



## REBOOT YOUR BRAIN FOR A BETTER 2022

While a lot of us don't understand why (something to do with apps, RAM, peripherals, etc.), we know that rebooting your computer helps it run better. What we might not realize is that the same is true for your brain.

But, without a "Power" button, how do you reboot a brain? Here are some suggestions.

**Sleep.** A really good night's sleep does wonders for a busy brain.

**Exercise.** The physical benefits of exercise are only half of the story. Working out is a great way to work out things that are bogging down your brain.

**Eat better.** It's a cliché, but it's true: A better diet leads to a better you.

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**Assess and address.** Take the time to analyze the things that are putting stress on your brain, and then address them. Work stress? Family tensions? Money worries? Something else? Identify the stressor, then come up with a plan to make a difference.

**Gather together.** Get together with friends for an evening of conversation, board games or easy-going activities.

**Find beauty and experience joy.** Make it a point to see something lovely or do something that brings you joy. Then savor the moment, and think back on it often.

**Breathe.** Get an app, watch a video or listen to a podcast that guides you through breathing techniques. You'll find that a few deep breaths really can make a difference.

## Smart Facts

53%

of Americans reported negative behavioral health effects from COVID-19.

66%

of employees reported that their work was a significant source of stress.

60%

of 18-25-year-olds view seeing a behavioral health professional as a sign of strength.



## THE STATE OF THE PANDEMIC

Sometimes it can be hard to keep up with all of the COVID news, and this becomes even more difficult when so much information is delivered in the form of arguments about who's right and who's wrong about this or that.

To help you cut through the noise, we're offering a quick State of the Pandemic, striving to sidestep controversy and focus on facts.

**We're now watching the Omicron variant with concern.** First identified in South Africa, this variant has attributes that allow it to spread quickly. While there were no reported cases of the Omicron variant in the U.S. in early December, officials say it likely is already here.

**Officials and scientists are scrambling to respond to Omicron quickly.** As the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said in late November, "Historically, the work to obtain the genetic information and patient samples for variants and then perform the testing needed to evaluate their impact takes time. However, we expect the vast majority of this work to be completed in the coming weeks."

**Nine vaccines are now fully approved for use.** Sixteen more are in limited use, and more than 100 additional vaccines are in clinical trials.

**More than half the U.S. population has been vaccinated.** Nearly 60 percent of Americans are fully vaccinated, and many have received boosters.

**More and more employers are requiring vaccines.** A late-November Willis Towers Watson survey revealed that 57% of organizations already require vaccinations to return to work or plan to do so soon.

**The vaccines do appear to work.** The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that unvaccinated people are five times as likely to contract COVID-19, and 13 times as likely to die from the virus.

**U.S. cases are up.** As of mid-November 2021, the country was experiencing an increase in cases, fueled largely by spikes in cases in the Northeast and Midwest.

**Those early measures still matter.** Even with vaccines, those things we learned early on about preventing the spread of the virus still matter. Wear a mask, wash your hands often and carefully, avoid others if you're sick, maintain a healthy social distance, and so on.

**Settle in for the long haul.** Nobody sees this pandemic ending within the next six months, so we all need to remain vigilant, and do all we can to protect ourselves and each other.



*"Historically, the work to obtain information for variants and then perform the testing needed takes time. However, we expect the vast majority of this work to be completed in the coming weeks."*

# MENTAL HEALTH GETS MORE ATTENTION, MORE COVERAGE

While the pandemic has increased everyone's awareness of the role mental health plays in overall wellness, employers in particular have taken notice: An April 2020 McKinsey & Co. survey revealed that behavioral health ranked among the top workforce health concerns for 90% of corporate decision makers, with 60% of employers planning to start, continue or expand the behavioral health services offered to their workforces.

Unfortunately, this evolution toward more mental health services is just beginning, so don't expect earth-shattering benefit options right away. Still, most benefit plans do offer some basic mental health coverage. Following are some ways most workers can tap into them and get help when they need it.

**Ask what's available.** This might seem obvious, but many employees shy away from asking about mental health services, worried that asking might give their employer a negative impression of them. However, sensitivity has increased, and most employers are aware that improved mental health leads to improved productivity. So: Ask.

