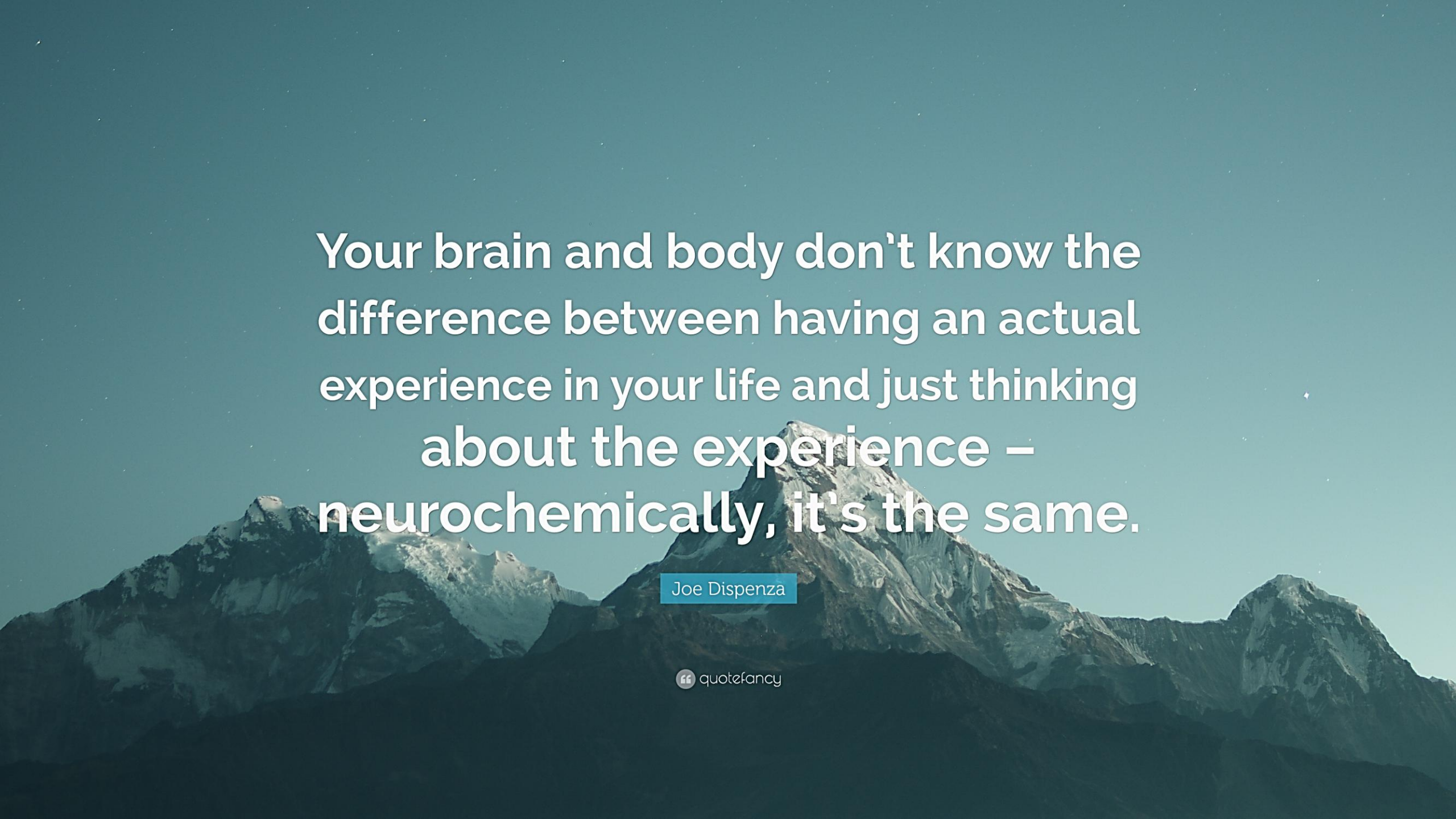
how to



- Use present tense.
- Treat the statement as reality.
- Feel the emotion of the positive statement.
- Repeat the positive statement many times.
- Use clear, short statements.

