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Reducing Acne-Stress and an integrated self-healing approach

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You only get one first impression and first impressions mean a lot. My face made me feel so insecure. I felt embarrassed because I was a 27-year-old, grown woman with an ugly face, or so I thought to be at the time. Acne is a very common problem for young people with about 20% of young adults being moderately to severely affected (Bhate & Williams 2012). Some social consequences of facial acne include reduction of feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. An early biofeedback study by Hughes, Brown, Lawlis & Fulton (1983) observed that those participants who continued and generalized the relaxation skills continued to show improvement in facial acne. The current study surveys the frequency of acne and stress among college students and illustrates through a case example how an integrated stress management program can significantly improve acne as well as self-esteem. 93 junior and senior college students were surveyed about facial acne as well as self-rated stress and anxiety. They reported an average of 5 on a 1–10 point scale related to acne severity and, an average of 6, on a 1–10 point scale related to stress and anxiety. A representative example is presented of the beneficial effects of stress reduction practices that use non-instrumented (i.e., self-monitored) techniques of feedback by which numerous students significantly decrease acne. The factors that promote the healing of the students are discussed and illustrated by a detailed report of one student who after four weeks decreased her facial acne symptoms and stress levels by more than 70%. She has continued to practice the skills and at the 6-month follow-up her skin continues to stay clear. We recommend, as the first level of intervention, that all young people, especially all those with acne, implement an integrated self-healing approach to improve the quality of their skin and life.

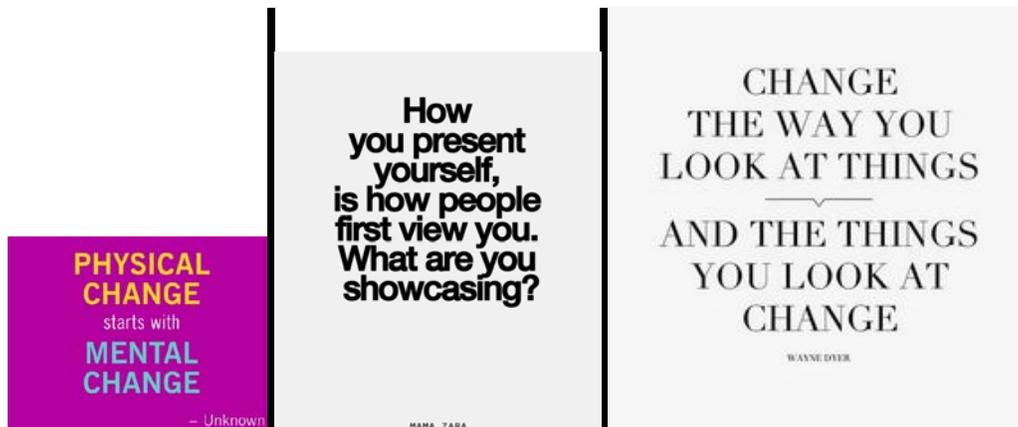
Keywords

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- Imagery
- Relaxation

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Non-Toxic Approach to Reducing Acne with an Integrated Self-Healing Approach

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BACKGROUND OF THE “MAKE HEALTH HAPPEN” PROGRAM

Every semester since 1976, approximately 100 to 200 undergraduates enroll in a semester long Holistic Health class at San Francisco State University. 80% of the students report that they have experienced significant improvement in their health after completing ‘self-healing’ projects using techniques that focus on awareness of stress, dynamic regeneration, cognitive stress reduction, imagery for healing, and behavioral change (Peper, Gibney, & Holt, 2002; Ratkovich et al., 2012). This study identified the topics of the self-healing projects, factors that contributed to success or failure, and how self-healing could improve the symptoms of acne.

Method:

Subjects: The participants were 61 females and 31 males college students, average age 24.1 years (SD=5.9).

Procedure: Students described the topic of their self-healing projects, self-evaluated the success of their projects, and identified factors that contributed to the projects’ success or failure.

Results: The topics ranged from decreasing pain to eliminating acne (see Figure 1). The students reported an average success rate of 7.5 (SD=1.8) on a scale of 1-10 (see Figure 2).

