

MENTAL AGILITY STOPLIGHT SYSTEM

HEALTH CRITERIA

ADEQUATE FUNCTIONING

LIFESTYLE INTERFERENCE

INDICATION FOR LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION

NEXT STEPS

What is the criteria, and why is it needed?

Each section's criteria is specific to its lifestyle domain: nutrition, movement, exercise, sleep, nervous system function, stress resilience, and screen time + stimulation.

MOSTLY GREENS: Optimal functioning; if you score mostly greens, your baseline is solid. Troubleshooting and any health/emotional/behavioral concerns may warrant professional consult or diagnoses.

4+ Yellows: It's important you remain cautious and further investigate some of your daily habits. The routine you currently engage with may be impeding your brain function, which could manifest as emotional/behavioral/social challenges.

2+ Reds: Consider a full-revamping of lifestyle changes, adopting of new and healthier routines, and consistent application of strategies prior to making diagnostic labels, scheduling psychological evaluations, or opting for psychiatric intervention.

Basic lifestyle strategies, challenges, and/or thought experiments will be written into the grey columns throughout each domain. They will be based on any report of yellow and red criteria.

Within each domain will be a column describing **adequate/optimal functioning**, which means you may need to identify deeper causes for any current symptoms or concerns; **lifestyle interference**, which suggests you approach your routines with a critical-yet-cautious eye, as your symptoms could be resulting from subpar brain functioning; and **indication for lifestyle intervention** suggests an overhauling of your current systems. It's likely many aspects of your life need to be altered before jumping to clinical diagnoses and/or medications.

MENTAL AGILITY STOPLIGHT SYSTEM

NUTRITION CRITERIA

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BASIC MACRONUTRIENT KNOWLEDGE

Understands protein, carb, and fat needs; can identify an approximation of each total based on movement/exercise

Meals are inconsistent in terms of volume and macro needs; large discrepancies in calorie consumption meal to meal or day to day

Does not yet understand macronutrients; cannot identify carb, protein, or fat sources; unable to identify daily average calorie consumption

YELLOW: Log your food using an app, like MyFitnessPal, every day for a week.

RED: Write down everything you eat, every day, for a week. Can take pictures if that's easier!

ADEQUATE PROTEIN INTAKE (0.7G-1.0G OF BODYWEIGHT)

Can identify multiple protein sources to achieve 0.7 grams to 1.0 grams of their bodyweight in protein per day

Inconsistently meets protein minimum needs

Does not meet daily minimum protein needs

YELLOW: Shoot for a minimum of 100g of protein per day.

RED: Shoot for 100g of protein per day.

MEALS ARE CONSUMED AT CONSISTENT TIMES DAILY (LITTLE FLUCTUATION IN MEAL SCHEDULING)

Stays within a tight time frame of when consumption occurs, not counting the occasional skipping of breakfast, late night out, etc.

Meals are inconsistently eaten in terms of time; occasionally skips meals and/or overconsumes at other times of day

Meals occur at intermittent times, a wide variety of non-nutrient-dense options are consumed irregularly

YELLOW: Choose either breakfast, lunch, or dinner to begin eating at the same time every day for a week.

RED: Choose one meal to have at the same time, and eating the same thing, every day.

AWARENESS OF CALORIE CONSUMPTION, HUNGER CUES, AND GENERAL EATING BEHAVIORS (SPEED, TRIGGERS, ETC.)

Can accurately maintain calorie needs with AND without tracking; can make informed choices about food without tracking; understands what foods lead to binge-like episodes; awareness of boredom vs hunger; can accurately eyeball portion sizes

Largely unaware of how many calories are consumed; difficulty identifying hunger vs. boredom vs. stress; struggles with portion size and control

Struggles with either stress eating or stress restricting of food; minimal awareness of how stress influences hunger; relies on food during times of boredom; near-constant access to poor choices

YELLOW: Eat a meal as slow as you can, pausing between bites.

RED: Remove one 'trigger food' from the house.