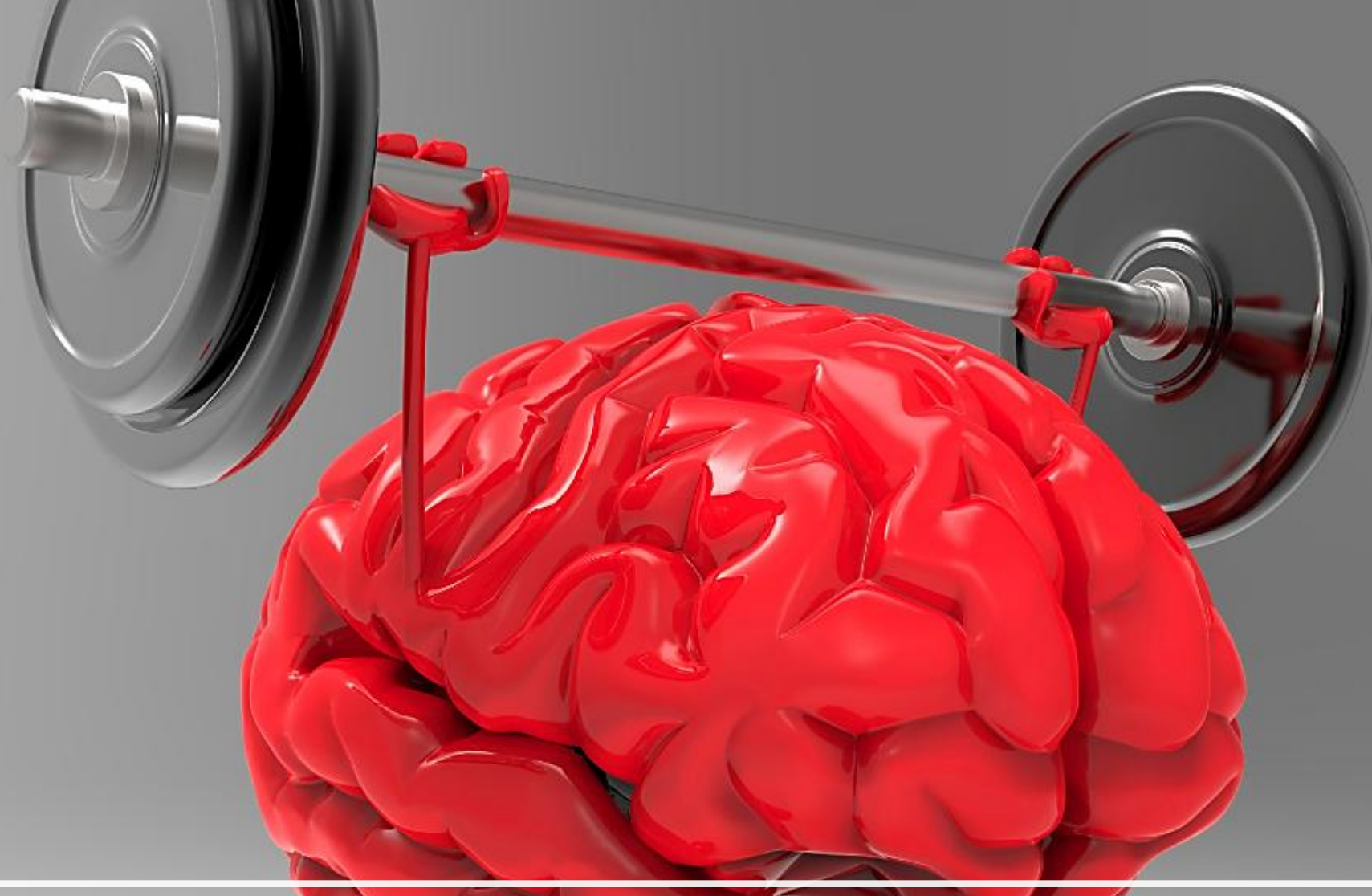
Examples:

- I am so happy now that I have...
- I feel wonderful living here
- I have achieved...
- I am 57 kilos (my ideal weight)
- My body is attractive
- I am healthy
- I am love



Your brain and body don't know the
difference between having an actual
experience in your life and just thinking
about the experience –
neurochemically, it's the same.

Joe Dispenza



Imagining my health means improving my health...

