

## Beyond Labels: Mental Wellness using Naturopathic Medicine

By: Dr. Christina Bjorndal, ND



### Naturopathic Medicine Modalities

1. Nutrition/supplementation
2. Botanical/herbal medicine
3. Homeopathy
4. Traditional Chinese Medicine & Acupuncture
5. Counselling
6. Hydrotherapy
7. Massage, Chiropractic medicine



### Principles of Naturopathic Medicine:

1. Do No Harm
2. The Healing Power of Nature
3. Identify and Treat the Cause
4. Doctor as Teacher
5. Treat the Whole Person
6. Prevention



### Naturopathic Medicine Helps With

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Eating disorders/disordered eating
- Bipolar disorder (type 1 or 2)
- Borderline personality disorder
- PMDD
- ADHD
- OCD
- ODD
- Autism, etc



### Key Questions:

- "When did things begin?"
- "What happened to you" vs "What is wrong with you?"
- "Did you feel loved by your mother and/or father?"
- "Do you love yourself/have compassion for yourself?"

### As clinicians we need to be:

- trauma aware
- trauma informed
- trauma educated



### Trauma

- Understand the role of Trauma – big T or little t
- Many focus on the story & experience
- "Trauma is not what happened to you, but rather what did you make the experience mean; what beliefs did you form as a result of that experience?" ~ Dr. Gabor Mate



## Early Childhood Development

“Growing scientific evidence demonstrates that social and physical environments that threaten human development because of scarcity, stress or instability, can lead to short-term physiologic and psychological adjustments that are necessary for immediate survival and adaptation, but which may come at a significant cost to long-term outcomes in learning, behavior, health and longevity”  
 - *Journal of Pediatrics, 2012 An Integrated Scientific Framework for Child Survival in Early Childhood Development*

We adapt to endure those difficult times, but those same coping mechanisms eventually become sources of dysfunction.  
 Help them see the **value that that same behavioural response played in their life.**



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## A point about diagnoses

“**All diagnoses** (ADHD, ODD, depression, anxiety, even psychosis), begin as coping mechanisms. At some point there's something about them that provided **survival value**.”

Furthermore, diagnoses don't explain anything. They describe things but they don't explain things.

The explanation is **always rooted** in some earlier experience that pre-dates the diagnosis.” ~ Dr. Gabor Mate



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## Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire

Finding your ACE Score: While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

Did a parent or other adult in the household often ... Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did a parent or other adult in the household often ... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever ... Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you often feel that ... No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you often feel that ... You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Were your parents ever separated or divorced? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Was your mother or stepmother: Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Did a household member go to prison? If yes enter 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Now add up your "Yes" answers: \_\_\_\_\_ This is your ACE Score



## My personal experience

- Adopted at 3 weeks – biological mother age 17
- High school - antibiotic use for acne & eating disorder
- University – diagnosed with anxiety/depression
- Prescribed an anti-depressant, 3 months later hospitalized for mania/psychosis
- Diagnosed Bipolar disorder Type 1 – achievements: UBC Commerce Valedictorian
- Corporate career – reported to CEO
- Suicide attempt – coma, kidney failure, dialysis, told I would need a kidney transplant
- 3 suicide attempts (last 2009); 6 psychotic events (last 2008) – spent 1 year of my life in psychiatric hospital care



## Research – Gut/Brain relationship

1. There is bi-directional communication between the gut and the brain. New studies show that there is heavy “bottom-up” influence from the gut biome on the neuronal activity in the brain. Manipulating the composition of the gut biome can have significant impact on the functioning of the brain. “Bacteria in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract can activate neural pathways and central nervous system (CNS) signaling systems” Foster, J., & McVey Neufeld, K.A. (2013). *Gut-brain axis: How the microbiome influences anxiety and depression. Trends in Neuroscience, 36(5), 305–312*
2. Stress, a major component in many mood disorders, can alter GI flora, lowering levels of beneficial bacteria Logan, A. C., & Katzman, M. (2005). *Major depressive disorders: probiotics may be an adjuvant therapy. Medical Hypothesis, 64(3), 533–538.*