MENTAL AGILITY STOPLIGHT SYSTEM

MOVEMENT CRITERIA	ADEQUATE FUNCTIONING	LIFESTYLE INTERFERENCE	INDICATION FOR LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION	NEXT STEPS
AVERAGES 7K-10K STEPS EACH DAY	Walking a total of 7K to 10K steps, on average daily, is a regular occurrence and expected behavior	Occasionally hits 5K-7K steps per day, but movement is often followed by long bouts of sitting	Walks less than 5K steps a day (or less than 20 minutes per day)	YELLOW: Shoot for 5-7K steps three days this week. Stand up every hour. RED: Commit to a 15-minute walk three days this week.
CAN DEMONSTRATE COMPLETE MOBILITY IN SITTING, STANDING, KNEELING POSITIONS	Can sit on rise from the floor without assistance, can bend/kneel/pick up items from the ground without assistance, is able to sit on the floor or in a backless-chair unassisted for 15+ minutes	Struggles with moving larger/cumbersome items, requires assistance with kneeling, difficulty maintaining upright position on floor or chair without back assistance	Requires almost complete assistance getting down and up from the ground	YELLOW: During your favorite TV show, sit on the floor for the last 10 minutes. RED: Stand every hour of the regular workday.
STRUCTURES ENVIRONMENT WHERE MOVEMENT IS AVAILABLE BETWEEN BOUTS OF SITTING	Regularly utilizes a series of standing and sitting positions throughout long bouts of sitting	Remains in minimal positions throughout the day, occasionally stands between long bouts of sitting	Stands and is on feet less than an hour per day; remains in seated position with hunched shoulders throughout day	YELLOW: Stand up every hour, stretching hands overhead and proceeding to touch toes (as close as possible) RED: Pace during a phone call or 5 minutes at the end of each TV episode.
CAN MOVE THE BODY THROUGH SPACE THROUGHOUT THE DAY WITHOUT SORENESS, INJURY, OR ACHING	After movement exceeding the norm (e.g., moving, vigorous outdoor work, family activity, etc), individual is physically resilient and able to maintain routine without need for excessive rest or muscular intervention	Cannot assist with heavier assistance tasks, typically avoids vigorous physical activities because of fear or injury or past injury; movement-heavy days are followed by excessive rest	Is physically/mentally unable to stand for longer than ten minutes at a time; cannot support upright spine when seated in a chair; unable to assist with moderate to heavy moving of items; struggles with regular muscle pain	YELLOW: Stay moving during rest days; continue with your walks and your standing routines. RED: Same as above. Motion is lotion!

MENTAL AGILITY STOPLIGHT SYSTEM

EXERCISE CRITERIA	ADEQUATE FUNCTIONING	LIFESTYLE INTERFERENCE	INDICATION FOR LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION	NEXT STEPS
STRENGTH TRAINS 2-3x+ PER WEEK	Strength trains using a combination of bodyweight, dumbbell/kettlebell/barbell movements, and progressively overloads based on strength gains	Strength trains less than the minimum suggested OR maintains same weight/reps/lower intensity for every session	Does not strength train or have an exercise routine	<p>YELLOW: Commit to three strength sessions a week, two of which you'll go to physical tiredness.</p> <p>RED: Walk for 20 minutes 4-5 days this week, switching between brisk pace and neutral pace.</p> <p>YELLOW: Does 60 seconds on, 60 seconds off, for 10 minutes using movement of choice (running, burpees, etc)</p> <p>RED: Put gym clothes on three mornings this week. Up to you if you want to proceed with workout.</p> <p>YELLOW: Complete one high-intensity workout this week (i.e., a CrossFit-style workout)</p> <p>RED: Go for a brisk walk after you put on gym clothes.</p>
INCLUDES AEROBIC TRAINING 2-3X PER WEEK, ACROSS ZONE 2 AND HIGH INTENSITY	Engages in "cardio" via rowing, running, swimming, biking, CrossFit regularly via low-to-moderate intensities as well as high intensity intervals	Occasionally does "cardio", but does not commit to it consistently; OR heavily favors strength training without any or minimal aerobic conditioning	Does not do aerobic training of any kind; struggles with hitting steps for the day.	
CAN STRUCTURE A BASIC EXERCISE REGIMEN	Understands how to write a basic program to follow that balances repetition across each muscle group	Can follow exercise routines as written; struggles to write workout plan if an app, workout, or session is not readily available	Is not able to put together an exercise routine independently or consistently commit to a pre-written exercise routine.	
CAN IDENTIFY BASIC MOVEMENTS FOR EACH MUSCLE GROUP; CAN WRITE BASIC CONDITIONING SESSIONS	Can easily and fluently write an exercise regiment and replace/substitute multiple movement patterns and alternatives across each muscle group, replete with conditioning of choice	Can identify some basic movements for muscle groups; relies on apps, strength training plans, YouTube videos to execute sessions with quality technique; "cardio" is all lower intensity	Cannot identify the "main" muscles in the upper body and lower body; requires in-person, personal training to execute basic movements; cannot understand or execute a written plan without professional guidance	

