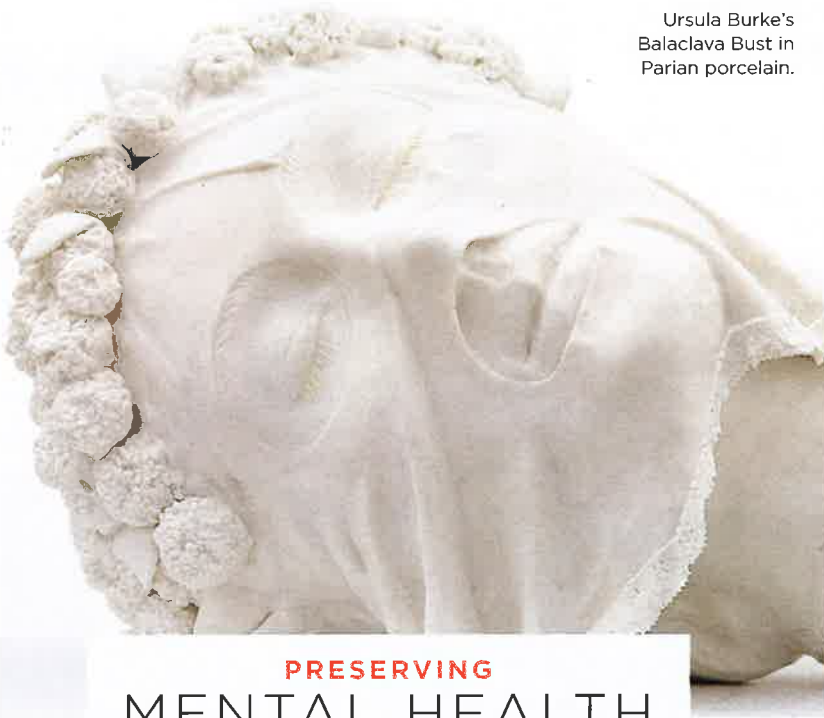


Ursula Burke's
Balaclava Bust in
Parian porcelain.



PRESERVING MENTAL HEALTH

BY FIONA BRENNAN, CLINICAL HYPNOTHERAPIST

As Socrates once observed, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Yet how much time do we dedicate to the preservation of our most precious asset: the mind?

Physical health and mental health are totally intertwined; each has an impact on the other and a subconscious dance between the two is continuously being played out. On a physical level, it is usually clear when we are healthy; for example, we reach a fitness goal or we make it from the couch to 5km. It is also apparent to us that if we want to preserve our new level of fitness we need to keep training. When it comes to the mind it is not as black and white as this and often it is only when our mental health crashes that we decide to pay it the attention and love it deserves. When gripped by anxiety or depression we usually know that we need to get help or take affirmative actions to become mentally stronger. Why wait for this to happen? As a clinical hypnotherapist, my work is not just about helping my clients when they are languishing mentally but is also crucially about helping them to sustain positive mental shifts.

Charles Dhuigg, bestselling author of *The Power of Habit*, identifies that 40 per cent of what we do every day is habit-based and most of these habits are unconscious, rooted in our past and do not generally serve our higher purpose. Developing a self-care routine for your mind is essential for sustaining current levels of mental fitness and also for continuing to progress. Research in positive psychology demonstrates that in the same way negativity is a downward slope, positivity is an upward spiral. When it comes to mental health you don't just want to sustain your current level but to expand and grow it. Try these three techniques, right, for mental equilibrium ...

POSITIVE HABITS

1. PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Self-awareness is 90 per cent of positive mental health. When your mind is racing, follow your breath not your thoughts. Deep belly breaths work best at calming the parasympathetic nervous system.

2. CULTIVATE RITUALS

Create morning and night-time rituals. This is when your subconscious is most malleable and suggestible. Meditate, listen to a hypnotherapy MP3, keep a journal, list ten things for which you are grateful. Find what works best for you and make it a habit.

3. PRACTICE SELF- COMPASSION

Be kind to yourself. I cannot emphasise this enough. If you have a strong inner critic, press pause and ask yourself, if someone you love was struggling in this way, how would you speak to them? Would you be critical? No, of course not! Become your own best friend.

“MY LIFE DIDN'T
PLEASE ME,
SO I CREATED
MY LIFE.”

COCO CHANEL