Canadian Health Hero
Wellness Domain: Community

Free from enslavement, Wilson Abbott and Ellen Toyer left Mobile, Alabama to move to Toronto. There, they gave birth to Anderson Ruffin Abbott. Born in Toronto in 1837, Abbott earned his medical degree from the Toronto School of Medicine after completing a placement under Dr. Alexander Augusta, a Black medical student born in America.

After earning his license, Abbott went to the US. As one of eight Black surgeons in the army, Abbott was recognized for his services during the Civil War. Among his experiences, Abbott cared for a dying President Abraham Lincoln. Abbott returned to Canada and settled in Chatham, Ont., becoming a coroner for Kent County, and later, a physician in Southern Ontario. He accepted an offer to be the medical superintendent of Provident Hospital – the first Black hospital in Chicago that served as training for Black nurses. He returned to Toronto in the late 1890s where he wrote for various publications about topics related to Black history and medicine.

Dr. Anderson Ruffin is one of many examples of Black people that overcame systemic racism and broke unjust barriers to become the first in their respective fields and pave the way for future generations.

Source: The Canadian Encyclopedia

Black History Month provides an opportunity to celebrate important contributions Black Canadians have made to Canada. It also serves as a reminder of the systemic racism and unequal opportunities that marginalized groups continue to endure. For many, we need to recognize the privileges that we've been afforded and use it to support and advocate for marginalized groups.

Allyship is the active practice of unlearning and re-evaluating. It is not a “one-and-done”, but the continuous practice of supporting and taking action to challenge injustices, end oppression and seek solidarity with those that are systemically disempowered.

You can create allyship by:

- Attend events to support and learn (ex. EDI Workshops, Black History Month events);
- Challenge systems;
- Intervene when you witness injustices;
- Be proactive about inclusion in your daily life;
- Actively participate in diversifying media to include black voices;
- Teach our children about race and promote the acceptance of others;
- Educate others about Black history, anti-racism or social justice movements

Want to learn more? Visit the Black History page from the Office of the President.

Link: https://president.uwo.ca/black-history/
Beating the Winter Blues

Wellness Domain: Emotional

Characterized by serious mood changes that lead to major disruptions and impaired functioning, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) affects 2-3% of Canadians at some point during their lives. However, a significantly higher number of Canadians (15%) experience a milder form of SAD, resulting in minor depression.

The most commonly accepted theory for SAD is a lack of sunlight, supported by an increase in rates at higher latitudes and during the shorter winter days. However, a genetic component may also exist, as 13-17% of people have an immediate family member with the disorder.

Symptoms can include a combination of: excessive sleep; poor sleep quality; lethargy; weight gain; feelings of sadness, guilt, and hopelessness; irritability; avoidance of people and activities that normally bring joy; and, elevated levels of stress. It’s important to avoid self-diagnoses and to consult with a doctor, as these symptoms may be the result of another form of depression or other causes.

The most common treatment for SAD is light therapy, which involves sitting next to a special artificial light (10,000 lux) for 20-30 minutes/day. The light triggers a chemical change in the brain that improves mood and lessens SAD symptoms. Although 60-80% benefit from the treatment, the recommendation is to consult with your doctor as side effects are possible. Other treatments include depression medications and cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT) that focuses on shaping your view of the world and breaking negative patterns of thoughts and actions.

Self-care activities, such as regular exercise, healthy eating, good sleeping habits, connecting with others and stress management techniques have been shown to reduce the symptoms of mild depression, including those that suffer from less severe forms of SAD.

Practical tips include: bundling up and spending more time outdoors; arrange your workspace to maximize sunlight exposure; building physical activity/mental wellness breaks into your day; taking a lunch-hour walk. When travel restrictions ease, taking a vacation to a sunny destination can also be a great way to offset SAD and escape the grind.

Source: https://cmha.bc.ca/documents/seasonal-affective-disorder-2

Want to learn more? Check out the SAD Support & Resources article on LifeWorks.

Link: https://westernuniversity.lifeworks.com/life/employee-assistance/articles/health/mental-health/other-mental-health-issues/seasonal-affective-disorder
Good Sleep for Good Health

Wellness Domain: Emotional, Environmental, Physical, Occupational

Sleep is critical. It is a non-negotiable.

Over the last several decades, sleep quantity and quality continue to decline. While the amount of sleep is dependent on age and other factors, the recommendation for adults is 7-8 hours of sleep. However, nearly half of all people report less than 6.3 hrs of sleep per night. It doesn’t take very long before a sleep deficit starts to have a long-term, negative impact on your physical and mental well-being. **You need your sleep.** Despite the popular belief, you can’t catch up on it.

The world’s largest sleep study was led by Dr. Adrian Owen, head of the Owen Lab at the Brain and Mind Institute at Western. They concluded that regardless of age, adults require 7-8 hours of sleep for optimal cognitive functioning; receiving too little, or too much, results in impairment. While short-term memory performance was relatively unaffected, reasoning and verbal abilities were strongly impacted. This can be concerning for employees tasked with making difficult decisions or communicating critical information.

Other studies have reported: changes in hormone levels that affect mood and appetite; impairments in transferring and storing information in long-term memory; cognitive decline; slower reaction times; a greater risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, depression and immunodeficiency; and, an increase in all-cause mortality rates.

Developing a routine is important to improving sleep health. Humans are the only species that deliberately deprive themselves of sleep and delay going to bed, which is more evident on our days off; this leads to an irregular bedtime and wake-up schedule. Another prevalent issue is our over-exposure to blue light, which is emitted by nearly every digital screen. This can shift our circadian rhythm – the natural 24-hour cycle that responds primarily to natural light – suppressing the production of melatonin. This results in difficulties falling asleep at night and waking up groggy.