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SLEEP CRITERIA	ADEQUATE FUNCTIONING	LIFESTYLE INTERFERENCE	INDICATION FOR LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION	NEXT STEPS
MEETS MINIMUM SLEEP NEEDS BASED ON AGE	Consistently averages 7-9 hours of sleep with minimal to zero wake-ups throughout night; easily falls back asleep if awoken	Averages 6-7 hours of sleep, but sleep patterns are irregular (i.e., frequent wake-ups, difficulty falling back asleep, restless)	Less than 6 hours of sleep most nights	YELLOW: Use a sleep-tracking app to gather accurate sleep hours per night. RED: Same as above.
GOES TO BED AND WAKES UP AT MOSTLY CONSISTENT TIMES, INCLUDING WEEKENDS AND OUTINGS	Maintains a rigid sleep schedule despite vacations, special occasions, travel, etc; wakes up around the same time and grows tired at night around the same time	Wake times and bed times are irregular and often require use of external items (screens/music) to occur; does not feel rested upon waking most days	No consistency in wake or bed times; sleeps excessively during day following poor night of sleep	YELLOW: Choose a time to go to sleep and lie in bed at that exact time three times this week. It's okay if you don't feel sleepy yet. RED: Try limiting one tech device 30 minutes before sleep this week.
CAN FALL ASLEEP WITHIN 30 MINUTES OF GOING TO SLEEP	After lying in bed, can easily fall into sleep without use of medications, noises, external comforts, etc.	Requires screens, music, TV, etc. to fall asleep; sometimes wakes up after falling asleep	Restless in bed and struggles to fall asleep without use of TV, screens, lights, and other external distractors	YELLOW: No technology in the bedroom for 3 nights this week. RED: Same as above.
CAN EASILY BEGIN THE DAILY ROUTINE FOLLOWING WAKING (WHETHER WITH OR WITHOUT NEED FOR AN ALARM)	Does not require multiple alarms to get up for the day; can begin the day's commitments without continued snooze alarms; feels mostly rested most days upon waking	Regularly and sometimes excessively uses snooze alarms; takes considerable time to get out of bed and get moving; often requires external cues (other people, alarms, etc) to get out of bed	Cannot wake up without multiple alarms; either a very heavy or very light sleeper; daytime sleepiness interferes with ability to function optimally or responsibly; requires excessive support in beginning day	YELLOW: Use an alarm clock instead of your phone for three mornings. Place it out of arm's reach. RED: Alarm clock and phone are across the room three nights this week.