## Research – Gut/Brain relationship

3. Compared to subjects who received the placebo intervention, participants who received the multispecies probiotic intervention showed significantly reduced ruminating thoughts, one of the most predictive habits in depressive episodes, as measured by a questionnaire indexing sensitivity (cognitive reactivity) to depression. Patients become less focused on recurrent bad feelings. *Science Daily. 2015. releases/2015/04/150414083718.htm*



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### Spiritual crisis/turning point

*"Surrender means the decision to stop fighting the world, and to start loving it instead. It is a gentle liberation from pain. But liberation isn't about breaking out of anything; it's a gentle melting into who we really are. We let down our armor....."*

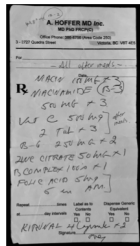
*"We are simply asked to shift focus and to take on a more gentle perception. That's all God needs. Just one sincere surrendered moment, when love matters more than anything, and we know that nothing else really matters at all."*

– A Return to Love by Marianne Williamson



### My personal experience

- Mental Health Regained Public Forum – 1999
- Patient of Dr. Hoffer
- Career change to become an ND after asking: "If money didn't matter, what would I be doing with my life?"



### Dr. Abram Hoffer, MD

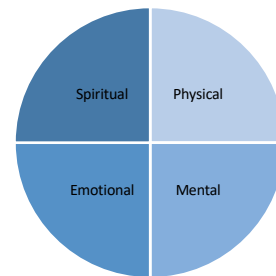
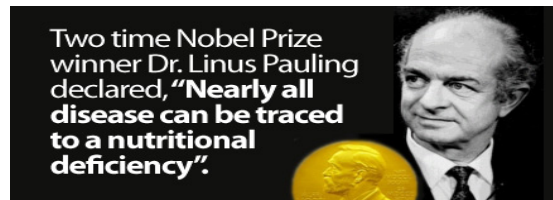


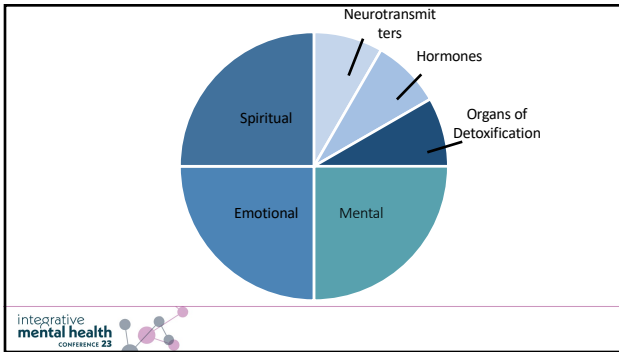
**"I tell patients that tranquilizers alone never cure anyone. They merely reduce the intensity of the symptoms and make life slightly more endurable. They create a better behaved, chronic dependent person. Only with orthomolecular treatment can the majority of schizophrenic patients hope to become well and normally independent."**

Abram Hoffer, MD, PhD



The term "orthomolecular" meaning "correct molecule" was first used by Linus Pauling (Nobel Laureate) in his article: *Orthomolecular Psychiatry*, published in the journal *Science* in 1968.





### 10 Areas to Address:

1. Nutrition/Supplements	6. Emotions
2. Sleep	7. Behave & react in the world/boundaries
3. Exercise	8. Environment a) chemicals b) epigenetics & inter-generational trauma c) neuroplasticity
4. Stress management	9. Spirituality
5. Thoughts	10. Love + Compassion