Suggestions for improving sleep health include: using a white noise machine and/or blackout curtains; keeping the room cool; limiting “power naps” to 20-minutes; avoiding exercise before bed; limiting alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine; turning off electronics at least an hour before bed; dimming or turning off the lights in the early evening; and, avoid eating meals or heavy snacking before bed.

If you’ve tried all these suggestions with little success, there may be an underlying cause for poor sleep health. At that point, it is recommended that you consult with a medical professional that specializes in sleep disorders.

**Tips for shift/night workers**

- Determine if you respond better to a traditional 7-8 hours or “slip napping”, a method that involves napping a few hours after getting home and a longer nap leading up to your shift;
- Ensure family members understand the importance of your designated sleep time;
- Consider removing the phone from the bedroom;
- Maintain the same sleep schedule EVEN on your days off; and,

Consider taking a nap before you get back on the road (12AM-6AM is the most dangerous driving period)

**Want to learn more?** Visit Dr. Adrian Owen’s Sleep Lab.

Link: [https://owenlab.uwo.ca/research/sleeplab.html](https://owenlab.uwo.ca/research/sleeplab.html)

**Want to track your sleep habits?** Try the Sleep Habitude Challenge through LifeWorks.
Winter Wellness Week Events

Wellness Domains: Community, Emotional, Environmental, Financial, Occupational, Physical, Spiritual

These deep winter days are the perfect time for reflection. You’ve done your best in these difficult times. Be proud of everything you’ve accomplished in the face of adversity.

Winter Wellness Week Events provides an opportunity to support your well-being. Western has organized a number of activities across the various domains of wellness. There is something for everyone!

Topics include: Self-Compassion, Resiliency for Working Parents, Setting and Achieving Your Goals, Hygge: The Art of Creating Hominess, Maximizing your Western Pension Plan, and Connecting with Environmental Wellness at Western.

Be sure to check out the events organized by The Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the acknowledgment and celebration of Black History Month.

Other opportunities to consider include: 12 Ways to Engage in Truth and Reconciliation at Western, Mental Health e-Learning Module, Living Well @ Western activities, Sun Life 1:1 Consultations, McIntosh Art Gallery virtual exhibits, and the LifeWorks Habitude Challenges.

Living Well @ Western: Activity Class Schedule for February

Wellness Domains: Community, Emotional, Physical, Spiritual

Guided Mediation with Tanaz;
Mondays; 12:10-12:50PM
Zoom Link

Mobility for Better Mentality with Michelle;
Tuesdays; 12:10-12:50PM
Zoom Link; Passcode: mobility icalendar link

Introduction to Yoga with Tracy;
Offered Asynchronously

To ensure the health and safety of our campus community, in-person classes won’t be scheduled in February. We would encourage you to visit the Living Well @ Western page to participate in previously recorded fitness sessions, including: Yoga, Zumba, Pilates and Functional Fitness.

We would like to encourage everyone to take wellness breaks throughout the day. If you are looking for new opportunities, you can access our 10-minute wellness break library, participate in a guided art session, listen to the musical talents of our Western students, or tune-in to our new wellness podcast.

Disclaimer: Before engaging in a new exercise program, please consult with your physician or health care provider to ensure that these classes are right for you.
Employees Corner

Collection of favourite resources. In recognition and celebration of Black History month.

Favourite Books: Africanthology by A. Gregory Frankson; The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo; My Life: In the Black by B. Denham Jolly; Out of the Sun – On Race and Storytelling by Esi Edugyan

YouTube Channels: Unilearnal featuring B is for Black and 28 Moments of Black Canadian History

Podcasts: Blacks in Canada; Seat at the Table

Recipe of the Month
Pilau Masala

Wellness Domains: Community, Physical

Pilau is a word used in East Africa to mean “pilaf”, which is a rice dish cooked in broth after being toasted to impart deep flavor and golden colour.

Ingredients:

Spice Blend – 1 tablespoon of ground cardamom; 1¾ teaspoons of ground clove; 1½ tablespoon of ground cumin; ¼ teaspoons of ground pepper; and, ½ teaspoon of ground cinnamon

Pilaua Rice – 2 tablespoons of oil or ghee; 2 ½ cups of brown or basmati rice; 1 diced onion; 1 tablespoon of chopped garlic; 1 tablespoon of chopped ginger; ¼ cup of chopped red pepper; 2 tablespoons of spice blends; 4 cups of vegetable or chicken stock; 1 cup of coconut milk; dash of salt and pepper; and, 1-2 chilies (optional)

Kachumbari (pico) – ½ cup of diced tomatoes; ½ thinly sliced red onion; juice from 1 lemon; handful of chopped cilantro; 1-2 tablespoons of olive oil; salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. In a skillet over low heat, toast the spice blend until the spices darken and begin to smoke (3-5 min.)
2. Remove spice mix from heat and transfer to a food processor or mortar and pestle until finely ground
3. In a large pot, heat the oil/ghee and add the chopped onions and rinsed rice until toasted (3-5 min.)
4. Add the garlic, ginger, red bell pepper and 2 tbsp. of spice blend and continue to cook for a few minutes
5. Add the broth and coconut milk
6. Bring the rice to a boil, then reduce heat to low and cover with a lid; cook for 40 min. or until rice is tender
7. Fluff cooked rice with a fork before combining all remaining ingredients in a bowl
8. Allow 15-20 to marinate or until the onions soften

Recipe found at chocolateforbasil.com
Resources and Supports

**Wellness Domains:** Community, Emotional, Environmental, Financial, Occupational, Physical, Spiritual

- [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [Employee Well-Being](#)
- [Living Well at Western](#)
- [LifeWorks](#)
- [Middlesex-London Health Unit](#)