



Wise Up

The latest on AI for Mental Health: Brought to you by Wysa

Wysa and April Health merge to revolutionize access to mental health care

Supporting students abroad: Zurich and Wysa commit to student wellbeing

5 mindfulness techniques therapists recommend for stress relief

Turning anxiety into job-seeking confidence. Debbie's real-life user story

Ask Smriti:

HELP! There's a looming threat of layoffs

Fight, flight, freeze, or flow? Take the quiz to discover your stress reaction type

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Read the full issue:

bit.ly/WiseUp06

wysa

Welcome

Dear Readers,

Welcome to our Spring issue!

We're excited to bring you another edition packed with the latest Wysa updates, expert advice on timely topics, and inspiring user stories.

As you may have already caught wind, Wysa is merging with the behavioral health experts at April Health! We're excited to share how this partnership will enhance mental health support through a Collaborative Care Management Model that ensures no referral goes unanswered.

Also in the spotlight is our partnership with the Zurich North America's Group Accident team providing vital mental health support to students studying abroad, helping them to feel better, perform better, and reduce the risk of drop outs.



From the soothing sounds of birdsong to the calming sights of green spaces, we explore the quiet powers of nature for wellbeing.

Wysa therapist, Tanya Bakshi, shares her favourite mindfulness techniques to help you cope with stress this Stress Awareness Month, and don't miss our quiz, where you can discover your stress reaction type: fight, flight, freeze, or flow - and learn how to navigate it more effectively.

In our Ask Smriti column, Smriti answers a timely question on how to support your team amidst looming layoffs, offering strategies to foster kindness and resilience during uncertain times.

Turning anxiety into job seeking confidence, we're honoured to share Debbie's real-life user story on how Wysa empowered her to land a new role and regain her sense of purpose.

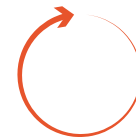
Finally, be sure to check out the back page for details on our upcoming Impact Session: 'Bridging the Mental Health Care Gap.' Join an incredible panel of experts as they discuss their experience with innovative solutions for underserved communities.

Thank you for joining us here again, and happy reading!

Megan

[Megan Kirk](#), Marketing Manager, Wysa

Wise news round-up



AI predicts teen mental health risks before symptoms appear

A new study in Nature Medicine shows that AI can predict which adolescents are at high risk for serious mental health issues before symptoms become severe. Using data from over 11,000 children in the Adolescent Brain and Cognitive Development Study, researchers trained AI models to identify risk factors like sleep disturbances and family conflicts. The AI proved highly accurate, with models predicting future mental health challenges based on both existing symptoms and underlying causes.

Sleep quality emerged as the strongest predictor, more influential than childhood adversity or family mental health history, highlighting a key area for early intervention. Brain scans did not improve predictions, suggesting that simple psychosocial questionnaires could be effective for identifying at-risk teens in schools or healthcare settings. Researchers now plan to test the model in clinical environments to ensure its effectiveness in real-world applications.



Research finds exercise can add disease-free years to your life, especially for high-risk groups

A new study finds that leisure-time physical activity can add 1-2 extra years of disease-free life, with the benefits being most notable for people with higher health risks.

Researchers analyzed data from over 530,000 initially healthy adults, tracking their physical activity and health outcomes.

They found that those who met the WHO-recommended activity levels (2.5 hours of moderate physical activity or 1.25 hours of vigorous physical activity per week) had more disease-free years compared to those who were less active. The impact was even greater for smokers, those with low socioeconomic status, or those experiencing depressive symptoms.

Researchers call for more broad physical activity initiatives, especially for at risk groups to boost public health and close the gap on health disparities between different population groups.



Increased popularity in solo travel and it's potential mental health benefits

Google Trends has recorded a 5,000% increase in searchers for solo travel over the past month alone.

Psychologists suggest solo travel works as exposure therapy for anxiety, tackling things like the fear of the unknown, loneliness and self-doubt. Solo travelers see it as an opportunity to learn more about themselves and 48% report boosted confidence and decision-making abilities as a result of traveling solo.

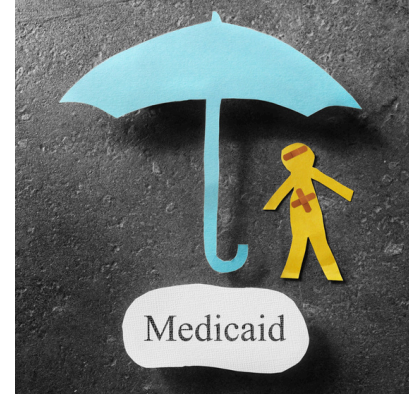
Feeling inspired to embrace the freedom and empowerment solo travel brings? Maybe it's your time to join the movement.



