



# SELF-CARE FOR ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

From Surviving to Thriving

**Alison Battye**

Illustrated by **Caty Battye-Weeks**

A **Speechmark** Book

# Self-Care for Allied Health Professionals

*Self-Care for Allied Health Professionals* brings together a collection of self-care strategies into one easy-to-read volume, supporting Allied Health Professionals to do the best for their patients by caring for themselves.

The book offers information and practical strategies to look after your physical and emotional wellbeing at home and in the workplace, exploring topics such as sleep and food, resilience and meditation, stress, conflict and adversity. Written to be a flexible tool that can be read cover to cover or dipped in and out of as needed, it offers rapid response self-care strategies alongside more lasting changes, supporting practitioners to make small steps to build healthy habits for the future.

Key features of this book include:

- *A combination of quick response strategies, like a five-minute breathing exercise you can use before a difficult meeting, and opportunities for deeper work, examining your purpose and aligning your role with your values.*
- *Combines ancient practices of meditation and mindfulness with the latest research on nutrition, exercise, sleep and wellbeing.*
- *Consideration of the challenges professionals face in the context of pandemics and a changing health and social care landscape, helping you to thrive in a challenging world.*

Self-care has never been more important. This is a book that every Allied Health Professional and trainee should have on their desk, to improve productivity, enhance job satisfaction and build resilience for whatever the future brings.

**Alison Battye** has worked as a Speech and Language Therapist for 20 years, working predominantly in the NHS, but also with Local Authorities, charitable trusts and independent practitioners. She currently manages a multidisciplinary team of Allied Health Professionals. Ali is a qualified yoga instructor, and has practised yoga and meditation for as long as she has been an Allied Health Professional. This exploration has informed her approach as a therapist and as a team leader. Ali passionately believes that if we can tune into our own needs, we more effectively meet the needs of others.

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Alison Battye  
Illustrated by Caty Battye-Weeks

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To Stephen, Cate, Ams and Kit



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# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Gratitude List                            | xi        |
| Introduction                              | xiii      |
| 1 The science and the art of self-care    | 1         |
| DNA and gene expression                   | 2         |
| The gut microbiome                        | 4         |
| The stress response                       | 8         |
| Tuning into our stress response           | 10        |
| The mind–body connection                  | 13        |
| Changing our habits in an unhealthy world | 17        |
| Notes                                     | 20        |
| <b>SECTION 1</b>                          |           |
| <b>Our physical wellbeing</b>             | <b>23</b> |
| 2 Breathe                                 | 25        |
| Breathe through your nose                 | 26        |
| Unblock your nose                         | 29        |
| Extend your exhale                        | 31        |
| Alternate nostril breathing               | 33        |
| Notes                                     | 36        |
| 3 Sleep                                   | 38        |
| Support your body clock                   | 40        |
| Leave work behind                         | 43        |
| Download your day                         | 45        |



## Contents

---

|                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Yoga nidra                       | 47         |
| Notes                            | 52         |
| <b>4 Move</b>                    | <b>54</b>  |
| Spend time outdoors              | 56         |
| Playful movement                 | 58         |
| Restorative yoga                 | 61         |
| Notes                            | 69         |
| <b>5 Eat</b>                     | <b>72</b>  |
| Mindful eating                   | 74         |
| Eat within a 12-hour window      | 77         |
| Eat a rainbow                    | 79         |
| Eat for hormone health           | 84         |
| Build a breakfast                | 87         |
| Lunchbox club                    | 89         |
| Easy dinners                     | 91         |
| Notes                            | 94         |
| <br>                             |            |
| <b>SECTION 2</b>                 |            |
| <b>Our emotional wellbeing</b>   | <b>99</b>  |
| <b>6 Resilience</b>              | <b>101</b> |
| Gratitude practice               | 102        |
| Random acts of kindness          | 105        |
| Cultivate a sense of wonder      | 106        |
| Digital detox                    | 109        |
| Finding flow                     | 113        |
| Self-talk                        | 115        |
| Make friends with your body      | 117        |
| Riding the wave of emotion       | 121        |
| Observing thoughts               | 124        |
| Our vulnerability                | 127        |
| CBA. Can't Be Arsed              | 129        |
| Notes                            | 132        |
| <b>7 Meditation</b>              | <b>134</b> |
| Mindful meditation               | 136        |
| Body scan                        | 138        |
| Breathe in the whole of creation | 139        |