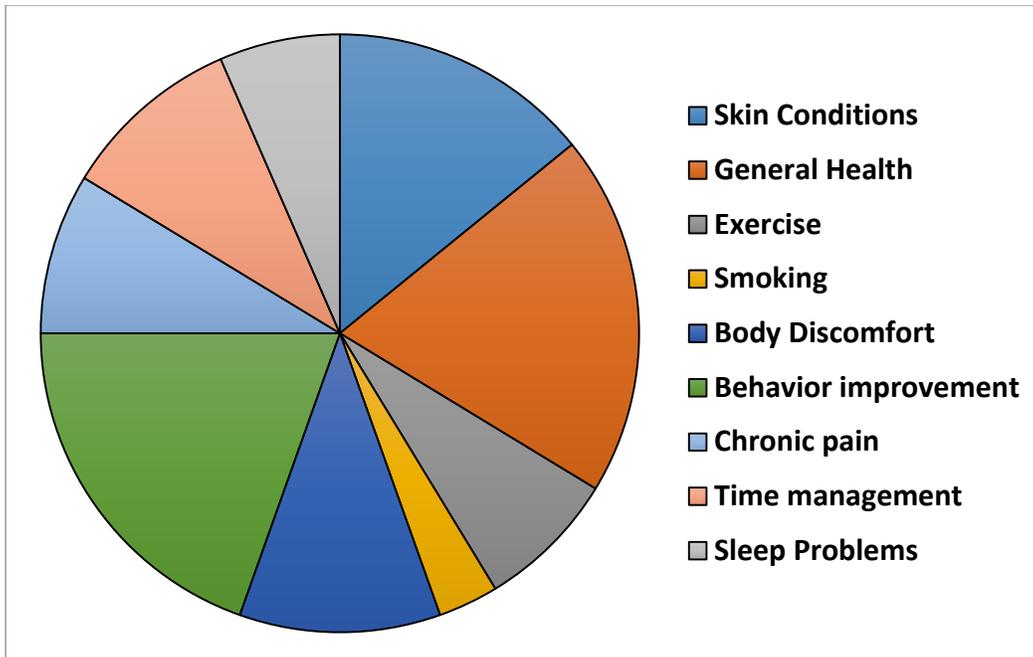


Figure 1. Distribution of students' self-healing project topics.

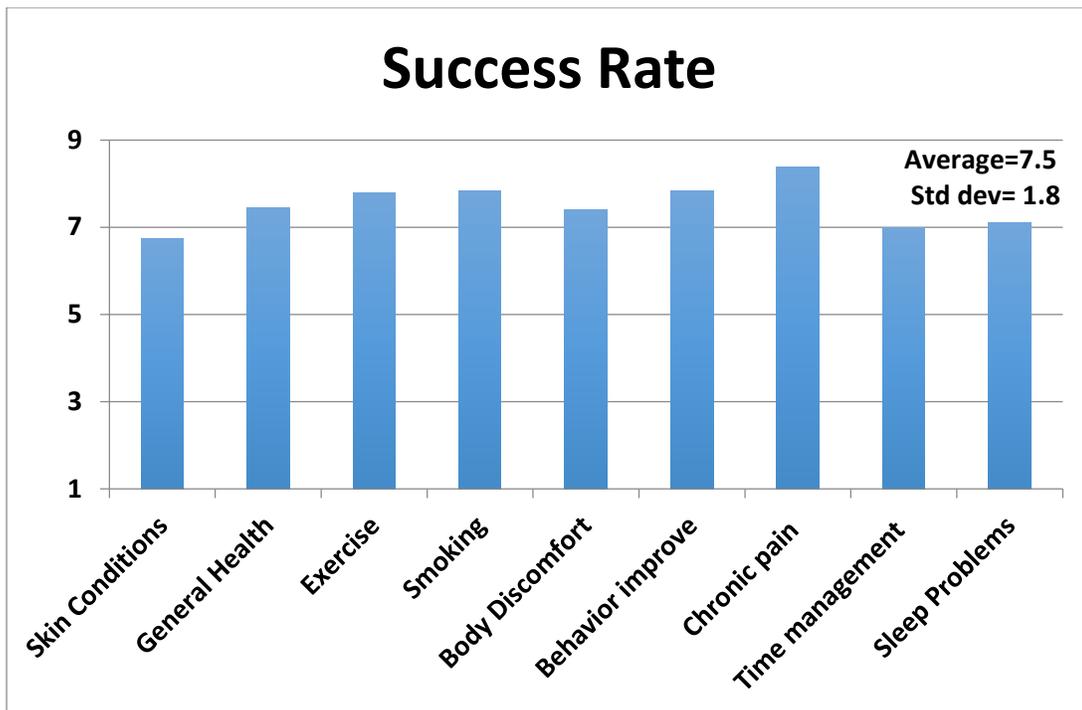


Figure 2. Students' success rate in achieved success in their self-healing project.