Evo 2: Largest AI model to transform genetic research and drug discovery

U.S. scientists have developed Evo 2, the largest biological AI model to date, capable of analyzing genetic code across 100,000 species. Developed by the Arc Institute and NVIDIA, Evo 2 can predict disease-causing mutations and enhance genome design.

With potential applications in drug discovery and personalized treatments, Evo 2 represents a major leap forward in understanding complex biological processes. By "thinking in nucleotides," this AI model could revolutionize research in disease, cell function, and gene expression.



Rising concerns over the U.S. Medicaid budget cuts

Hundreds of advocacy groups are urging Senate Majority Leader John Thune to reconsider proposed Medicaid cuts, citing potential impacts on access to care and state budgets.

The House's budget blueprint calls for \$880 billion in reductions, which could lead to fewer enrollees and lower provider payments.

Researchers suggest these cuts may increase healthcare costs, reduce state GDPs, and result in significant job losses. With Medicaid and CHIP covering 80 million Americans, advocates emphasize the program's role in supporting families, healthcare providers, and communities across the country.

AI and Mental Health

Wysa and April Health merge to revolutionize access to behavioral health care through primary care providers

Wysa and April Health are coming together to transform mental health care by integrating AI-driven support with expert-led behavioral health services. The collaboration will provide patients with continuous, personalized care, through a combination of behavioral health specialists, psychiatrists, and Wysa's AI-driven guidance, ensuring that no referral goes unanswered. This groundbreaking combination of AI and human resources in one model of care guarantees that patients receive support between clinician visits and eliminates the wait times that often plague mental health care.

Redefining Behavioral Health in Primary Care

Access to behavioral health care can be incredibly challenging, especially in rural and underserved areas where mental health providers are scarce. Half of the US population lives in what's considered a mental health desert, leading to average wait times of 3-4 months for psychiatric support. This leaves 80% of patients turning to their primary care providers (PCPs) for help, but without the necessary behavioral health resources, those providers face limited options for treatment.

April Health was founded to change this reality by embedding virtual behavioral health services directly into primary care practices, ensuring patients receive the care they need. Now, with Wysa's self-help AI Coach integrated into this model, April Health patients can access a hybrid of human and AI-guided care, expanding access without increasing the burden on providers or hitting insurance barriers.



"Mental healthcare doesn't fit neatly into appointment slots. Patients need support between visits, and providers need solutions that don't add to their workload. By integrating Wysa's AI, every patient referred to us receives ongoing care—whether through a behavioral health specialist, a psychiatrist, or AI-powered guidance tailored to their needs. This combined approach drives better outcomes in less time, helping to bridge America's mental health gap."

- Jesse Weinberg, CEO at April Health.

No Referral Left Unfulfilled

Over 50% of behavioral health referrals in primary care settings don't lead to successful outcomes, leaving patients without the support they desperately need. At Wysa, we're determined to change this. With April Health, we're ensuring that once a provider refers a patient, they'll receive the right level of care—whether that means direct engagement with a behavioral health care manager, psychiatric medication recommendations, or digital support from our AI. And every patient, regardless of their insurance coverage, will have access to our AI-powered support, making this a scalable solution for expanding mental health care without financial barriers.



"No one should have to wait for behavioral health care, yet the reality is most patients face long delays, assuming they ever get the support they need. By bringing Wysa's AI into April Health's care model, we're creating a seamless system where patients can engage with mental health support immediately, while still receiving expert-led care."

- Ramakant Vempati, Co-founder and President of Wysa.

A Model That Works for Patients and Providers

April Health's integration of our AI reinforces Collaborative Care Management (CoCM), a proven model that allows primary care and specialty clinics to be reimbursed for behavioral health services. This approach not only improves patient outcomes but also makes behavioral health financially sustainable for healthcare practices.

By partnering with April Health, primary care providers, pediatricians, women's health professionals, and more can now integrate behavioral health into their practices without hiring additional staff or disrupting their workflows. Providers can simply refer patients to an introductory call with April Health, where care managers assess needs and initiate a psychiatrist-led collaborative care plan. This ensures that patients receive comprehensive behavioral health support within the time constraints of primary care.

The Future of Integrated Behavioral Health

We believe this partnership shows that behavioral health care can be both accessible and scalable—offering human support where it's needed while ensuring every patient has continuous access to clinically validated mental health tools. The first providers to adopt this integrated model are April Health's existing primary care partners within LifePoint Healthcare and The Newton Clinic, affiliated with MercyOne.

For more information, visit www.aprilhealth.com and www.wysa.com.



April Health
by **wysa**

Nature's quiet power

How the sights, sounds, and scents of the
natural world restore our wellbeing



By Sarah Baldry

Chief Marketing Officer, Wysa



There's something undeniably refreshing about stepping outside as the world awakens to spring. The chill of winter begins to retreat, making space for warmer days, soft breezes, and a burst of life that seems to fill the air. Nature has an effortless way of comforting us, doesn't it? Whether it's the sound of leaves rustling, the feel of sunshine on your skin, or the simple act of breathing in fresh air, these small moments of connection with the natural world offer a deep sense of calm.