---

|                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Feel a sense of wonder for your body  | 141        |
| We are all made of stars              | 143        |
| Loving kindness meditation            | 145        |
| Notes                                 | 148        |
| <br>                                  |            |
| <b>SECTION 3</b>                      |            |
| <b>Bringing it into the workplace</b> | <b>151</b> |
| 8 Antidotes to stress                 | 153        |
| Set an intention for your day         | 154        |
| Shift your perspective                | 157        |
| Small treats                          | 158        |
| Stop blaming                          | 162        |
| We are all allowed to make mistakes   | 165        |
| 9 Our work environment                | 167        |
| A workstation that works for you      | 168        |
| Movement throughout the day           | 170        |
| Desk yoga                             | 172        |
| Support healthy food choices          | 177        |
| Leave work on time                    | 178        |
| Notes                                 | 182        |
| 10 Team culture                       | 184        |
| An empowered team                     | 185        |
| What is urgent and what is important? | 187        |
| Set service objectives as a team      | 190        |
| Effective emails                      | 193        |
| Meetings with a purpose               | 196        |
| Meeting etiquette                     | 197        |
| Space to think                        | 200        |
| A connected team                      | 203        |
| Notes                                 | 206        |
| 11 Conflict at work                   | 208        |
| Everyone has intrinsic worth          | 210        |
| Practicing non-judgement              | 212        |
| Pick up the phone!                    | 215        |
| Stop story-telling                    | 218        |
| Depersonalise, re-professionalise     | 220        |

## Contents

---

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Set boundaries for healthy work relationships      | 222        |
| Compassionate communication                        | 225        |
| Notes  | 226        |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>SECTION 4</b>                                   |            |
| <b>Our place in the world</b>                      | <b>229</b> |
| <br>   |            |
| 12 Purpose   | 231        |
| Identify your natural gifts and learned behaviours | 232        |
| Align with your values                             | 234        |
| Find your purpose                                  | 237        |
| Your purpose in pictures                           | 241        |
| Make a restorative playlist                        | 243        |
| Set personal goals which have intrinsic rewards    | 246        |
| Live life as it if is weighted in your favour      | 250        |
| Notes  | 252        |
| <br>   |            |
| 13 Adversity                                       | 253        |
| Writing therapy                                    | 254        |
| Post-traumatic growth                              | 255        |
| Moral injury                                       | 259        |
| An emergency self-care kit                         | 261        |
| Distraction behaviours                             | 263        |
| A protective posse                                 | 266        |
| Forgiveness  | 268        |
| Notes  | 271        |
| <br>   |            |
| 14 A better world                                  | 272        |
| Global citizenship                                 | 273        |
| Compassionate communities                          | 277        |
| AHPs and the future of the world                   | 279        |
| We have influence                                  | 284        |
| Notes  | 287        |
| <br>   |            |
| Index  | 289        |



# Gratitude List

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# Introduction

How many times have you had this conversation?

‘How are you?’

‘I’m *fine!*’

‘How’s work?’

‘*Busy!*’

This has become a ritual call-and-response. It is automatic; it is out of our mouth before we have chance to think.

Allied Health Professionals go into the profession to make a difference to others. They are typically empathic and caring, and have the health and wellbeing of others at the heart of what they do.

They might struggle with their own self-care. Why is this?

Do we know when we are *not fine*?

I want to give you a scenario.

*I start the day with a school visit to support a young person in school. It takes a while to locate the young person and their teacher has forgotten I was visiting. They are happy for me to join the lesson, and I am able to work with the young person and a teaching assistant, and at the end of the lesson, I have a brief discussion with the teacher.*

*I drive to my office base for a video meeting with a young person, their foster carer, their teacher and two other therapists involved in their care. There are some complex issues to consider and some conflict between the people involved.*

*I type up my clinical records and check my emails before lunch. I need the loo, but I will just finish this email. I’m a bit thirsty, and my water bottle is empty, but here is another email needing a response.*

*I'm just about to get up when a team member pops their head round the door. Do I have five minutes to talk about a safeguarding concern?*

*Lunch is in front of my computer screen, and I don't have time for a walk. I have to go straight into a planned meeting; I am presenting a piece of work and need to be totally on it.*

*After that, I have a flurry of emails generated from the ones I wrote this morning. I'm not sure what one is asking, and another one links with something I was doing last week, but I can't seem to find the document on the shared drive...*

*By the end of the working day, I have a headache, my neck and back are stiff and sore, and I am thinking about what I need to cook for dinner this evening.*

*As I drive home I worry about a child on my caseload; they have a degenerative condition, and I am wondering about how they and their family are coping...*

*When I arrive home, I feel drained, and I barely have the energy for another conversation.*

Does this sound familiar?

