

Mental Wellbeing and MS

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With thanks to Dr Rob Shore, Clinical Neuropsychologist for slides

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What is Neuropsychology?

Neuropsychology is concerned with how the functioning of the brain affects cognition, emotions and behaviour.



Emotions: anxiety,
stress, low mood,
adjustment to diagnosis

Behaviour e.g. self-care,
fatigue management

Cognition: e.g. memory,
concentration, planning

MS and mental wellbeing

- MS itself can affect cognition, emotions and behaviour. How much varies - everyone's experience is different.
- Living with MS can bring challenges that affect thinking, emotions, and behaviour. For example, increased fatigue may make work more demanding and affect concentration, which may mean finding new ways of approaching tasks and adapting routines to support wellbeing.
- Today we're focusing on what you can do to support your wellbeing.
- There is support available for you if you need it.

Looking after your emotional wellbeing

- Recognise that emotions can come and go, and that it is normal and understandable to feel a range of different emotions when you are managing a long-term condition
 - Allow yourself to feel whatever it is that you're feeling
- Find support in your network – practical and emotional
 - Accepting help is a sign of strength
- Be kind to yourself
 - Think of what you would tell a friend or loved one
- Celebrate your strengths
 - Focus on what you can do

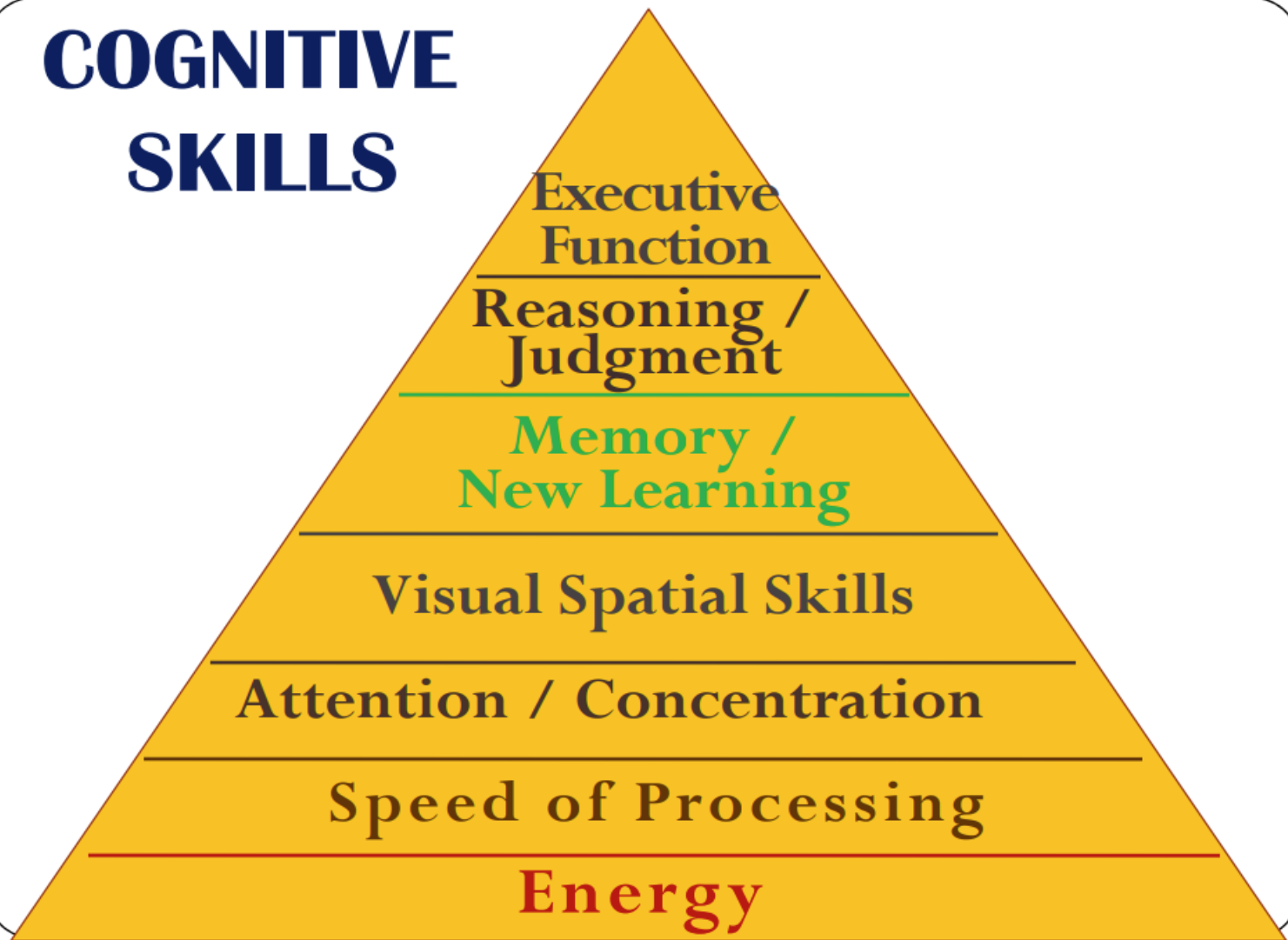
Looking after your emotional wellbeing

- Make time to connect with others
- Keep doing things that are important to you
- Relaxation and mindfulness can be very beneficial for your mental wellbeing
- Setbacks may happen – if they do, it doesn't mean you have to start again from square one
 - All the work you've already done in learning about yourself and managing your wellbeing is still there for you to draw on

Mindfulness

- Mindfulness = paying attention in the present moment, on purpose, and without judgement
- Mindfulness can help you to live more in the present, rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on the past
- Evidence to show it can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety
- <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/what-is-mindfulness/>

COGNITIVE SKILLS



Cognitive Tips

Memory

- Routine
- Use memory aids (e.g. phones, notepads, reminders)
- Make changes to your environment (e.g. notice board; everything has a place)

Concentration

- Minimise distractions
- Do one thing at a time
- Avoid doing complicated things if fatigue is high
- Take rest breaks

Cognitive Tips

Executive skills (planning, organising, problem solving)

- If you feel overwhelmed by a task or job, then break it down into smaller parts
- Sequence those smaller parts; what needs doing first?
- Take time to prioritise e.g. write a checklist of what you need to do.
- Write down deadlines /appointments in your diary
- Be methodical
- Give yourself more time

Managing Fatigue

- Fatigue can be mental and/or physical
- Fatigue affects:
 - Emotions: feeling more low, anxious, stressed
 - Cognition: worsens brain fog, reduces concentration, may feel more forgetful
- This means that managing fatigue can really help in managing your emotional and cognitive wellbeing