We often think of nature's power as being purely visual - lush greenery, blooming flowers, endless skies. But its benefits go beyond what we see. Each of our senses plays a role in how we experience and absorb the world around us. The sounds of birdsong, the scent of wet grass and blossom, the feel of grass underfoot. Each of these elements influences our mood, reduces stress, and brings clarity to a busy mind. And, as research increasingly shows, it's not just about how nature makes us feel in the moment. Time spent outdoors has profound, lasting effects on both mental and physical health.

For me, this connection with nature has been a lifelong thread, one that, in hindsight, weaves my whole career together. I started out in marketing and PR, spending years shaping stories and building connections in fast-paced industries. But behind the demands of my professional life, I had another, quieter passion: plants, gardens, and the restorative power of green spaces. When I had children, I followed that pull, stepping away from the corporate world to study and practise garden design. I immersed myself in the textures, shapes, and rhythms of the natural world, discovering how outdoor spaces could offer not just beauty but deep emotional restoration.

Now, working in mental health, everything has come full circle. The link between nature and wellbeing is no longer just something I believe. It's something I see playing out every day. Science confirms what we feel instinctively: time spent in nature reduces stress, enhances mood, and strengthens resilience. And in an age where so many of us live at full pelt, barely pausing to breathe, the need for this connection is unquestionable.

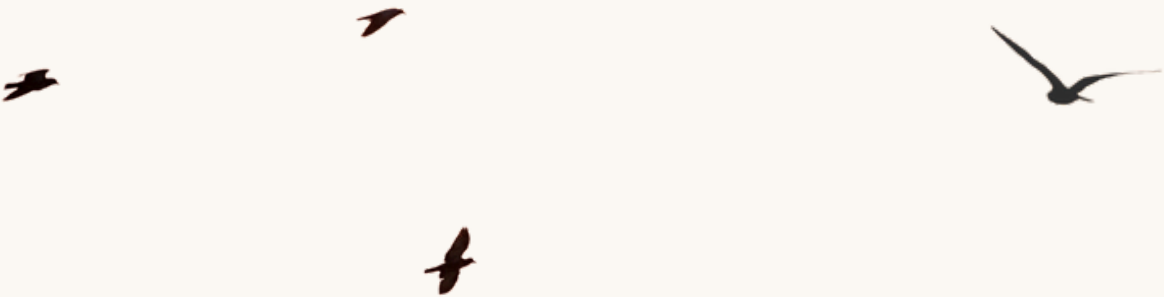
The science behind nature's healing touch

It's long been observed that patients recovering from surgery heal faster and require less pain medication when they have a view of nature from their hospital window. But why? Scientists have found that simply looking at a natural landscape activates pathways in the brain that lower blood pressure, slow heart rate, and reduce stress hormones like adrenaline. Green spaces, especially those with scattered trees, induce a state of calm that helps the mind reset. Studies even show that gazing at certain colours, particularly soft greens, whites, and yellows, can enhance this soothing effect. House plants, particularly those with green-and-white variegation, have been found to have a calming effect. I personally loathe variegated plants so I just stick with greens!

It's not just about what we see. Our other senses play a powerful role in nature's ability to restore us. The rustling of leaves, the rhythmic sound of waves and birdsong have been shown to significantly reduce stress and improve cognitive function. Research has found that water sounds, in particular, enhance concentration and elevate mood, while birdsong helps to lower anxiety.

The overlooked power of natural scent

One of the most fascinating discoveries in recent years is the profound effect that scent has on our wellbeing. When we inhale the fragrance of certain plants, the chemical compounds they release enter our bloodstream and interact with our bodies much like a prescription drug. This is why essential oils have been used in healing practices for centuries. My bathroom cupboard overflows with tiny bottles of the stuff.



Lavender, for example, contains linalool, a compound known for its ability to reduce anxiety. The fresh scent of pine, rich in pinene, has been shown to lower stress levels and improve mood - one reason why a walk through a pine forest feels so invigorating. Cypress trees, cedar, and juniper release compounds called sesquiterpenoids, which activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation and even boosting immune function. Meanwhile, citrus scents such as lemon and orange contain limonene, an anti-inflammatory compound that has been linked to reduced stress and enhanced cognitive function.

For those who can't always get outside, bringing nature indoors can provide many of the same benefits. Inhaling just a few drops of hinoki (Japanese cypress) oil, diffused into a room, has been shown to increase natural killer cells - immune cells that help protect against disease.