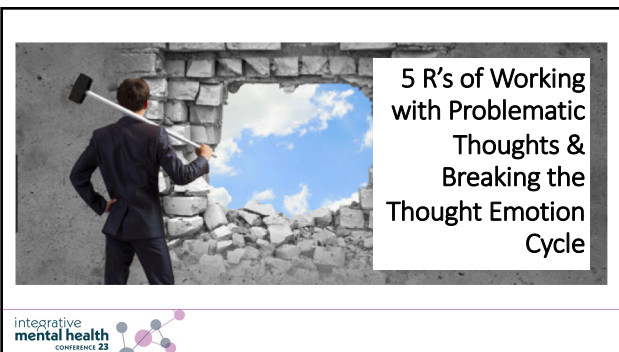
### Clinical Application:

**Visit #1:** intake, determine which macro-systems need support and which of the 10 steps they need to work on, explain starting there and will build each visit: diet, sleep, exercise, testing/objective questionnaires (anxiety and depression monitoring forms – need medication?); on a scale of 1-10 how do you rate loving yourself?

**Visit #2:** Review previous Rx - % compliant & % improvement; introduce 5 R's of working with problematic thoughts & breaking the thought emotion cycle; make changes to Rx based on improvement & re-evaluation

**Visit #3 - 15:** 4 Agreements, The work of Byron Katie, Boundaries, Responsible language, Distorted Automatic thoughts, Limiting Beliefs/Shadow Beliefs, Eckhart Tolle, Jeff Foster, Pema Chodron, Tara Brach, Jack Kornfield, Gabor Mate/Compassionate Inquiry

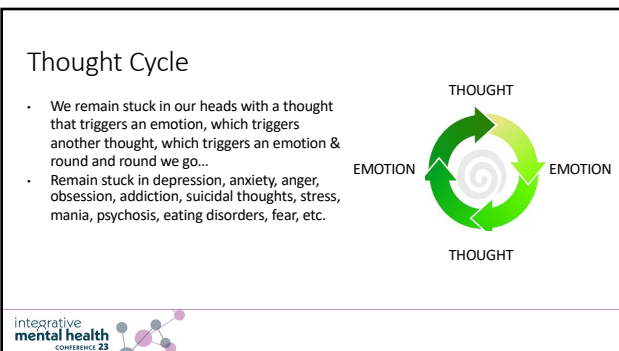
**GOAL: LOVE, COMPASSION & ACCEPTANCE OF SELF**

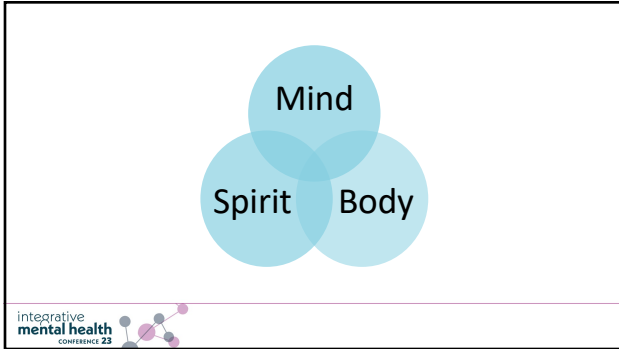


### Thought Cycle

- In our society, many are either right or left brained in their thinking with little cross-over to the other side. This can make us unbalanced.
- We end up living from the neck up, stuck in our heads with our thoughts, with little regard for our bodies.

A diagram of a human brain, split vertically into two halves. The left half is colored blue and labeled 'LEFT BRAIN'. The right half is colored orange and labeled 'RIGHT BRAIN'.

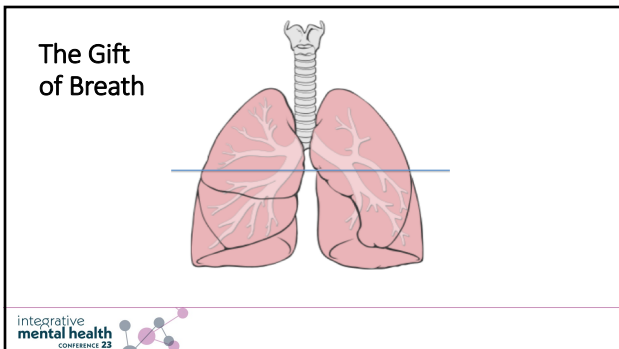




- ### 5 R's of Working with Problematic Thoughts
1. Recognize: Recognize your thoughts
  2. Refrain: Refrain from following your thoughts
  3. Relax: Relax into the breath
  4. Resolve: Resolve to repeat this process
  5. Rephrase/Reaffirm: Rephrase the thought you recognized