Factors that contributed to the Self-Healing Projects' Success and Failure

The major factors that contributed or inhibited success in the self-healing project are shown in Figure 3 and 4.

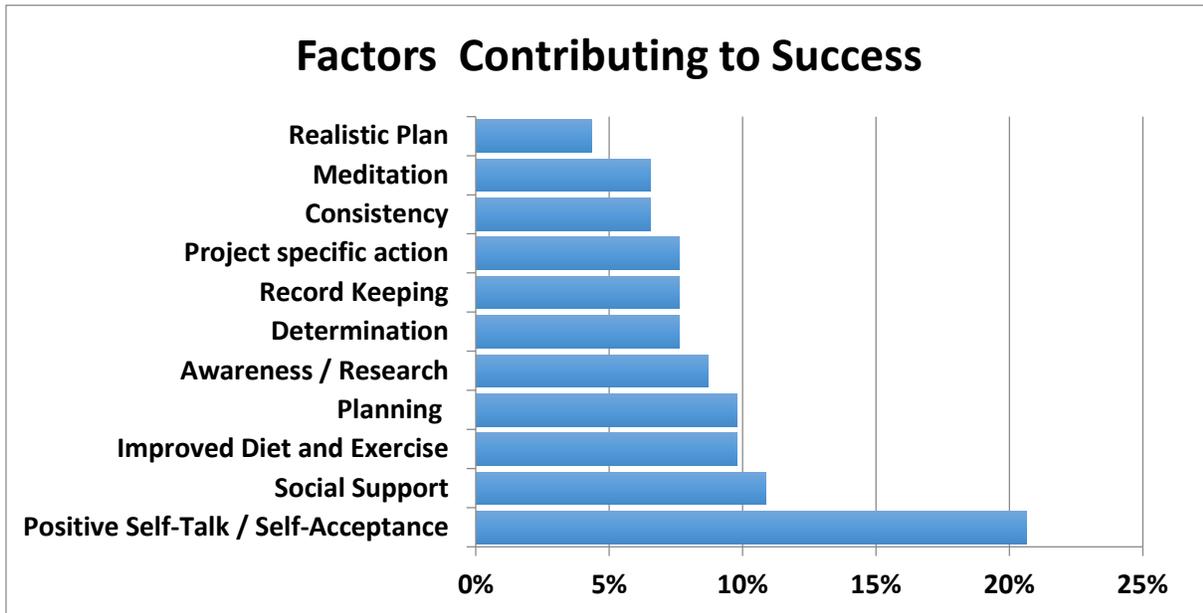


Figure 3. Factors that contributed to the success in achieving the self-healing projects.