The benefits of guided imagery on athletic performance: a mixed-methods approach

Katrina Volgemute^{1*}, Zermena Vazne¹ and Romualdas Malinauskas²

¹Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Rigas Stradins University, Riga, Latvia, ²Department of Physical and Social Education, Lithuanian Sports University, Kaunas, Lithuania

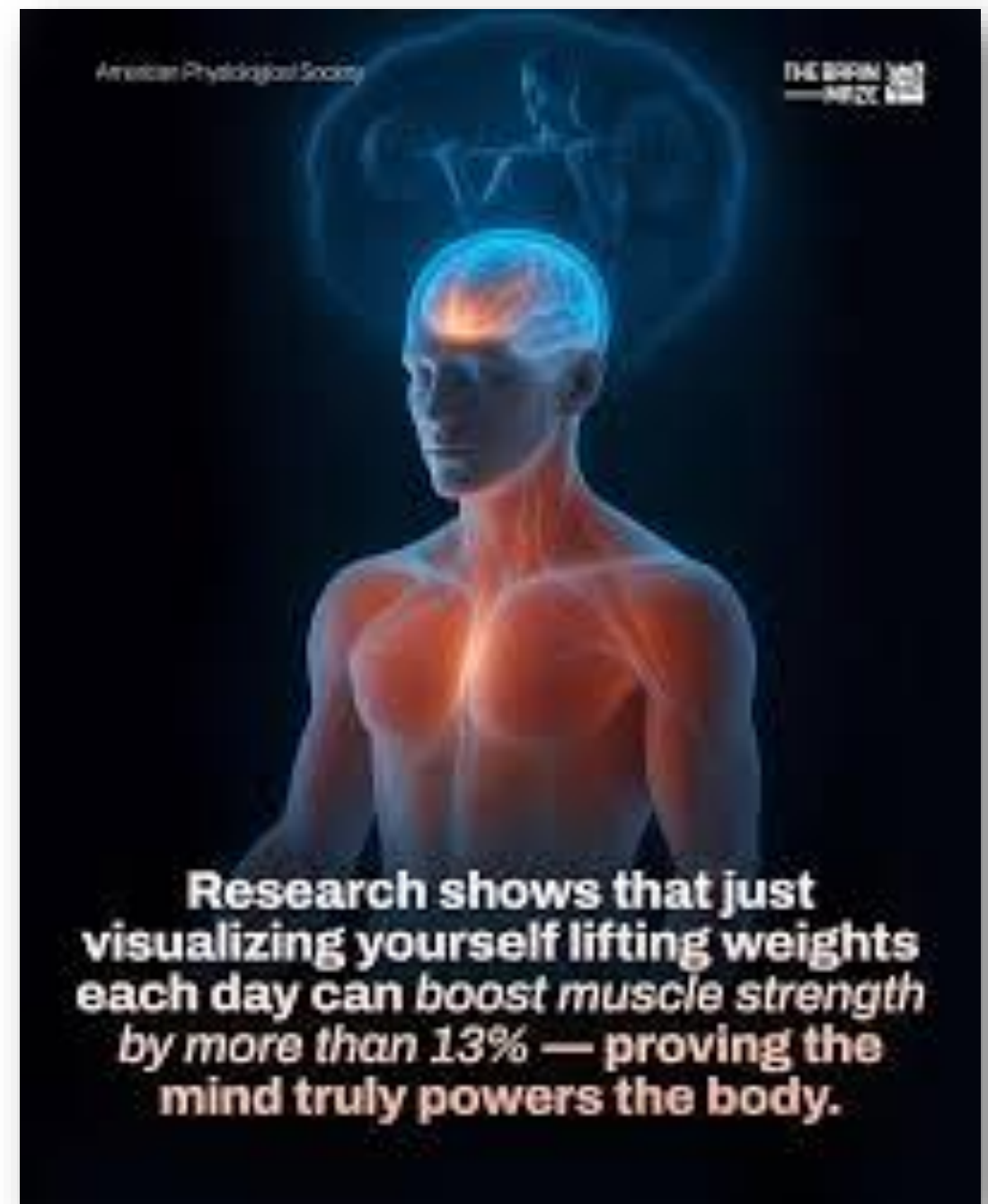
Review article

Effects of Mental Imagery on Muscular Strength in Healthy and Patient Participants: A Systematic Review

Maamer Slimani ¹✉, David Tod ², Helmi Chaabene ¹, Bianca Miarka ³ and Karim Chamari ⁴

¹ Research Laboratory “Sports performance Optimization”, National Center of Medicine and Science in Sports (CNMSS), Tunis, Tunisia; ² School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK;

³ Physical Education School, Federal University of Pelotas, Brazil; ⁴ Athlete Health and Performance Research Centre, ASPETAR, Qatar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, Doha, Qatar



Activity

Think about the statements below. Repeat them internally. What do you feel? What do you notice?