- ### Step 1: Recognize your thoughts
- Need to gain insight or **RECOGNIZE WHAT** you are thinking
  - Thoughts affect how we feel - as your thoughts create neuropeptides that communicate with the neuroendocrine system to produce hormones (chicken/egg)
  - Without awareness of how you are thinking, it may be a limiting factor in regaining your mental health
  - You are stuck if the thoughts are unkind, unsupportive, negative, etc – move on to Step 2: Refrain

- ### Step 2: Refrain
- Thinking patterns run deep into your history (major highway on the negative tract, build a new highway = neuroplasticity)
  - Refrain from following the 'urge' to perpetuate destructive thinking patterns
  - Goal of refraining is to relax into the urge – use your breath to break the thought emotion cycle



### NERVOUS SYSTEM IS KING: What side are you on?

SYMPATHETIC	PARASYMPATHEIC
Stressed	Relaxed
Hurt	Help
Sabotage	Support
Suffering	Beautiful
Inner Critic	Inner Cheerleader
Bully	Buddy
Ego	Soul
Fear	Love

## Two States: What is your dominant state?

### Love (parasympathetic) or fear (sympathetic)

#### Shift to:

- Love
- Self-compassion
- Confidence and
- Security

## Why is Self- Compassion Important?

"Because its driving force is love not fear. Love allows us to feel confident and secure (in part by pumping up our oxytocin), while fear makes us feel insecure and jittery (sending our amygdala into overdrive and flooding our system with cortisol). When we trust ourselves to be understanding and compassionate when we fail, we don't cause ourselves unnecessary stress and anxiety. We can relax knowing that we'll be accepted regardless of how well or how poorly we do. Unlike self-criticism which asks if you're good enough, self-compassion asks what's good for you?"

~ Kristin Neff - Self- Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself

"Look at a tree, a flower, a plant.  
Let your awareness rest upon it.  
How still they are, how deeply rooted in Being.  
Allow nature to teach you stillness."

—Eckhart Tolle



## Step 4: Resolve to Repeat

- Continually interrupt negative thought patterns
- Unconscious mind – contributes to depression, anxiety, disordered eating/eating disorders and mania - at play whenever we say we want something but never do it
- Awareness we can break this cycle
- Eventually, change happens
- Resolve to do this process again and again! Gym analogy

## Step 5: Reaffirm/Rephrase

- Rephrase whatever the "negative" thought was that you recognized was keeping you stuck
- For many, it is hard to believe that our thoughts affect our physiology
- Affirmations = whipping cream on top of "s\$#%"
- Go neutral
- Careful how we talk to ourselves because we are listening!
- We condition ourselves to adapt and respond more appropriately to life

## Candace Pert: Molecules of Emotion:

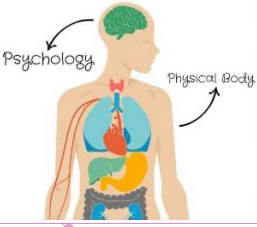
Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) means:

- ◊ psycho = thoughts
- ◊ neuro = brain
- ◊ immunology = immune system/how you feel

Understand the technology of the brain, how it works and how it is related to our beliefs.