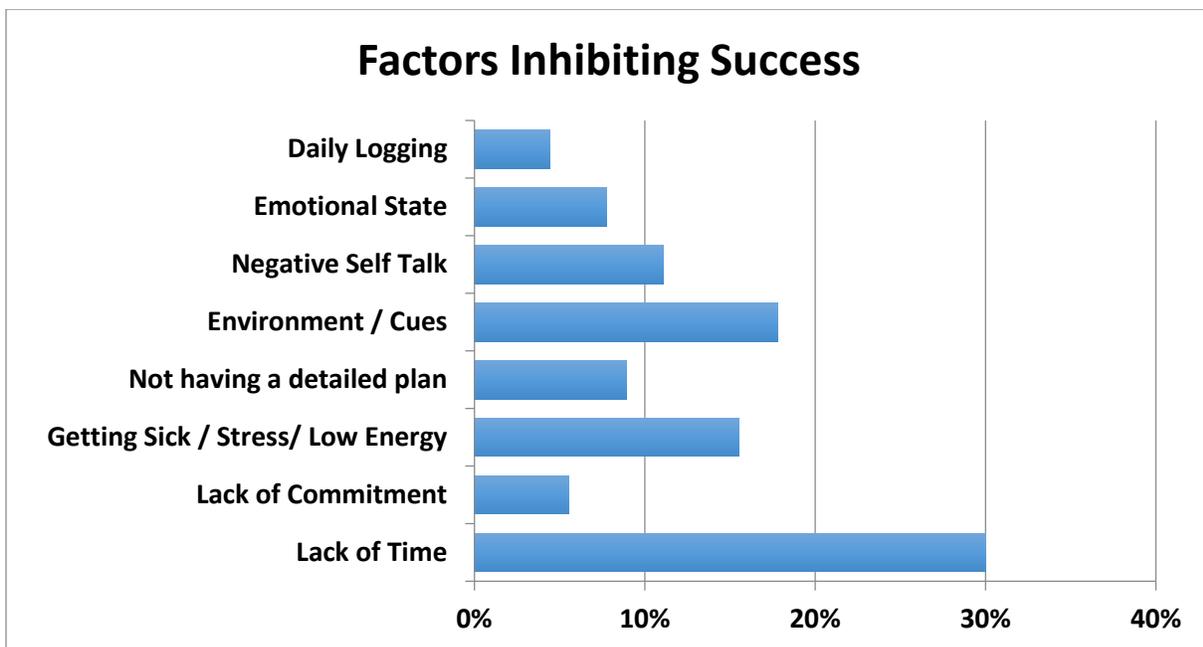


Figure 4. Factors that contributed to inhibiting the success of the self-healing projects.

The major underlying factors that contributed to success was active participation by doing their self-identified practices and setting achievable small goals. In many cases unmanaged stress was a covert

factor that contributed to the decrease of success. When students manage their stress and make their project a priority, they were more likely achieve success.

Stress and Acne

This study explored the frequency and severity of acne by surveying 93 junior and senior college students about their acne symptoms. They reported an average acne severity of 5 and an average stress level of 6, on a 1 (none)-10 (severe) scale. The stress level was significantly higher for those who reported the most as compared to the least acne as shown in figure 5.

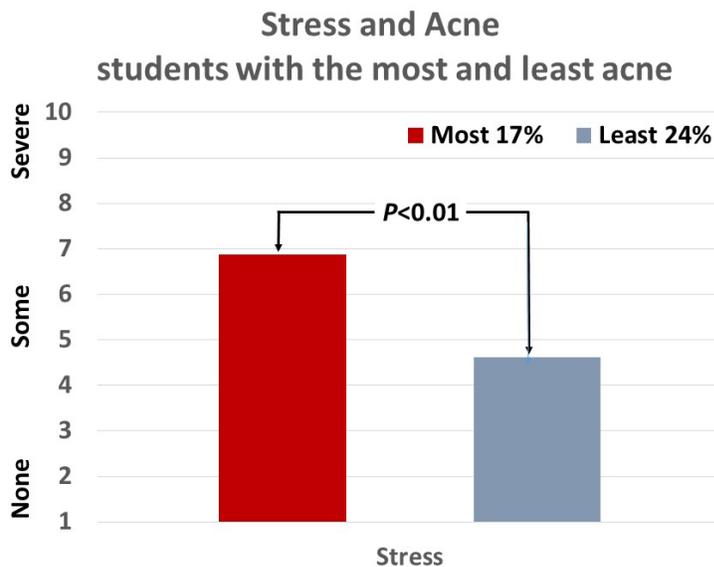


Figure 5. Students with the most acne report significantly more stress than those with the least acne.

When students applied self-healing strategies their acne is often reduced as illustrated in the following case example.

Reducing acne: a case example

The student was a 27 year old female with constant acne and her acne would flare up with an increase 10-15 blemishes during periods of high stress. Previously, she had tried many different facial washes and cleansers, ointments, lotions, over the counter medications and had spent hundreds of dollars on facial treatments at spas. In addition, she had been prescribed a tetracycline regiment that accompanied peroxide washes for about a year; however, the treatments did not give her a consistent clear skin. Her acne would still fluctuate from 2 to 15 blemishes. Two months before beginning the self-healing project, she had stopped treatments except for a gentle face washing and applying a neutral moisturizing lotion.