Can we interrupt this sequence of events somewhere (or multiple times) to put in self-care actions that will later prevent the headache, back ache and the general feeling of overload?

This is the book I need.

*If we are distracted by thirst or hunger, how are we going to make good clinical decisions?*

*If we are not aware of our own emotional needs, how are we going to support others?*

*If we aren't anchored to our purpose and our place in the world, how are we going to enjoy long and productive careers?*

## **From surviving to thriving**

Most of the time, we just about manage. There are some days that leave us feeling completely drained. This is survival.

We might be relying on a few props, like family or friends, supportive colleagues. If all else fails, there is wine, or chocolate or a box-set binge.

Ideally we want to aim for more than survival.

We want to thrive. We want to be the person that we imagined we would be, when we decided to enter this profession.

My personal reasons for focusing on my own self-care include the following, some of which may also be true for you.

*I want to have the energy to get through a busy working week. I want to do the best I can for our service-users whilst I am at work. I want to show up for my colleagues. I want to model to my team that self-care is important, so that they feel they can also look after themselves. I want to have the energy to be there for my family and friends; I want to be present for them when they need to talk through their day. By showing myself compassion and care, I am training myself in compassion and care for other people, for my communities and the wider world.*

## Where to start?

You do not need to do everything in this book.

One change can make a big difference.

This book is one you can dip in and out of, or you can read from cover to cover. You can follow the sequence in which it was written, or you can go straight to the chapter that appeals to you. You might read the reasoning behind the practice, or you might skip the theory and just choose a strategy to try out now.

Whatever small step you make, you will be improving your own wellbeing now, and building good habits for the future. If something looks weird now, it might seem more relevant in months to come. Not everything in this book will be for you; I would like you to tune into what you need, and adapt your approach to suit your lifestyle.

If you are currently overwhelmed, and feel like you are only just keeping your head above water, choose a self-care strategy from the ‘Breathe’ or ‘Sleep’ chapters. These strategies are ‘rapid response’ self-care. You will get an instant benefit. Later chapters contain strategies that might involve more time, thought or effort. They may be ‘slow-burn’, but their impact may be profound.



## Future proofing

Many people find these practices when they have come to some sort of crisis. If this is the case, you have a strong incentive to look after yourself. Many chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, auto-immune conditions, digestive problems, depression and anxiety can be helped by the strategies in this book.

Alternatively, you may be thinking long-term. It is a brilliant idea to build in helpful habits now. We don't know what life is going to throw at us. Whether it is illness of a family member, relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, bereavement, financial crisis, a pandemic... these things are often out of our control. How we respond to them is not.

This book aims to build resilience. Start the practices now, and you are future proofing your own wellbeing.

## Tuning in

This involves consciously ditching the automatic 'I'm fine' for 'what is going on for me right now?'

It involves switching from the unconscious 'busy!' mode to one which is more attuned, more aware of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs, and more able to deal effectively with whatever shows up in our workplace today.

### **Some useful questions to ask ourselves when we are tuning in:**

- *How is my body feeling?*
- *Where am I feeling it?*
- *What's going on with my breathing?*
- *What thoughts are coming up?*
- *What feelings are coming up?*
- *What is this reminding me of?*
- *What is the wise thing to do in this moment?*

## Self-compassion

We wouldn't talk to others the way we talk to ourselves. We wouldn't still be in our jobs.

We tend to berate ourselves for the food choices we make, for our lack of exercise, for our over-reliance on coffee, alcohol, chocolate, social media.

We will discover in the coming chapters how our environment is working against us, and making it difficult for us to make healthy choices. As soon as we know this, we can forgive ourselves.