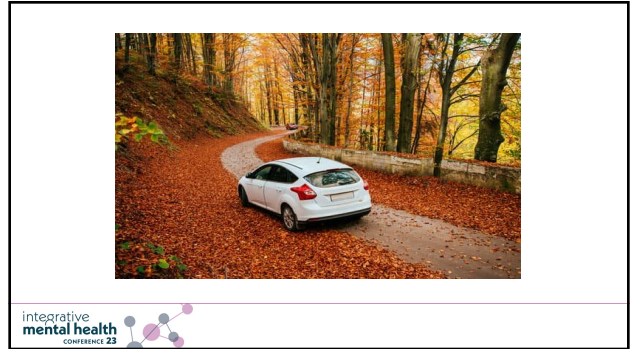
"Change your thoughts, change your life"

## Psychoneuroimmunology



This new field explains the scientific understanding of how psychology and physical body processes interact.

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## Rx to Break the Thought-Emotion Cycle

1. When you catch your thoughts in order to break the thought emotion cycle
2. Before you eat
3. Before you go to sleep
4. Upon waking
5. After going to the bathroom
6. Standing in a line up
7. Driving – keep hands on wheel of course!

Anxiety doesn't have a chance to rise when you reset the nervous system with breath

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## Breaking the Thought-Emotion Cycle

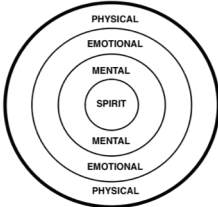
- Live in the present moment
- KEY POINT TO ASK PATIENTS: Where do you live in your mind mostly? In the past (ruminating); present moment (now); or in the future (worry, anxiety)?

Prescription: bring yourself back to the present moment

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## Recap: Moving Beyond

- Biochemical imbalance in the brain
- No denying the physical and causal connection between neurotransmitters and one's mood state
- My "out there" view - our spirit is trying to get our attention because some aspect of our lives is not moving in concert with our spirit or divine plan.
- By looking at ourselves and taking the time to be silent, talk to others and open up about what we are feeling, we can address the underlying root of mental illness

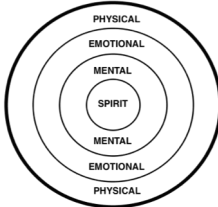


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*"Remember, you are going to be with you the longest. It is vital you get the attention you might with yourself first before seeking love from another" ~ Dr. Christina Biandol, MD*

## Recap: Moving Beyond

"...The human being is not simply a physical entity. We have minds, we think. We have emotions, we feel and we translate these feelings into meaning. We are **spiritual beings**. ....Causes of disease manifest in four groups or levels. Of these, the spirit is the center; the next layer is the mental aspect of the person, then the emotions and the outermost layer is the physical. If there is a distortion on the spiritual level, it will create distortion through the system, like ripples from a stone thrown into a pond."



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*"Remember, you are going to be with you the longest. It is vital you get the attention you might with yourself first before seeking love from another" ~ Dr. Christina Biandol, MD*

## Love for yourself

- **Our feelings about ourselves & how we treat ourselves is critical to our mental health and wellbeing**
- How do you love yourself on a scale of 1 to 10?
- Look into another person's eyes with a heartfelt caring and loving intent
- Self-harm is criminal
- Ask yourself if the way you talk to yourself in your head would be accepted by your best friend if you talked to them that way?

*"A vital question to ask yourself frequently is: what is my relationship with the present moment?"*  
 ~ Eckhart Tolle



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## Actionable Points

- 1. The Essential Diet:** Eating for Mental Health = eating road map + manage liquids: ½ your body weight in water; no caffeine, no pop, no alcohol
- 2. Address gut health** – rotate probiotics; ensure regular bowel movements
- 3. Ask key questions:** do you love yourself? What happened to you? ACE questionnaire and trauma?
- 4. "Mind the Gap"** –practice of the 5 Rs – download videos;



Mind, Body, Soul  
Heal Your Mind, Help Others

October 20-22, 2023  
Canmore, Alberta

*A heart-centred retreat for health care professionals*

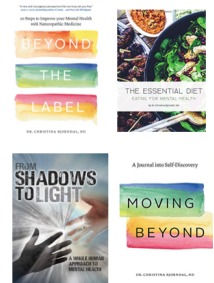
Reconnect to your purpose and heart's desires;  
Recharge and refuel to avoid burnout;  
Surround yourself with supportive heart-centered healers who nurture your sense of spirit.