The hidden sense: how nature influences our microbiome

Beyond sight, sound, and scent, there is another, often overlooked way in which nature improves our health - through the invisible world of microbes. The biodiversity of our environment directly affects the diversity of the microbiome in our bodies. Studies have shown that after just two weeks of being allowed to play in mud, children's gut and skin microbiomes shift to more diverse, healthier compositions, leading to stronger immune function and reduced inflammation. Adults, too, experience these benefits: office workers with a green wall in their workspace develop more beneficial bacteria on their skin and in their gut, while simply touching untreated wood has been shown to lower blood pressure.

Bringing nature into daily life

Finding time to immerse ourselves in nature can feel like a challenge, especially with busy schedules, family commitments, and work. But the good news is that even small interactions with the natural world can make a difference. For those who can, practices like forest bathing (the Japanese concept of Shinrin-yoku) offer a deep sense of restoration. This isn't about exercise or hiking - it's about moving slowly through a forest, breathing in the scents, feeling the textures, and absorbing the atmosphere. Studies show that this practice lowers cortisol (the body's primary stress hormone), reduces anxiety, and even improves immune function.

But you don't need a forest to reap the benefits of nature. Sitting in a park, tending to a garden, or simply opening a window to look out and let fresh air in can help. Research suggests that spending just **120** minutes per week in a green space is enough to significantly improve mental wellbeing.

The challenge: embrace nature this spring

For those who want to explore the science behind these ideas further, Kathy Willis' book **Good Nature** is a fascinating deep dive into the ways that plants, landscapes, and natural elements influence our brains and bodies. From the healing power of scent to the hidden benefits of soil microbes, her research as professor of biodiversity at the University of Oxford highlights just how deeply interconnected we are with the natural world. This spring, take the time to notice the world outside. Breathe in the fresh air, listen to the birds, let the warmth of the sun touch your skin. In a fast-paced world, nature offers a gentle reminder: slow down, take a breath, and just be.

Mindfulness for stress relief.

A therapist's favourite practices

April is Stress Awareness Month, making it the perfect time to pause and reflect. How often do you truly slow down? How do you manage stress? Do you have the tools and techniques you need to keep calm during life's storms? This month, we ask Wysa therapist, Tanya Bakshi, her favorite stress relief practices in the hopes of giving you some new techniques to try!

What is stress?

"Understanding stress is the first step to managing it more effectively", says Tanya. "Stress is a natural response that helps us stay alert and perform at our best. It's not inherently bad, we actually need a certain level of stress to stay motivated and ready for action. It's what helps us meet deadlines, prepare for big presentations, or react quickly in emergencies."

"Ideally, stress sharpens our focus by activating the sympathetic nervous system, but when stress is chronic, it pushes our body and mind beyond their limits. Too little stress can leave us sluggish and unmotivated, while too much can make us tense, overwhelmed, and mentally drained. High stress levels long-term are linked to serious health issues, including insomnia, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, anxiety, and depression."

So, what can you do when stress starts running the show? That's where mindfulness comes in.



How can mindfulness help?

"Spending too much time caught up in your mind can amplify stress", shares Tanya. "The mind is constantly jumping between worries, overanalysing past conversations, or planning future activities. That's your mind stuck in autopilot. Mindfulness helps break this cycle by bringing your attention back to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and non-judgment. A practice rooted in Buddhist traditions and extensively studied in modern psychology, mindfulness is well-recognised as an effective tool for stress reduction."

Research shows that mindfulness can reduce activity in the Amygdala (the brain's 'fear centre') while strengthening the prefrontal cortex, which regulates emotions. In simple terms, "mindfulness helps you worry less and respond to stress in a healthier way". Tanya continues, "thus, with regular mindfulness practice, you can develop better control over your thoughts and emotions."

Mindfulness activities for stress reduction

There are several evidence-based approaches that can help provide structured techniques to cultivate mindfulness and reduce stress. Here are five practices for stress relief that Tanya recommends as a therapist.

1. Mindful breathing

Ever noticed how your breathing changes when you're stressed? It becomes shallow and fast. Mindful breathing is one of the simplest yet most effective mindfulness practices. It helps slow things down by focusing on the breath, anchoring you in the present.

How to Practice:

1. Find a comfortable seat, close your eyes, and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose.
2. Exhale gently through your mouth, letting go of any tension.
3. Observe the rhythm without trying to control it.
4. When the mind drifts (which it will), gently bring attention back to the breath.

2. The body scan meditation

The body scan meditation is a foundational mindfulness practice that promotes relaxation and awareness of bodily sensations. This technique involves bringing attention to your body, noticing different sensations, such as temperature, tightness, tension, and observing these sensations without judgment. This technique works to shift your focus away from racing thoughts and put you back in touch with your body.