If you are currently exhausted, you need to be extra kind to yourself. If you are managing caring responsibilities, a difficult relationship, a health condition, financial pressures, a transition or uncertainty about the future, you need to be extra kind.

Think of how you would talk to a small child, an elderly patient or a carer who is doing the best they can with the resources they currently have. This is how you need to talk to yourself. This person will make mistakes because they are learning. We learn from making mistakes.

When I am feeling tired or down, I have a few phrases that I find helpful to say to myself:

- *I am enough.*
- *I am a work in progress.*
- *This too will pass.*
- *Mistakes are proof that I am trying.*
- *I learn from my mistakes.*
- *We can do hard things.*

## Upward spirals

When we add a self-care strategy to our day and we tune into the effects, there is an upward spiral. We notice that we feel better, and this makes us feel that we have agency: we can influence how our day unfolds.

The awareness of the benefit is likely to magnify the benefit. We are signalling to ourselves that we are worth it, just like nurturing a small child, an elderly patient or a tired carer is worth it.

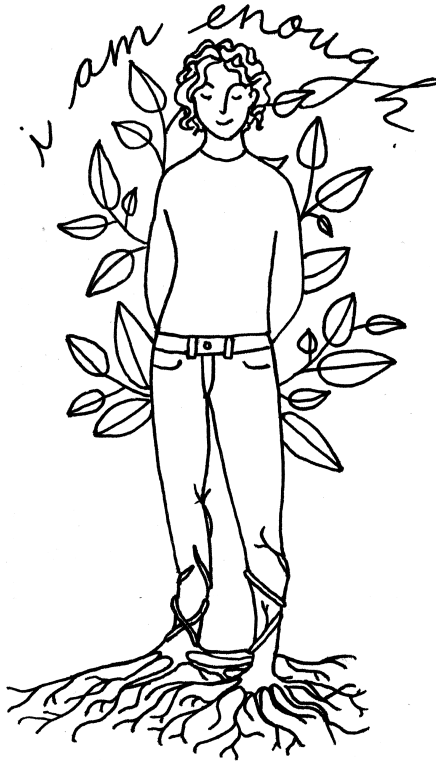


Figure 0.1 I am enough

One self-care strategy will have multiple benefits. These will span our physical health, our emotional health, our performance at work, our life satisfaction and our sense of purpose and meaning in the world.

Our awareness of these multiple benefits is likely to help us to tune into what else we might need. We might make another change, which will generate a further upward spiral.

Occasionally there will be a downward spiral. You will have a bad day, a series of challenges or even a catastrophic event.

Having had experience of tuning in and knowing what you can do to make yourself feel a little bit better will prepare you for these times. You can interrupt the downward spiral with a self-care practice. As soon as you interrupt the downward spiral, you have broken it. You have agency. Even if you feel five or ten percent better, this is

empowering. Tune in, magnify the benefit by bringing your awareness to it, and you will have an upward spiral.

## **The ripple effect**

In addition to an upward spiral, there is a ripple effect too. When we adopt a self-care strategy, we are not the only person to benefit. We are likely to feel better, physically and emotionally. This will influence our interactions with others. We are likely to be more attentive, compassionate and appreciative of others. They will feel this, and are in turn more likely to be more positive in their interactions with others. With one kind action, we can initiate dozens, if not hundreds, of other kind actions.

With every self-care strategy we use, we have an opportunity to model self-care for those around us. We are showing our partner, children, friends, colleagues, patients and managers the importance of self-care. This is a kindness that ripples outwards.

We are reducing the rate of burn-out in our profession. We are enabling ourselves and colleagues to enjoy long and fulfilling careers.

We can do a lot of good in the world by the simple choices that we make every day.

## **Can one book meet the needs of all Allied Health Professionals?**

I have written this book for all Allied Health Professionals. This is a bold move.

Allied Health Professionals are diverse. We are Art Therapists, Drama Therapists, Music Therapists, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Dietitians, Radiographers, Podiatrists and Chiropodists, Orthoptists, Prosthetists and Orthotists, Osteopaths, Operating Department Practitioners and Paramedics.

Our day-to-day work may look very different from one AHP to another, but we are all dealing with the same issues. We are all trying to do the best for our service-users, our colleagues and ourselves. We are trying to make best use of the resources we have available. We are trying to balance competing demands on our time and attention. We know that to have maximum impact we need to empower service-users. We might need to work on our own empowerment in the process!