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NERVOUS SYSTEM FUNCTION CRITERIA	ADEQUATE FUNCTIONING	LIFESTYLE INTERFERENCE	INDICATION FOR LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION	NEXT STEPS
CAN REMAIN COMPOSED DESPITE PHYSICAL AND/OR EMOTIONAL DISCOMFORT	Can independently manage emotions despite stressful situations; remains respectful, stoic, and self-composed in moments of crisis or peak distress	Maintains composure when challenged by friends or family; struggles to control emotions during volatile situations; defensive when given feedback	Abrasive with others' perspectives, close-minded to alternative explanations, falls apart during stressful situations	YELLOW: Ask someone for feedback and respond with nothing except "thank you!" RED: Ask someone what they think of a topic without sharing your opinion.
BREATHES THROUGH NOSE MOST OF THE TIME (ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT WHILE SLEEPING)	Regularly breathes in through the nose and out through the mouth; snores minimally or not at all throughout night; can take a full, deep breath through the nose	Occasional snoring during night; struggles to inhale a full breath (i.e., chest does not fully expand); mouth-breathes shallow breaths under stress	Lots of snoring throughout sleep; sleeps primarily on back; shallow breaths through the mouth	YELLOW: Make a conscious effort to catch yourself every time you're about to inhale through your mouth. RED: Same as above.
HIGH HEART RATE VARIABILITY	High heart rate variability is when your heart's beat can adapt to a wide variety of situations and bring itself back down to baseline	N/A	Low heart rate variability indicates your autonomic nervous system remaining 'stuck' in fight-or-flight or distress; low resilience to stressors	YELLOW: Commit to exercise, movement, and nutrition goals in previous domains. RED: Complete 4 minutes of box breathing twice this week during times of moderate stress.
CAN PHYSICALLY BRING SELF BACK TO A STATE OF 'CALM' OR BASELINE FOLLOWING STRESSOR EXPOSURE	Following an adverse event, individual can recover quickly and reintegrate into their commitments and routine; able to 'bounce back' with minimal post-stress symptoms or need for rest/reassurance		Highly reactive to stress and defensive when given feedback; remains in a heightened, anxious, or agitated state most of the time; appears uncomfortable physically; requires assistance (social/psychiatric) to bring self to baseline	YELLOW: Do not try to fix or change feelings. Write them down, read them out loud back to yourself, and move on. RED: Before reaching out for reassurance, wait 10 minutes. During those 10 minutes, pace or do breath routine.

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STRESS RESILIENCE CRITERIA

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**CAN REMAIN
FOCUSED ON A
TASK FOR 30+
MINUTES**

Finds “flow” in challenging and stimulating tasks and can maintain focus without checking phone, taking breaks, requiring distractions, etc.

Can focus on a task, conversation, or activity for 15–20 minutes when support of others is present and/or with intermittent breaks/distraction.

Cannot maintain focus for longer than 5–10 minutes; requires constant breaks and distractions; poor concentration and retention

**RECOVERS QUICKLY
FROM STRESS,
WHETHER MINOR OR
CONSIDERABLE**

Regardless of the challenge, adversity, or life circumstance, can recover and re-integrate into daily life with minimal upset or change

Can recover from minor to moderate stressors with social support; can re-integrate into daily responsibilities after considerable time has passed since event

Remains in a hyper-vigilant, depressed, anxious, irritable stage for days, weeks, or months at a time

**REGULARLY
EMPLOYS HEALTHY
STRATEGIES TO
‘SUFFER BETTER’**

Does not try to avoid or eliminate suffering but embraces it; uses challenge as opportunities and believes in ability to overcome difficulty

Will try strategies to ‘manage stress’ when given; will occasionally endure difficulty to reach an end-goal; sometimes uses distraction to get through challenge

Relies heavily on opinions and reassurance of others and/or psychiatric/therapeutic intervention for minor to major stressors

**REGULARLY COMMITS
TO COMPLETING
DIFFICULT THINGS
AND DOES NOT
REWARD ONESELF
WITH AVOIDANCE**

Understands that committing to challenging things is not an excuse to avoid future discomfort; current discomfort is seen as an opportunity to prepare for inevitable future discomforts; believes in ability to influence their life and outcomes.

Commits to group ‘challenges’; may find self in a ‘slump’ following completion of a challenge; regularly avoids future difficulty after enduring current challenge; moderate tolerance to most stress

Highly risk averse and unwilling to fail or experience uncertainty; avoids novel or new situations; does not value struggle as imperative to growth; sees challenge as harmful, damaging, or ‘too hard’

YELLOW: Commit to an engaging task without any tech, and make a tally on a Post-It every time you find yourself compelled to check your phone/distract yourself.