How to Practice:

1. Find a quiet space and lie down or sit comfortably.
2. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
3. Bring attention to your toes, noticing any sensations such as warmth, tingling, or tension.
4. Gradually move your focus upward through your body, scanning each area without trying to change anything. Spend anywhere from 15 seconds to 1 minute on each body part.
5. If the mind wanders, gently return focus to the present sensation.



3. The STOP technique

If you're caught in a stress spiral, the STOP technique might work for you. With an emphasis on building psychological flexibility, this technique helps you to respond to stress with awareness rather than avoidance. It is a four-step mental checklist (Stop, Take a Breath, Observe, Proceed) that helps you ground yourself in the present moment by interrupting your automatic stress reactions and fostering conscious decision-making. This technique is especially useful in high-pressure situations where emotions can take over.

How to Practice:

1. **Stop:** When feeling overwhelmed, pause for a moment.
2. **Take a Breath:** Inhale deeply through your nose, hold briefly, and exhale slowly.
3. **Observe:** Notice thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without judgment.
4. **Proceed mindfully:** Choose a response aligned with your values rather than reacting impulsively.

4. Loving kindness meditation

Stress can make us self-critical or irritable and this practice helps cultivate compassion, both for ourselves and others. Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) is an ancient Buddhist practice that cultivates goodwill and universal friendliness towards all.

How to Practice:

1. Find a quiet space and sit comfortably with your eyes closed and take a few deep breaths.
2. Generate kindness toward yourself and silently repeat phrases like: "May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I be at peace."
3. Gradually extend these wishes to others, your family and friends and even strangers.
4. Let feelings of kindness and compassion grow within you.
5. After a few minutes, take a deep breath and open your eyes.

5. Leaves on a stream

Leaves on a stream is a visualisation exercise and cognitive defusion technique used in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) that can help you to detach from stressful thoughts by observing them as passing phenomena rather than absolute truths.

How to Practice:

1. Close your eyes and imagine sitting by a stream.
2. Picture leaves floating on the water, each carrying a thought.
3. Observe the leaves as they drift past, acknowledging each thought without judgment.
4. Allow thoughts to come and go, recognizing that they do not define you.

Whether through body scans, mindful breathing, cognitive defusion, or loving-kindness meditation, these practices empower you to break free from automatic stress responses and cultivate a greater sense of calm. Bringing mindfulness into your daily life doesn't require major changes, just a few intentional moments each day can lead to lasting improvements in wellbeing. So, why not start today? Pick a practice and try it right now. These are techniques you can carry with you and turn to whenever you need to restore calm and clarity this Stress Awareness Month and beyond.



Tanya Bakshi is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Therapist with over six years of experience, dedicated to helping clients build resilience, improve mental health, and lead fulfilling lives. She specializes in evidence-based

therapies, including CBT and DBT, to support children, young adults, and older adults in managing emotional and behavioral challenges. Since 2022, Tanya has been running her private practice, Mental Health with Tanya, while also serving as an Audio-Visual Therapist at Wysa, where she provides counseling for anxiety, depression, stress, burnout and relationship concerns.

Supporting students abroad: Zurich and Wysa commit to student wellbeing

By Mike Hughes, Regional Underwriting Manager, at Zurich North America, and Sarah Baldry, Chief Marketing Officer at Wysa.



In today's educational landscape, student mental health is a crucial priority, especially for those studying abroad. While these experiences offer personal growth and cultural exchange, they also present unique challenges such as isolation, homesickness, and academic pressures, which are only compounded by the stress of navigating unfamiliar environments.

To address these issues, Zurich North America's Group Accident team partnered with Wysa in 2024 to provide vital support to students abroad. As universities adopt new technologies and strategies, it's essential to engage students in breaking the stigma and encouraging the use of these resources.

The Need for Proactive Support

*Are we doing **enough** to support student mental health before crises arise?*

Conversations with university risk managers reveal a pressing need for comprehensive mental health support that anticipates the challenges students face. The importance of fostering student wellbeing cannot be overstated; universities and their partners must take proactive steps to ensure students feel supported before their moods decline into deeper crises. Ensuring wellbeing is not only essential for academic performance but also for personal development and success in life.

Many students hesitate to disclose mental health struggles due to stigma or fear of judgment, allowing issues to escalate. Innovative tools like AI-driven Wysa provide 24/7 anonymous support, enabling students to engage without fear of exposure. Clinical evidence shows that Wysa users open up three times faster than with human therapists, breaking down barriers to seeking help.

Investing in student mental health is a forward-thinking strategy with long-term benefits. When students feel supported, they perform better academically, are less likely to drop out, and develop greater emotional resilience. Prioritising mental health fosters a more engaged and productive student body while equipping graduates to navigate future careers with adaptability, resilience, and emotional intelligence.

Making Mental Health Resources Accessible

Integrating platforms like Wysa into university services allows students to engage with coping strategies and resilience-building techniques at their convenience. Such innovations address the urgent need for mental health resources that students can access wherever they are in the world. By providing immediate assistance and fostering open communication about mental health, these solutions empower students to seek support before reaching a crisis point.