**See a mental health provider.** Not so long ago, virtually no employer-sponsored plan covered mental health services such as counseling, therapy or substance abuse interventions. Now many do, and more add coverage every day. Check your plan website or talk to your HR team to see what's covered. And be aware that, even if your plan doesn't specifically cover mental health, it might cover some mental health services under general health benefits.

**Use flexible spending dollars.** Even if your benefit plan doesn't cover mental health services, your Health Savings Account or other flexible spending dollars can help to offset the cost.

**Take advantage of existing resources.** Many employees fail to leverage standard benefit-plan tools that can help to improve mental health. Use your PTO to take a day or two to destress. Download and use mindfulness apps offered through your plan. Take advantage of that gym discount. And talk to your HR team about other tools that might be available to you.

**Tap into your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).** Often one of the most under-utilized benefits, EAPs typically include mental health services that can be used remotely and confidentially. Contact your HR team if you need more information about your company's EAP.

While these tips acknowledge that many employers are still behind the times when it comes to mental health services, some firms are raising the bar by offering things like reduced co-pays for mental health visits, free counseling and therapy sessions, increased schedule flexibility and more. As a result, expect progress in mental health coverage in the coming years.



## Birth Defects Prevention Month

Not all birth defects can be prevented, but women can take measures to reduce the chances that their babies will be among the one in 33 born with a birth defect. Simple actions such as getting pre-pregnancy check-ups, making sure your vaccinations are up-to-date and maintaining a healthy weight can make a difference. To learn more, go to [www.marchofdimes.org](http://www.marchofdimes.org).



# HARVEST OF THE MONTH: LEMON

If life gives you lemons, you can do a whole lot more than make lemonade.

Lemons contribute to a wide range of dishes, sweet or savory, cooked or cold. While we tend to think of lemons as part of a dessert or perhaps as an accompaniment to a fish dish, many cultures see them as staples to be used in virtually every meal. If you're willing to be a little adventurous, you'll find that lemons can put a citrus spin on any number of standard menu items.

Getting a good lemon requires little more than following your instincts: The best ones will be bright yellow, feel a little heavy in your hand and smell wonderfully lemony. Choose ones that have smooth skin, as wrinkled ones are likely a little older and won't provide the flavor you want.

If you're planning to use your lemons in a few days, you can keep them at room temperature, but if you'll be keeping them for a week or more, store them in the refrigerator in a sealed plastic bag. They'll last at least a couple of weeks that way.



If you freeze lemons, they'll retain their flavor but become mushy when you thaw them. That's OK if you simply want to preserve the juice to add to food or drink. You also can freeze lemon slices by putting them in a sealable bag lying flat in the freezer. For a refreshing drink, freeze lemon juice in ice cube trays and add it to water.



## Recipe: Lemon Tart with Shortbread Crust

### Ingredients (8 servings):

- ½ cup powdered sugar
- 1½ cup flour
- ¾ cup butter sliced
- 5 large eggs
- 1½ cup sugar
- 1¼ cup freshly squeezed juice of about 3-4 lemons
- ¼ cup lemon zest
- Pinch of salt
- 10 tablespoons butter sliced

### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put powdered sugar, flour and ¾ cup butter into food processor and pulse until combined. Press mixture into the bottom of 9-inch tart pan and poke the bottom with a fork. Bake for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from oven and let cool. Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan, whisk eggs and sugar over medium heat until combined. Add lemon juice, zest and salt. Whisk for 2-3 minutes, then add 10 tablespoons of sliced butter and whisk while it melts, then continue to whisk until the mixture thickens and coats the back of a spoon. Remove from heat and strain into a bowl and let cool. Pour into the bottom of the shortbread crust, and then refrigerate for at least four hours, or overnight.

### Nutrition Information:

CALORIES: 267; PROTEIN: 3G; CARBOHYDRATES: 25G; FAT: 18G; SODIUM: 153MG; FIBER: 1G; SUGARS: 7G; CHOLESTEROL: 46MG

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