RED: When you’re tempted to distract yourself or take a break, see if you can delay for 3 extra minutes. Use visual reminders!

YELLOW: Choose 2 physical challenges and 2 social challenges this week. Follow through completely.

RED: Continue all forms of walking, nutrition, sleep, and breathing interventions.

YELLOW: Choose something you’re bad at and record your attempts at it. Make a “difficulty montage.” Reflect on how it felt.

RED: Choose one challenge and break it down into the tiniest possible steps. Commit to following through on one of the steps.

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SCREEN TIME & STIMULATION CRITERIA

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CAN HOLD A CONVERSATION WITHOUT BEING DISTRACTED BY PHONE

Engages in conversation with known people or strangers across a variety of topics; can hold a conversation, eye contact, and basic manners without phone use

Struggles occasionally with eye contact with others; often reports feeling 'awkward' during social interactions; frequently checks phone during social exchanges

Texting, DMing, email, and other indirect forms of communication are more frequent than in-person interaction

YELLOW: Bring up a topic to a friend and leave your phone behind. Notice how many times you reach for it during the conversation.

RED: Choose one hour of your day in which you leave your phone at home while you go out into "the real world."

EASILY FINDS ALTERNATIVE SKILLS/HOBBIES TO TEND TO IN LIEU OF PHONE USE

Tries new skills and remains active/cognitively engaged across a variety of interests and skills; is content to engage with activities without a phone/tech

Will engage with new hobbies in social situations; records/'posts'/documents most or all social interactions; doesn't possess many interests

Digital interaction or technology use is the main source of entertainment during any down time

YELLOW: Choose a skill you're not good at and practice it for 15 minutes this week.

RED: Sit silently for the first 10 minutes of downtime and identify how often you reach for your phone or other tech.

CAN BE STILL, QUIET, OR BORED WITHOUT DISTRESS OR NEED FOR DISTRACTIONS

Regular meditation practices, sitting in silence, breathing practices without technology use; little need for background noise, TV, or phone to be constantly present

Can tolerate some bouts of boredom but will usually revert to phone use; struggles to manage self without external distraction

Reports feelings of distress without technology or phone use; shuts down or grows agitated when bored

YELLOW: Go on a silent, phoneless walk, and make note of everything you notice.

RED: Same as above. This time, choose a breathwork practice for the 10 minutes.

HAS IN-PERSON RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL EXCHANGES, AND VALUES THESE SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS OVER DIGITAL EXCHANGES

Regularly meets with others in-person; checks in with friends and family in person to preserve relationships; values connection and quality time with others

Has some in-person friendships; frequently reverts to online communication over phone calls or face-to-face interaction; tends to avoid conflict unless via email/text/indirect methods

Relies heavily on digital interaction and social media to "connect" with others; frequently watches the news to gather "information"; struggles to discern their own opinion from others; rarely has in-person contact with others

YELLOW: Call instead of text someone twice this week.

RED: Choose three days of no-news, no social media. Can use other tech (for now.)

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SOMETIMES A UNIVERSAL RESET IS NEEDED.

It's crucial we see our results as data points worthy of investigation. Over-emphasizing negative feelings that arise from this 'assessment' is actually a symptom of a greater issue (which will hopefully reveal itself throughout this tool.)

TOTAL NUMBER OF GREENS:

Reflection Questions:

1. How am I keeping myself stoic and grounded, and how can I preserve these habits?
2. Is there anywhere that I'm coasting? Why?
3. How would I move someone else from red to green?

TOTAL NUMBER OF YELLOWS:

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some habits I've built momentum around?
2. What is my current response to stress, and how often does that response occur?
3. What throws me off of my routine and habits most easily?

TOTAL NUMBER OF REDS:

Reflection Questions:

1. What habits have completely fallen off my radar lately?
2. Am I aware of the signs that I'm heading into "red"?
3. If I had to pick one non-negotiable behavior this week, would what I choose and why?

In this space, identify three experiments you will try this week based on your results.