As a result of this partnership, over 40 universities are able to offer clinically proven AI wellbeing support to students traveling abroad, as part of their cover with Zurich North America. This growing network of educational institutions demonstrates a collective commitment to fostering environments where student mental health is a priority, and are leading the way by adopting these essential mental health resources into their toolkit.

*Institutions with **strong mental health resources** can experience up to a **30% increase in retention rates**, leading to better academic outcomes and a positive campus atmosphere.*

Understanding Risk and Liability Concerns

While the integration of mental health services into educational frameworks is essential, it also raises important questions surrounding privacy, risk, and liability. Some universities express concern about the potential legal repercussions if students disclose mental health issues through applications like Wysa, especially if a crisis occurs as a result.

However, Wysa's design effectively alleviates such concerns by anonymizing all interactions and ensuring that data is deleted after 48 hours. This confidentiality allows students to seek help without fearing potential exposure or judgment from peers or faculty. By providing a safe and supportive environment for students to discuss their mental health challenges, universities can foster a culture of care and trust that encourages wellbeing while effectively fulfilling their duty to support student needs.

Added Value for Budget-Conscious Universities

In a time of financial constraints, Zurich's inclusion of Wysa as a resource is particularly impactful. These mental health tools provide essential support for students while enhancing the institution's reputation as caring and innovative. Research shows that institutions with strong mental health resources can experience up to a 30% increase in retention rates, leading to better academic outcomes and a positive campus atmosphere—all without the financial burden of comprehensive mental health programs.

However, with this added value brings new responsibilities. Universities must not only offer these resources but also ensure students are aware of them. Risk managers should collaborate with wellbeing teams and digital tool suppliers to promote effective communication and outreach.

Effective communication and outreach efforts are essential for maximizing their impact. University wellbeing teams need to be equipped to promote awareness materials and make them visible to the relevant student populations. It is crucial that students know they have these accessible and confidential support at their fingertips—so they feel empowered to seek help when they need it. Utilizing social media campaigns, informational sessions, and partnerships with student organizations can help spread the word.

Conclusion: A Call for Collaboration and Visibility

The Zurich North America and Wysa partnership exemplifies innovative strategies for supporting student mental health. With many universities already offering these resources, there's a significant shift toward greater mental health awareness on campuses. Universities must not only provide these tools but also actively promote them to students.

We hope to inspire universities to champion mental health resources and create inclusive environments where every student feels empowered to seek help. Together, we can prioritize mental health, dismantle stigma, and ensure every student has the support they need to thrive.

Fight, flight, freeze, or flow?

What's your stress reaction type?

Take the quiz

When faced with a stressful situation, how do you naturally respond? Answer the following questions to discover your stress reaction type.

Q1. When you're overwhelmed by tasks, how do you typically react?

- A.** Push through and work as much as you can to tick everything off.
- B.** Distract yourself with TV or social media for a bit to self-soothe and feel better.
- C.** Feel stuck and unable to decide what to start with meaning you get nothing done.
- D.** Break it down into smaller tasks and tackle them one at a time.

Q2. You receive unexpected critical feedback. How do you handle it?

- A.** Defend yourself and argue your case.
- B.** Avoid thinking about it and focus on something else.
- C.** Feel stuck and unsure of how to respond.
- D.** Accept it as a learning opportunity and move forward.

Q3. A sudden deadline is moved up by a week. How do you react?

- A.** Work overtime to meet the deadline, no matter what.
- B.** Consider dropping the task altogether or asking for help.
- C.** Feel overwhelmed and unsure where to begin, how is this possible?
- D.** Reorganize and prioritize your tasks to stay on track.

Q4. During a heated argument, how do you respond?

- A.** Stand your ground and argue your point.
- B.** Walk away to avoid further conflict.
- C.** Go silent, unsure of what to say next.
- D.** Try to mediate and de-escalate the situation.

Q5. You find out you've made a major mistake at work. What's your first move?

- A.** Work extra hard to correct it immediately.
- B.** Think about how to leave the situation before it gets worse or you mess up more.
- C.** Feel paralyzed and unsure what to do next.
- D.** Stay calm and devise a step-by-step plan to fix it. You've got this.

Your results

- A** **Mostly A's:** Fight
- B** **Mostly B's:** Flight
- C** **Mostly C's:** Freeze
- D** **Mostly D's:** Flow

Continue on to find out more about your stress response type.



FIGHT

You confront stress head-on, ready to take control and tackle challenges forcefully. You're proactive and get the job done! Just be sure to avoid burning out by taking time away to rest and recharge after fighting your way through the troubles that dare challenge you.