This book is arranged into sections.

- *Section 1 considers our physical health. There are chapters for how to breathe, sleep, move and eat to optimise our physical health.*
- *Section 2 considers our emotional health. There are chapters for building our resilience through cultivating gratitude, kindness and wonder and acknowledging our thoughts and feelings. There is a chapter where we explore simple meditation techniques.*
- *Section 3 is about how we bring these practices into our working day. There are chapters around our work environment, our team culture and dealing with conflict. This is self-actualisation, as we bring our best self to work.*
- *Section 4 is about finding our place in the world as an AHP. This is the bigger picture: how we are part of our community and how we might contribute to social change. We move into the realm of self-transcendence.*

At the end of each chapter in Sections 1 and 2, you will find some specific ideas for how to ‘apply this at work’. These are for you, but also for your service-users and their carers, and sometimes for your colleagues. These are suggestions only. You are best placed to think of ways to use the strategies in your role.

I recommend that you try out a strategy for yourself first. If you feel it could be useful for service-users, you might discuss it with your colleagues and manager, read any related research, and maybe carry out a project to explore the benefits.

Section 3 contains general strategies for managing our working life as an AHP. There are common themes for all AHPs, regardless of clinical speciality. Section 4 considers what each of the disciplines might offer, as our roles evolve to incorporate social prescribing and public health. Again the suggestions are there to get you thinking. You are invited to bring your own creativity and innovation to this work.

## **I’m not sure this stuff is for me...**

Just by skim-reading this book, you will pick up on some ideas. You might not be aware that you have processed them, but they will be

lodged in your subconscious. Our brain has a knack of storing information away for future use. If it's not useful now, it might come in later. There will be some trigger that reminds us of something we once read. If the time is right, we will make use of it.

Unless this book was thrust into your hand by a well-meaning colleague or friend, you were probably drawn to it in some way. You probably recognise that self-care is important. Maybe you feel that you have been neglecting your own needs. Maybe you have been getting away with it for a long time, but feel that you might not always get away with it. Maybe you have already started your self-care exploration and want to go further.

I want you to take a moment to think about your own reasons for taking care of yourself.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- *Do I give myself the time and attention that I give to others?*
- *Do I know what my body needs on any given day?*
- *Do I regularly take time to tune into my feelings?*
- *What is the impact of this? On me? On the people around me?*
- *What is stopping me?*
- *What support do I have?*
- *What would be a good outcome for me?*

Writing down the answers to these questions can be powerful. We see that this is important because we've taken the time to write it down. We are also more likely to remember something we have written, even if we never read it back.

You might feel comfortable exploring these questions with a trusted friend, family member or colleague. You can take it in turns to answer each question, taking a minute for each question. Be clear about whose turn it is, so that there is a speaker and a listener, and don't interrupt one another whilst the other person is speaking. This gives you time to really explore your thoughts. Often we say something aloud that we have not really been conscious of. Somehow having the space to talk without interruption brings issues to the surface.

## Making self-care a habit


We have many self-care routines which we do without fail each day. They are built into our day, and we only forget them on rare occasions when something major has disrupted our day. Examples include brushing our teeth, putting the kettle on, letting the dog out, feeding our children, putting clothes on, brushing our hair, checking our phone, picking up our keys before leaving the house, locking the door...

One way of making self-care a habit is to attach it to a habit we already have. You might march or jog on the spot whilst the kettle is boiling. You might look up at the sky and notice the trees when you are waiting at the bus stop. You might take a moment to extend your exhale before you enter your place of work.



Figure 0.2 Stitched together

## Self-care your way

Self-care practice will evolve over time. A key concept is tuning in to what you need now. For each strategy in this section of the book, you will see a reminder to ‘tune in’  and reflect upon how this practice affects you.

If you want to ‘go deeper’  with a particular practice, there are also suggestions for further reading or resources.

Don’t get too obsessed with any particular aspect of self-care. You don’t want to increase your stress by thinking you have to do things perfectly. As the writer Augusten Burroughs says, ‘I, myself, am made entirely of flaws, stitched together with good intentions’. Aim to be ‘good enough’ rather than perfect. You are a work in progress. We are all works in progress.