Procedure: Over a five week period she monitored her skin condition and integrated the following practices during the day as shown in Figure 6.

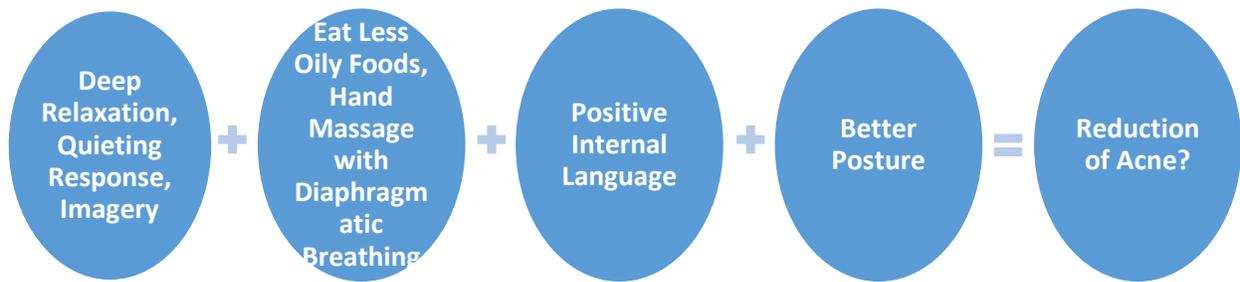


Figure 6. Sequence of self-healing strategies.

Week 1: Monitored acne to establish a baseline of skin eruptions.

Week 2-5: Integrated the following self-healings skills during the day: 1. Practicing deep relaxation for 20 minutes; 2. Implementing the quieting response every time her hand went to her face and in response she would quickly put her hand down, tighten her hands to make fists, and then release the tension; 3. Practicing self-healing visualization while washing her face with water (imaged blackened, dirty pores becoming sparkly clean); 4. Interrupting the urge to scratch or pick on her face by practicing diaphragmatic breathing and giving herself a hand-massage when the urge would not go away; and, 5. Eating less oily foods.

Week 3-5: Incorporated positive self-talk and interrupted her negative critical statements with positive phrases.

Week 4-5: Added posture awareness and posture change so that each time she collapsed she would sit or stand upright.

RESULTS

The participant was successful in implementing her behavior changes and reduce acne during stressful time periods as shown in Figure 7. The participant's acne was significantly reduced in number and appearance as shown in Figure 8. She observed that her personality changed from being timid, insecure, and overall unhappy to being more outgoing, confident, and joyful. Her dispositional attitude also shifted from being pessimist to being an optimist more of the time.