I love my body

I will love my body when I lose weight

I am having a wonderful time now

I will have a wonderful time when I graduate

I expect I'll get what I want

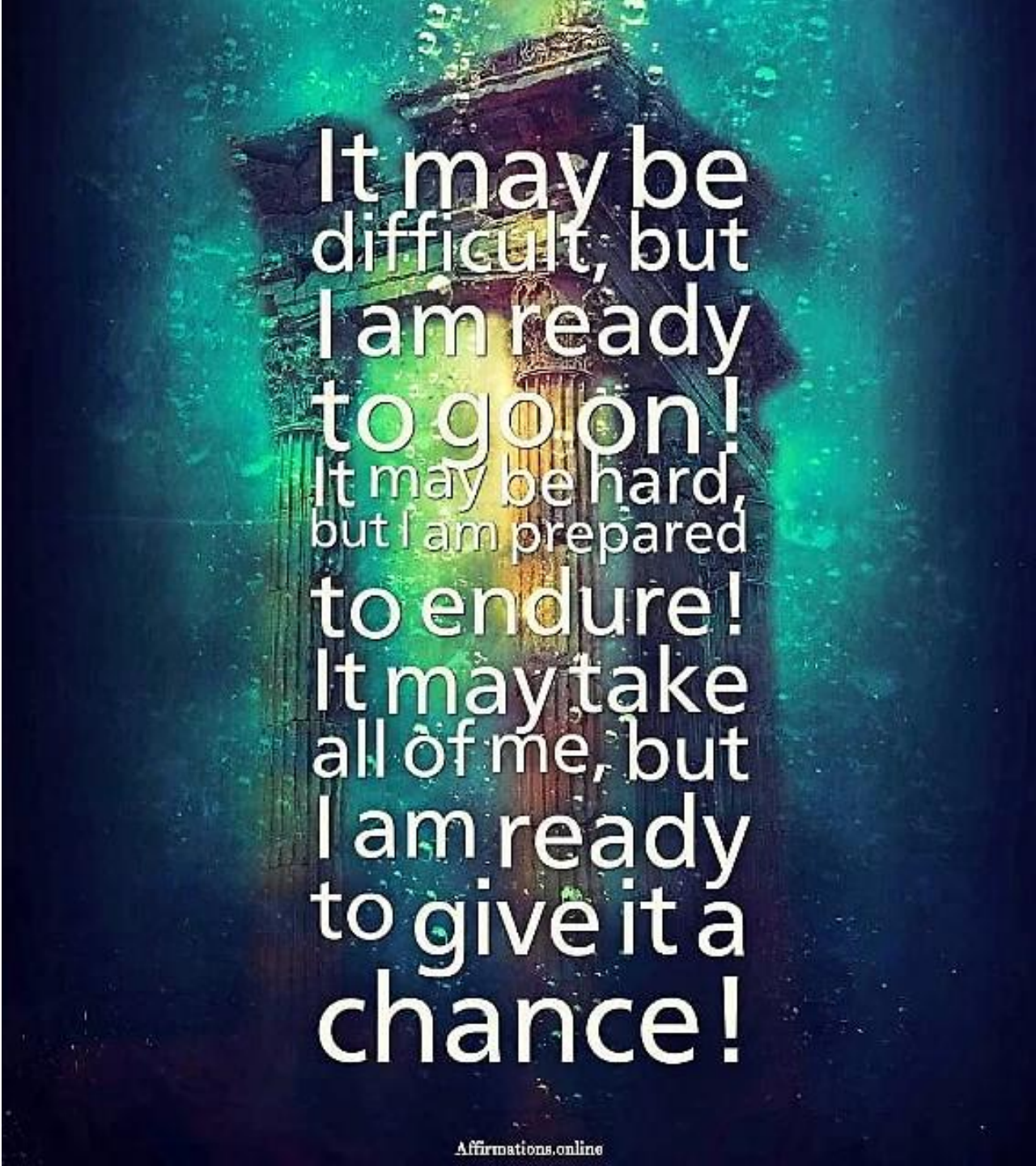
I expect nothing so I won't be disappointed



Ahhh — I'm not convinced!

I feel I am fooling myself! I am
experiencing very intense trauma!

Transitional (“but”) affirmations



It may be
difficult, but
I am ready
to go on!
It may be hard,
but I am prepared
to endure!
It may take
all of me, but
I am ready
to give it a
chance!