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# The science and the art of self-care

This chapter will provide a revision of the key physiological processes that are involved in health and wellbeing practices. This will include relatively recent scientific findings.

We will first look at the role of DNA and the role of lifestyle in our gene expression.

We will then explore the gut microbiome and its links with every aspect of our health and wellbeing.

We will revise the autonomic nervous system and the stress response.

We will approach the concept of the mind–body connection. We will consider how we can become more aware of what is going on in our bodies and minds in response to self-care practices.

You can become a scientist of your own mind and body, and start to see patterns in how you are responding to self-care practices. The art of self-care is then to tweak the practices so that they work for you and your lifestyle.

If you enjoy reading scientific papers, I have referenced relevant research. Most of these papers are available to read and download for free on PubMed. Type in the name of the first author and the title of the paper. Related articles will also be available. Research into the gut microbiome is a particularly ‘live’ topic, with new discoveries being made all of the time.

Many of the practices in this book can be related back to ancient practices, particularly those associated with Eastern medicine and philosophy.

These practices tend to work on a broad level, across bodily systems. We might be changing our diet to address a pre-diabetic state, but we notice that our blood pressure goes down. We note that we are

sleeping better, and we feel like moving more. Our hormonal and skin health improves too.

Scientific research is now able to look at how and why these practices work. We can measure blood pressure or blood sugar changes in response to exercise, diet, breathing or sleep. We can measure the levels of stress hormones before and after meditation.<sup>1</sup> We can measure the length of telomeres at the end of our chromosomes<sup>2</sup> and see that physical activity results in younger telomeres. We can measure the modulation of brainwaves in response to yoga practices.<sup>3</sup> Science is supporting the wisdom of ages.

Adopting self-care strategies will not mean that we are guaranteed perfect health. We reduce our risk of developing health conditions, but we do not eliminate the risk. If we do become ill, self-care practices will support our recovery. If we have to manage a long-term health condition, self-care can ease pain and discomfort and emotional distress. We have a range of options available to us to help us feel better. Most importantly, we have agency in our health and wellbeing.

If you would rather skip to the self-care practices, then go ahead. You can always come back to this chapter later.

## DNA and gene expression

There is a common misconception that our health is determined by our DNA, and that we can't do much to alter our long-term health outcomes.

When DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) was discovered in 1962 by Rosalind Franklin, James Watson and Francis Crick, it was believed that DNA sequencing would unlock the secrets to health and disease. In the decades which have followed, it has become clear that you cannot match disease with one, or even a few genes.

There is very little correlation between our DNA and our risk for cardiovascular disease<sup>4</sup> and diabetes.<sup>5</sup> Our genes are thought to account for only three to ten percent of cancers.<sup>6</sup> Our genes account for less than one percent of our risk of Alzheimer's.<sup>7</sup> Environment plays a much larger part than DNA in the development of autoimmune diseases such as arthritis, asthma and eczema.<sup>8</sup>

There is an interplay between our DNA and the environment. Factors in our environment and in our lifestyle influence whether

particular sequences of DNA, or genes, are switched on or off. This is a whole new field of medical research called epigenetics.

If you like a metaphor, then DNA is the available lights in the light show. Our environment, including our lifestyle choices, determines which lights are switched on, and when.

DNA contains the instructions to our cells about which proteins to make. Specific proteins have specific functions in the cell, and in our bodies. All our cells contain the same DNA (this is our genetic code) but only some parts of the DNA are read. This is gene expression. The ways in which gene expression can change include:

1. A chemical group may be added to or removed from a specific section of the DNA strand. The chemical group blocks that part of the DNA from the proteins which would otherwise 'read' the gene. The gene can be methylated (turned off), or demethylated (turned on).
2. DNA is coiled very tightly around proteins called histones. If the DNA is wound very tightly around the histone, the gene cannot be read, and the gene cannot be expressed. If the DNA is not wrapped tightly, the histone can be read, and the gene is expressed.
3. RNA (ribonucleic acid) acts as a messenger molecule which takes instructions from the DNA into the cell and instructs the cell to make particular proteins. RNA may recruit proteins to modify histones so that genes are switched on or off.