FLIGHT

You tend to avoid stressful situations, preferring to distance yourself or escape when things get tough. This can be useful, but not always helpful when stress is unavoidable. Building a skill set to cope with stress is your best bet!



FREEZE

You may feel overwhelmed by stress, finding it hard to act or make decisions in the moment. As a result, stress may continue to increase as responsibilities build and issues go unresolved. Small cracks soon turn into larger cracks and become bigger problems - take one small step to gain some momentum today!



FLOW

You stay calm and go with the flow, maintaining a balanced approach to handling stress. You know the only way out is through and do a good job of taking action while remaining level-headed and confident in your ability to get through whatever life throws your way.

Q. The threat of layoffs

“We just saw on TV that our department is going to be cut with thousands of people to be laid off. How can I support my team and expect them to be motivated with such a threat looming?”

A. Dear Reader,

This is an incredibly tough place to be in. There's the shock of the news, the fear of what it means, and then the added pressure of needing to support others when you don't even feel steady yourself. It's a lot. If you're feeling shaken or at a loss for what to say or do next, that makes complete sense. You're human. Let's start there. When uncertainty strikes at this scale, people go into survival mode. Productivity, motivation, even basic concentration, they all take a hit. That doesn't mean people don't care. It means their nervous systems are reacting to a perceived threat. So the real question right now isn't "how do I keep people motivated?", it's "how do I help them feel safe enough to keep going, one step at a time?"

Here's how you might do that.

1. Acknowledge the impact gently, but directly.

Your team likely found out the same way you did, through the news. That kind of exposure can feel invasive and disempowering. Don't ignore it or try to "wait for more details." Speak to it, simply and calmly. You might say: "I saw the news too, and I know it's unsettling. I don't have more information right now, but I want to be transparent with you as soon as I do. In the meantime, I'm here to talk if you need space to process." This kind of acknowledgment helps reduce fear. It says: "You're not imagining this. And you're not alone."

2. Give people permission to feel and just be.

You may notice team members pulling back, getting emotional, or asking lots of questions. All of that is

normal. People might be worried about their finances, their families, their future. Let them know it's okay to not be okay right now. Try this: "If you're feeling distracted, worried, or even just flat - that's a completely human reaction. Take breaks when you need to. Let's be kind to ourselves and each other right now." Containment is key here. You're not fuelling panic, but you're also not shutting it down. You're creating space that says, "This is a hard thing, and we can hold it together."

3. Limit how much news you're all consuming.

It's important to stay informed, but constant exposure to media updates, speculation, or social media reactions can worsen anxiety. Encourage your team (and yourself) to set boundaries around the news. Doomscrolling won't give us more clarity, only more stress. Offer alternative grounding routines like short walks, focused work sprints, even just stepping away from the screen for ten minutes. These small pauses really do matter.



4. Focus on what's still in your hands.

Right now, it can feel like everything is up in the air. Help your team zoom in to what's still within their control, remind them that such organisational decisions are sometimes more a reflection of organisational challenges or shortcomings than the employee's. Remind them of their past contributions and promotions. Conversations could be small wins on a project, connection with each other, or taking care of their professional wellbeing, like updating CVs or reflecting on recent achievements. Not in a "jump ship" kind of way, but more like: "No matter what happens, you've built so much here. Let's make sure you can carry that forward, wherever you go." This helps shift the story from "I might lose everything" to "I still have agency, even now."

5. Hold the line with calm, not certainty.

You don't need to have all the answers. Just be someone who stays present and steady. That might sound like: "I don't know what's next yet. But I'll walk through this with you, every step of the way."

6. If it feels too much, reach outside the circle.

Sometimes, the emotions around job uncertainty can feel too big to hold alone. And it can be hard to talk openly at work when everyone's feeling the same pressure. That's when reaching out to someone outside the situation can help. This could be a friend, a mentor, or even a mental health professional. If therapy feels like too much right now, even something like the Wysa app can be a good place to start; it offers a non-judgemental space to talk things out, reflect, and get a bit of perspective. You don't have to wait until it's unbearable to ask for support. And finally, for you: Before you support others, check in with yourself too. You're likely carrying just as much fear and pressure as everyone else, if not more. Who's holding space for you? Whether it's a peer, a journal, or a quiet morning walk - don't forget to offload what you're holding. You can't pour from an empty cup. Uncertainty is exhausting. But connection can be a buffer. You can't make this situation go away, but you can make it more bearable, just by being real, consistent, and kind. One breath at a time. One day at a time. You're doing better than you think.

With warmth,

Smriti.

**Smriti Joshi, Chief of Clinical Services
& Ops, Wysa**

Ask Smriti



Every issue, we ask Smriti Joshi one of your burning questions, and she offers expert opinion, rooted in science and decades of experience.

If you have something related to mental health technology, employee wellbeing, artificial intelligence or population health, please get in touch on press@wysa.io and we will **Ask Smriti**.