<https://discover.drchristinabjorndal.com/canmore-retreat-1>

## Resource Books

- **Beyond the Label: 10 Steps to Improve your Mental Health with Naturopathic Medicine – sold in 9 countries**
- **The Essential Diet: Eating for Mental Health**
- **Moving Beyond: A Journal into Self discovery**
- **From Shadows to Light: A Whole Human Approach to Mental Health (co-authored)**

Available online: Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Chapters



## Questions? Stay in Touch!

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- www.drchristinabjorndal.com
- Dr. Christina Bjorndal - The Essential Diet
- @drchrisbjorndal



## Case Study - LH, 28 yo F Visit #1 Sept 2019

**CC: Anxiety, Depression, Sleep, Eating disorder hx, PMS**

Anxiety monitoring form: 42 & Depression monitoring form 45: already taking Sertraline 25 mg

Supplements prescribed:

- Niacinamide – 2 caps at breakfast
- Multi B6 – 1 cap at breakfast
- Mg malate/citrate – 400 mg for muscle pain
- Mg bisglycinate – 2 caps at bed – for anxiety, sleep & depression

Exercise: - daily movement that you enjoy

**Visit #1 Diet suggestions:**

- The Essential Diet: eating for mental for health
- Eat Tryptophan forming foods – eat daily
- Seed protocol for cycle
- Water – min goal is ½ your body weight in ounces – increase to 2L/ day ( + 2 cups of water for each cup of coffee)
- Eat protein at breakfast & lunch to balance blood sugar





## Case Study - LH, 28 yo F

### Visit #1 Counseling suggestions:

- Gratitude journal: 3 things you are grateful for every day
- Do something that you love to do – sing, write, exercise, pottery, draw, play music
- Create vision for yourself of health – see yourself as energetic, healthy, etc – what is real was once imagined
- Suicidal thoughts- red flag that in that moment you aren't loving yourself; shift to kindness
- Won't get to can by telling yourself that you can't
- Ask yourself – where you are living in your mind- past, present or future?
- Testing: CBC + Differential, Cholesterol panel (HDL, LDL, Triglycerides), Fasting Glucose, Liver enzymes (ALT, ALP, GGT), Bilirubin, Ferritin, TSH, Vit B12, Cortisol (am), TPO, Estradiol, Progesterone (to be tested between days 18-22 of your cycle, with Day 1 being the first day of flow)

## Case Study - LH, 28 yo F Visit #2 Oct 2019

- Partner lost job - stress/anxiety about the same; sleep improved; way more energy in the morning; AMF - 39; DMF 40 - slight improvement
- Blood work findings: B12 is suboptimal; Progesterone is low 4.0; Cortisol suboptimal at 340
- Methylcobalamin (B12)– 2,000 mcg in morning
- Jr Nervotone - 2 tsps 1x/d in the morning – in water – 10 min away from food
- Vit D - 5,000 IU 1x/d with food
- Progesterone support --- Evening primrose 2 g 2x/d – Days 15 – Day 1; & Mg malate/citrate – 400 mg for muscle pain – for menstrual cramps
- Taught 5Rs of working with problematic thoughts

## Patient Case Study (con't) – LH Visit #3 Nov 2019

- Noticeable improvement, AMF 25; DMF 17; no cramps or PMS; continued counselling around limiting beliefs
- Taught how to manage boundaries (recovering people pleaser)

## Patient Case Study (con't) – LH Visit #3 Nov 2019

- Visit #4 Jan 2020 - had a friend attempt suicide - lots of stress - LH remained stable (felt in the past she would not have)
- Visit #5 Feb 2020 - anxiety & depression free; AMF -14 DMF 17
- Subsequent visits: working on core beliefs, shifting inner critic, distorted automatic thoughts, limiting beliefs, liver support; gut health, environmental quiz; revisit lab work

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