Changes to gene expression can arise because of environmental and lifestyle factors.<sup>9</sup> Examples of these include:

- *Exposure to environmental toxins, such as air pollution.*
- *Exposure to tobacco smoke, alcohol or drugs.*
- *Exposure to viruses and bacteria.*
- *What we eat, how much we eat and when we eat.*
- *How much and what sort of physical activity we get.*
- *Exposure to stress and our response to stress.*
- *The amount and quality of our sleep.*

Genes are being switched on or off every day, every hour, every minute. Gene expression dictates what sorts of cells are made, and which chemicals are being produced in the cells. This includes digestive enzymes,

hormones and neurotransmitters. Our genetic expression determines our body composition, the health of our cardiovascular system, our digestive system, our bone density, our hormone balance, our hair and skin health, our immune response, the levels of inflammation in our body, even our cognition and our mood.

We might have a poor night's sleep one night which results in certain genes being switched on, but then we get a good night's sleep the next night, which results in those genes being switched off again.

If we are only exposed to a toxin, drug or stress for a small amount of time, we are at less risk than if we are exposed continuously over many years. Similarly, there will be a cumulative effect of positive lifestyle choices over time: more beneficial genes will be switched on more often. This reduces our risk of developing health problems and diseases, and enhances our general health and wellbeing. We are likely to live well for longer.

Gene expression is influenced by all the behaviours we will consider in this book. To summarise, this encompasses:

- *The way we breathe, sleep, move and eat in order to look after our physical wellbeing (Section 1).*
- *The balance between being alert and active and being relaxed and rested in order to look after our emotional wellbeing (Section 2).*
- *How we balance our personal needs with the relentless demands of work (Section 3).*
- *How we find purpose and meaning in life, and how we connect with our community (Section 4).*

This is an empowering message. We have much more control over our health than we previously thought. Our bodies have an amazing capacity to repair themselves. We can help this process along by the choices we make every day. The more positive choices we make, the more we improve our body's ability to bounce back.

## **The gut microbiome**

We are not alone. It turns out that we have a lot of genetic material in our bodies which is not human.

Our gut microbiome, housed in our large intestine, is a diverse ecosystem of 39 trillion microorganisms. They include friendly bacteria, yeasts, parasites, viruses and archaea. We also have a microbiome on our lungs, skin, mouth, nose, ears, between our toes, inside our tummy button ...

These microbes evolved with us, in a mutually beneficial relationship. We couldn't survive without them. We wouldn't have a functioning immune system without them. Their gene expression contributes to our overall health and wellbeing, because they synthesise and metabolise a vast array of chemicals in our body, including hormones and neurotransmitters.

The gut microbiome is crucial to our health because friendly bacteria are able to digest the food that we cannot, and to metabolise micronutrients so that they are bioavailable to us.

We used to think that dietary fibre just helped with moving food along the gut. Now we know that our gut bacteria are able to metabolise the fibre to make short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). There are many different types of plant fibres, in all parts of the plant: the leaves, stems, roots and seeds. Different populations of friendly bacteria are able to make use of different types of fibre to produce SCFAs.

SCFAs are crucial to our health. They play an important role in:

- *Protecting the lining of our gut so that it does not become damaged and leak harmful substances into our bloodstream.*<sup>10</sup>
- *Regulating our immune response in our gut, so that we do not over-react to food. This reduces our risk of developing food allergies and intolerances.*<sup>11</sup>
- *Regulating our appetite and our satiation signals.*<sup>12</sup> *Eating a high-fibre meal keeps us full for longer, but also reduces the sugar spike after this meal and after the next meal we eat.*<sup>13</sup>
- *Regulating our blood sugar and insulin response, reducing our risk of Type 2 diabetes.*<sup>14</sup>
- *Regulating inflammation in the gut, reducing our risk of colorectal cancer,*<sup>15</sup> *inflammatory bowel syndrome (IBS) and other gut disorders.*<sup>16</sup>
- *Reducing widespread inflammation in the body. This reduces our risk of autoimmune conditions such as asthma,*<sup>17</sup> *eczema and arthritis, and even cardiovascular disease*<sup>18</sup> *and depression.*<sup>19</sup>

- *Enabling our bodies to access vital micronutrients, including vitamins and minerals and even hormones like Vitamin D.*<sup>20</sup>
- *Enabling our bodies to access phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are chemicals from plant foods which have a host of beneficial effects for our bodies, including preventing oxidative damage to our cells and tidying up pre-cancerous cells.*<sup>21</sup>

The more diverse the species in our gut microbiome, the healthier we are likely to be, because different microbes specialise in metabolising different types of fibre, micronutrients and phytochemicals. A diverse ecosystem is more effective at making the most of available resources. Healthy populations of friendly bacteria can easily outcompete harmful bacteria, making us less likely to fall prey to infections.