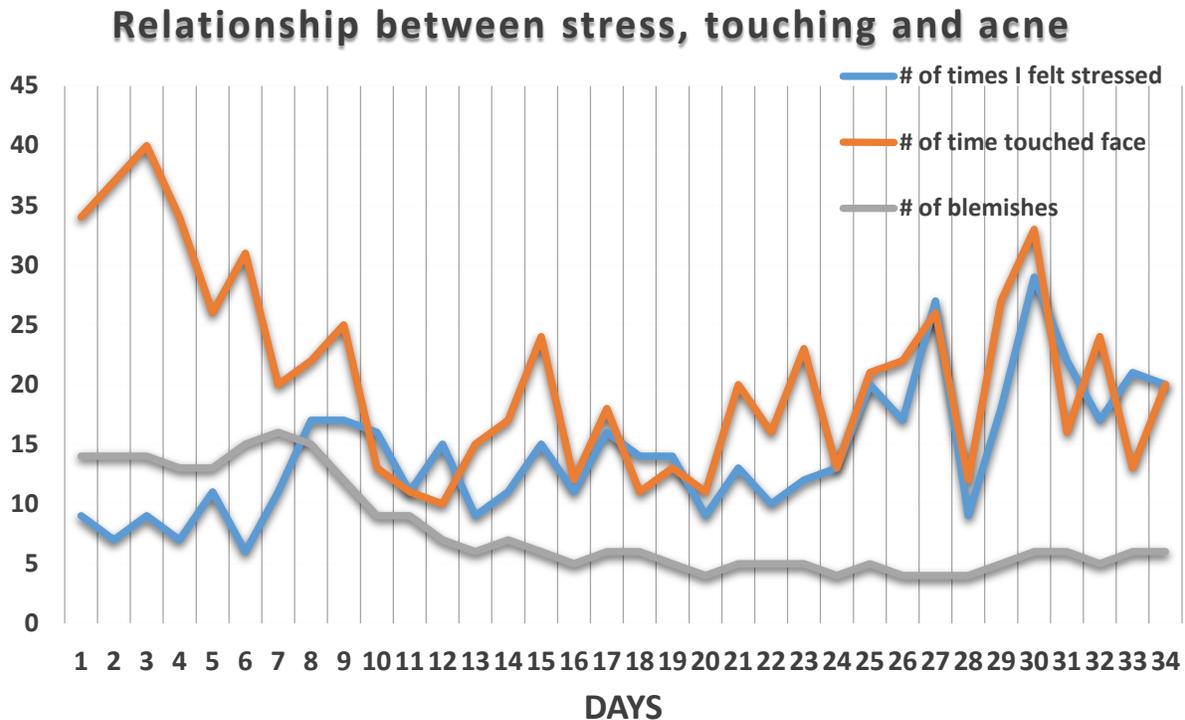


Figure 7. Comparison of number of stressful events, the number of times touching the face, and the number of blemishes.

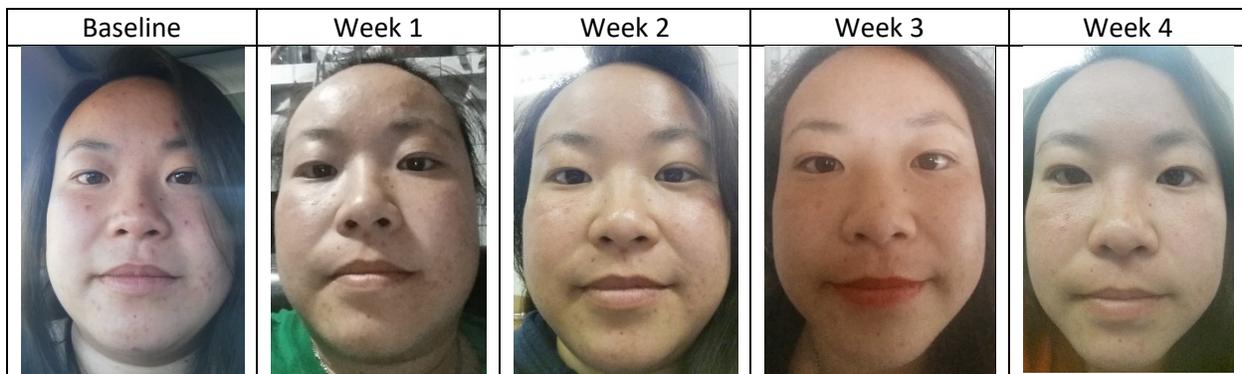


Table 8. Image of progression of the 5 weeks. The photos were taken at the end of the week of each practice.

DISCUSSION

Self-healing appears possible for many conditions ranging from chronic pain to acne especially if the participant integrates the practices throughout the day. The first step is usually awareness of symptom producing behaviors. In the case of acne, the participant was surprised by how many times she touched

her face when she monitored her behavior. She observed that the number of times she touched her face in the beginning seemed to be out of boredom. As she mastered the skills, she did not touch her face even though the number of stressful events increased. The number of blemishes increased at first but then decreased after the first week of the practices.

The lesson learned from the students and the specific case of reducing acne are:

- Become aware of what you actually are doing. In the specific case of acne, the awareness led to change the habits that she believed were linked to a reduction in blemishes and acne.
- Evoke hope and transform mental images and self-talk. In the specific case of acne, as her internal language became more positive, her personality and well-being also changed for the positive.
- Keep practicing what you want to do and be. The daily self-healing practices, self-monitoring and, support from others ultimately helped her recognize previously unconscious behavior and become more aware.

“I felt so different than before I started this project. I am so amazed, I feel great, accomplished, and more confident. I feel like I went from being a pessimist to an optimist. I feel better about myself and everything around me. I also feel like when I do get stress, it does not feel as if the world is about to end. It feels more manageable.”

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