Managing Fatigue

- Plan your days and weeks so that you do not take on too much on each day but also do not have too many empty days.
- Provide yourself with regular breaks.
- Give yourself extra time to complete tasks and process information.
- Work in an environment with as few distractions as possible.
- Sometimes people find it difficult to take rests:
 - Notice any unhelpful thoughts that show up when you're resting e.g. I should be able to do more
 - Acknowledge the impact these thoughts have and try to let them go
 - Try reframing them: I'm resting now to look after myself, to do more of what is important to me

Tips for family

- It's common to feel a range of emotions when you are supporting someone
- Stay connected to family and friends
- Accept offers of help
- Take breaks and try to make time for yourself
- Look after your health
- Access support if you need to

When to seek help

- If your emotions or cognition are impacting your day-to-day functioning
- If you're finding it hard to do things you usually enjoy, or you've lost interest in doing them
- If you're worried about how you or your loved one are coping
- If you feel like you need some support

Access to psychological support

- In West Berkshire, neuropsychology can be accessed within the Community Based Neuro-Rehabilitation team. Referral is by healthcare professional. It is a short-term intervention team and the team includes occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and therapy assistants.
- In Berkshire, there is outpatient neuropsychology. This is an assessment only service for concerns around cognition. Referral is by healthcare professional.

How might neuropsychology help?

- **Assessment of cognition and advice about strategies.** This might include advice about how to manage any difficulties at work.
- **Fatigue management** – this is often in conjunction with an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. We often fall into unhelpful patterns of behaviour when fatigue is bad which tends to serve to worsen symptoms. Fatigue management involves considering and implementing relevant strategies.
- **Emotional wellbeing** – support to understand any emotional changes and intervention to help better manage any emotional changes.
- **Family** – support to help family with understanding and adjustment

Access to support

- If your concerns are in relation to your mental health e.g. feelings of depression and anxiety, then you can also access support through Talking Therapies. Self-referral is possible.
 - <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/talking-therapies>
- MS Therapy Centre (Reading) may offer counselling
 - <https://bmstc.org/>
- MS Society has useful handouts giving basic information and strategies for people with MS and their families
 - <https://www.mssociety.org.uk/>

Access to support

- Reading and West Berkshire Carer's hub (e.g. carer support groups, breaks, short break accommodation)
 - <https://carerspartnership.org.uk/>
- For children of a family member with MS, there are young 'carer' groups
 - Reading: <https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/young-peoples-zone/young-carers/>
 - Newbury: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/youngcarers>
 - Wokingham:

- Thank you for listening
- Any Questions?