We can increase the diversity of our microbiome by eating a wide variety of plant-based foods. Every time we eat fruit, vegetables, nuts and seeds, pulses and wholegrains, we will feed the microbes which thrive on these foods. These microbes will reproduce more, and there will be healthy populations in our gut. A useful question to ask before any meal is “how am I going to feed my friendly bacteria?”

There is a lot of research currently going into the gut microbiome, and it seems that the gut microbiome influences every body system.<sup>22</sup> Improving the diversity of our gut microbiome is likely to simultaneously benefit all of our body systems: our cardiovascular health, our digestive health, our hormone health, our brain health.

It is easy to increase our microbiome diversity: we just need to eat a wide range of plant foods. We should aim for at least 30 different plant-based foods per week. This can include fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds, pulses and wholegrains, herbs and spices, and even coffee, tea and chocolate!

Highly processed foods do not feed our health-giving microbes. Processed foods feed microbes which are harmful to our health, and they deplete the populations of healthy microbes. When samples are analysed, people who eat more processed food have less gut diversity, and suffer more health problems as a result.

Fermented foods, like live yoghurt and kefir, miso and tempeh, sauerkraut and kimchi, can boost our populations of friendly bacteria (probiotics). The plant-based foods we consume will then keep these

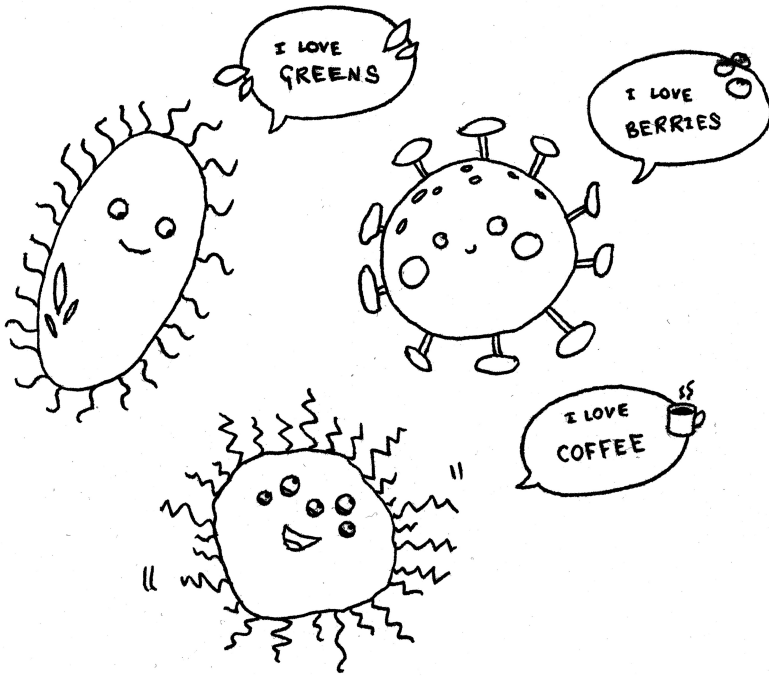


Figure 1.1 The gut microbiome

populations alive (prebiotics). We don't need to spend lots of money on pills that contain probiotics or prebiotics; we just need to eat a diet rich in plant-based foods, ideally with some fermented foods. Cocoa and coffee are fermented foods!

There is a clear message about the standard Western diet: we need to reduce our consumption of processed carbohydrates, such as refined flour and sugar. We need to reduce our consumption of meat and dairy. We need to reduce our consumption of high-fat and high-sugar foods such as burgers, nuggets, milkshakes, ice-cream, fried foods, white bread, cakes and confectionary. Artificial sweeteners, alcohol and antibiotics also deplete our microbiome.

There is interesting evidence to suggest that our gut microbiome can influence the foods we crave.<sup>23</sup> The more we eat healthy food, the more we increase the populations of friendly bacteria. The more friendly bacteria we have, the more they signal to us to eat healthy