About Smriti

Smriti Joshi, Chief of Clinical Services and Operations at Wysa is a licensed clinical psychologist with over 21 years of experience in India's mental health sector. She is an Advanced Telemental health professional and has authored papers and book chapters, contributing significantly to tele-counselling guidelines through the Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists. Smriti leads mental health tech discussions on the Therapists in Tech platform and is a part of the National Mental Health Council for WICCI. She has appeared in several media outlets, including a TEDx talk and CNBC-TV18. Smriti holds an M.Phil in Clinical Psychology from the University of Delhi and specializes in treating depression, anxiety, insomnia, anger, and loneliness.



Real life user story

Turning anxiety into job-seeking confidence with Wysa

Debbie, age 41, from Leicestershire, UK, was previously employed as a chemist but left her position due to **significant stress and anxiety**. The demanding work environment had started to affect her mental health, leading her to seek professional support. Enrolled in a **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** course through **NHS Talking Therapies**, Debbie was also introduced to Wysa's digital mental health support app that helps users manage symptoms like **anxiety, low mood, and stress**. Having completed her CBT course, Debbie continues to use Wysa daily to help manage her anxiety and stay motivated while job hunting for a new role in administration.

Experience with Wysa

When Debbie first started using Wysa, she was immediately drawn to its interactive and friendly nature. "I like the little penguin - it's like having someone to chat to about your day. And the techniques on there are so useful," she shared. The app's conversational style, combined with its inviting mascot, quickly became a source of comfort, allowing her to talk about her day and engage with therapeutic exercises in a relaxed way.

"There's nothing on there that I don't like. I think it's all pretty helpful and informative," she remarked, adding that she appreciates how accessible the information and tools are.

Managing Anxiety and Practicing Gratitude

With her anxiety substantially improved, Debbie attributes much of her ongoing progress to using Wysa regularly. "It was mainly anxiety that led me to therapy," she explained, "and it's got a lot better now than it was before. It took a lot of work but I'm getting there." She's integrated Wysa's mindfulness and gratitude exercises into her routine, which she finds uplifting. "It makes me smile... there's this little icon that gives you a hug, and there's a lot about gratitude and mindfulness on there," she said. She now considers these practices an essential part of her day.

Debbie uses Wysa almost every day, especially in the morning to set a positive tone. She often finds herself returning to it whenever she feels she could benefit from a particular technique. "I usually go on it in the morning," she noted. "Sometimes I might open it during the day if I'm thinking, 'Oh, I could try that technique again.'"

"I like the little penguin - it's like having someone to chat to about your day. And the techniques on there are so useful."

Preference for Wysa Over Other Digital Tools

In addition to Wysa, Debbie has tried other digital mental health tools, but none had the same impact. "I tried Silver Cloud, but it just didn't work as well for me," she explained. "I think this one, Wysa, is a lot better." When asked why Wysa stands out, she noted that its interactive style, friendly design, and gratitude exercises keep her engaged, all of which she finds more helpful than the alternative digital tools offered to her.

Job-Hunting Motivation

Since leaving her position at the chemist, Debbie has used Wysa to stay motivated in her job search. She finds that the app's goal-setting feature helps her feel organised and focused during this transitional period. "The goals on there are so helpful for keeping me on track," she explained. This has been especially useful as she seeks new opportunities in admin work.

Encouraging Others to Use Wysa

Debbie is enthusiastic about recommending Wysa to others dealing with anxiety, low mood, or depression. When asked if she would suggest the app to others, she replied without hesitation, "Oh, absolutely. I'd definitely recommend it."

Exploring the SOS Button

Although Debbie hasn't needed to use Wysa's SOS feature, she was reassured upon learning more about it. "I remember hearing about someone with an Apple Watch that automatically rang the police when they needed help," she said, explaining her previous concerns about emergency features in apps. But after learning that Wysa's SOS button is designed only for grounding exercises and deep breathing, and providing helplines, she felt more at ease. Knowing it provides accessible exercises in case of moments of panic has given her peace of mind.

A Willing Advocate for Mental Health Awareness

Debbie's positive experience with Wysa has inspired her to share her story to help others overcome the stigma around mental health: "If sharing my experience helps other people, then that's exactly what I want to do." She hopes that by sharing her story, she can encourage others facing similar challenges to try Wysa as part of their journey toward better mental health.

Conclusion

Debbie's journey illustrates how digital mental health tools like Wysa, when used alongside traditional therapy, can provide ongoing support and empowerment, especially in times of transition like job searching. For Debbie, Wysa is more than just an app; it's a daily companion that helps her face each day with greater confidence and resilience.

Editors notes: We're pleased to share that following this interview Debbie has since found work.



LIVE Zoom Session

Bridging the mental health care gap in low resource settings

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or exploring ethical AI in mental
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