Musical affirmations

**LIFE IS GOOD
AND I AM
GRATEFUL**

AFFIRMATION SONG



**HIGH ENERGY
MORNING
AFFIRMATIONS**

7 Minutes - Set to Music

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Self-Affirmation, Intentions and Alcohol Consumption in Students: A Randomized Exploratory Trial

Jenn L. Scott, Alexandra C. Brown, Jessica K. Phair, Josh N. Westland and Benjamin Schüz*

School of Psychology, University of Tasmania, Private Bag 30, Hobart, TAS 7001, Australia

*Corresponding author: School of Psychology, University of Tasmania, Private Bag 30, Hobart, TAS 7001, Australia. Tel.: +61-3-6226-7471;

E-mail: benjamin.schuez@utas.edu.au



Experimental group: saw these 4 posters and affirmed themselves



Control group: saw the same
4 posters and affirmed David
Beckham



**Students rated
themselves or
David Beckham on
6 ideals**

**Affirmation
questionnaire**

Wisdom and Knowledge

“Being able to come up with new and different ideas and ways of doing things is one of my strong points.”

“I value my ability to think critically.”

Courage

“I must stand up for what I believe in, even in the face of strong opposition.”

“I always admit when I am wrong.”

Humanity

“I am never too busy to help a friend.”

“I go out of my way to cheer up people who appear down.”

Justice

“I treat all people equally, regardless of who they might be.”

“I really enjoy being part of a group.”

Temperance

“I never seek vengeance.”

“I do not act as though I am a special person.”

Transcendence

“I experience deep emotions when I see beautiful things.”

“Despite challenges, I always remain hopeful about the future.”



Key findings

- Self-affirmations increased intentions to reduce alcohol consumption.
- Heavy drinkers reduced alcohol consumption more.
- Students became more receptive to behaviour change.

Key message

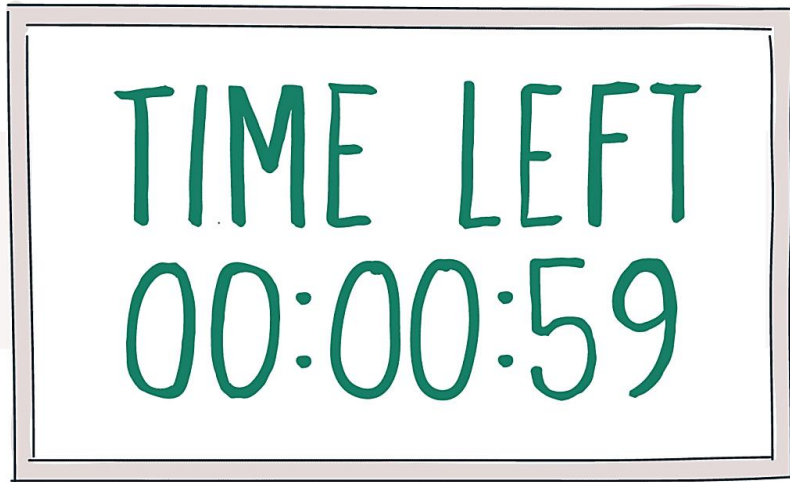
- Campaigns to reduce alcohol consumption among university students can be more effective when combined with self-affirmation!



SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS

WE'RE
LISTENING

Minute essay



In one minute, answer in writing these 3 questions in writing.

1. What is the most important (or interesting or useful or annoying) thing you learned today?
2. Of everything you learned today, what could you apply to your personal life?
3. In one word, how are you feeling right now?

Links to lecture resources

- [Mindset - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics](#)
- [Depressed Mood, Perceived Health Competence and Health Behaviors: aCross-Sectional Mediation Study in Outpatients with Coronary Heart Disease - PMC](#)
- [Self-Affirmation Theory: Protecting and Enhancing Self-Integrity • Psychology Town](#)
- [Do Affirmations Work? Research, Psychology, and Tips](#)
- [Self-affirmation alters the brain's response to health messages and subsequent behavior change - PMC](#)
- [\(PDF\) Self-Affirmation, Intentions and Alcohol Consumption in Students: A Randomized Exploratory Trial](#)
- [The Brain: How The Brain Rewires Itself](#)
- [Review article_effects of mental imagery on muscular strengthJ Sport Sci Med - jssm-15-434.pdf](#)
- [Frontiers | The benefits of guided imagery on athletic performance: a mixed-methods approach](#)
- [GraLife Is Good and I Am Grateful | Affirmation Song by Bob Baker - YouTube titude Affirmation Songs Playlist \(Bob Baker Affirmations Music\) - YouTube](#)



**KEEP
CALM**
this is the
**END OF MY
LECTURE**