

A detailed illustration of a woven wicker basket overflowing with various colors of yarn balls. The colors include shades of orange, green, blue, yellow, and white. Several wooden knitting needles are scattered among the yarn. The basket is set against a soft, light background.

Yarn & Self-Care: a dynamic duo

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Why this topic?

- Today we'll learn:
 - Fiber arts are more than just a “*hobby*”
 - The many benefits of engaging in fiber arts
 - How crafting supports healing
 - To capitalize on the POSITIVES of fiber crafting
 - To overcome & transform any negatives into POSITIVES



I am **not** a therapist. This presentation and the information contained within are **NOT** substitutes for therapy or other health care interventions.

DISCLAIMER



One more disclaimer

Much of the research done has focused on **KNITTING**, however; subsequent studies have shown that the benefits of knitting are also documented in those who crochet, quilt, cross stitch, etc.



My focus: living well!

Quality of life:

“Quality of life (QoL) is a concept which aims to capture the well-being, whether of a population or individual, regarding both positive and negative elements within the entirety of their existence at a specific point in time.”

~ National Institutes of Health (NIH)



Pause for participation

What positive feelings or experiences do you
associate with your fiber crafting activities?

Documented benefits

- Lowers blood pressure
- Reduces depression and anxiety
- Slows the onset of dementia
- Is as relaxing as yoga
- Distracts from chronic pain
- Provides an opportunity for creativity
- Increases sense of wellbeing
- Reduces loneliness and isolation
- Increases sense of usefulness and inclusion

~ Knit for Peace

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[video](#)

Blood pressure & stress

- Knitting enacts the relaxation response and lowers the heart rate by an average of 11 beats per minute.
- Blood pressure drops when knitting.
- Knitting is more than simply a distraction from life tasks; its rhythmic cadence mimics meditation and can promote reflection.
- As documented in an analysis of the therapeutic aspects of **quilting**, knitting offers variability in terms of challenge and skill.
- Another study showed the effectiveness of relaxation on managing chronic pain, and the importance of being able to encourage (bring forth) a relaxation response.
- Another researcher noted knitting's potential to promote wellbeing due to its repetitive nature. The ebb and flow of each stitch can create “a space for contemplation” and induce “an enhanced state of calm”.
- Knitting can facilitate a passive release of stray thoughts.

From “A Literature Review of the Evidence-Based Research on the Health Benefits of Knitting”

From the founder of Harvard's Mind and Body Medical Institute:

Dr Herbert Benson, author of *The Relaxation Response*, recommends:

...[the] repetition of a word, sound, phrase, prayer, or muscular activity [can illicit] the relaxation response – decreased heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension.

Benson continues, “[T]he relaxation response can be elicited by a number of meditative techniques, such as diaphragmatic breathing, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, jogging – even knitting”.

→ There is a benefit from *“meditation in yarn or fabric”!*





Anxiety & depression

- Fiber arts have a rhythmic and sensory nature.
 - These can be calming, and bestow meditative and therapeutic qualities
- The creative process can lead to a finished product.
 - This is particularly helpful to those suffering from depression, who feel hopeless, unable to do anything.
 - Making for someone in need reminds us that we can do something to help others.



Anxiety & depression (2)

- Knitting, crocheting, quilting, etc. are creative processes that tend to evoke a sense of personal productivity and satisfaction, which explains some of the positive psychological outcomes.
- Participation in creative activities is associated with self-reported improvements in health and increased quality of life, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.
- Engaging in creative activities with OTHERS allows us to observe their mastery of new tasks as an inspiring example
 - This can strengthen our belief that we, too, can succeed
 - This increases positive self-efficacy (believing that we are capable)

More on depression and fiber therapy

- Professor Kelly Lambert from Randolph-Macon College (Virginia) theorizes that the incidence of depression is rising, despite an increase in anti-depressant prescriptions, because modern society lacks effort-based activities, so the reward system goes into decline.
- Professor Lambert's research suggests that activities involving the hands, which have a tangible end-product, stimulate the reward system.
- Research-participants have shared the feelings of success they experience when knitting, et al and how it changes their outlook on life.
 - It appears to kick-start the process of wanting to be part of life once more.

Supporting data (some context)

- According to research by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), in 2023, “...**32.8%** of adults in Pennsylvania reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder, compared to 32.3% of adults in the U.S.”





Managing addiction

(anorexia nervosa, younger patients)

- In a study on the effects of anxiety, knitting was found to be beneficial in reducing feelings of anxiety.
- Patients reported that knitting:
 - lessened the intensity of their fears and thoughts
 - had a calming and therapeutic effect
 - gave them a sense of pride and accomplishment
- **74%** of the respondents reported benefits of distraction or distancing from eating disorder thoughts and feelings
- **74%** reported increased relaxation and comfort
- **54%** reported stress reduction, accomplishment, and prevention of ruminating thoughts becoming actions
- **32%** reported positive physical experiences such as meditative movements of the hand, which allowed them to sit still and enjoy sensory aspects of the task.



Journal of Groups in Addiction and Recovery (2007)

- Dr. Kathryn Duffy published a paper about knitting as an experiential teaching method for females in addiction group therapy.
- She reported that her knitting program had been successful in facilitating discussions and beneficial in providing a skill for moderating stress and emotions, both for female inpatient and outpatient drug and alcohol addicts.
- Another researcher has noted:
 - By watching others struggle in their early attempts to learn and then become more skilled, clients can see that success often takes persistence.
 - This can contribute to developing a positive sense of self-efficacy both by at first modeling and then building on small successes.



Brain health

“...knitting and crochet can challenge and strengthen our brains through the repetition of complex stitches and patterns. This actually helps build new neural pathways that help with memory and can reduce the cognitive decline that comes with age.”

~Henry Ford Health

Aging well

Mayo Clinic research study documented:

- people who engaged in crafts like knitting and crocheting had a **LOWER** chance of developing mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and memory loss.

In addition, the study found:

- reading newspapers/magazines or playing music did not produce similar beneficial results.

A close-up photograph of a ball of white yarn and a piece of knitted fabric. The yarn is a ball of white, slightly fuzzy yarn. The fabric is a textured, light-colored knit. The image is on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Research summary data

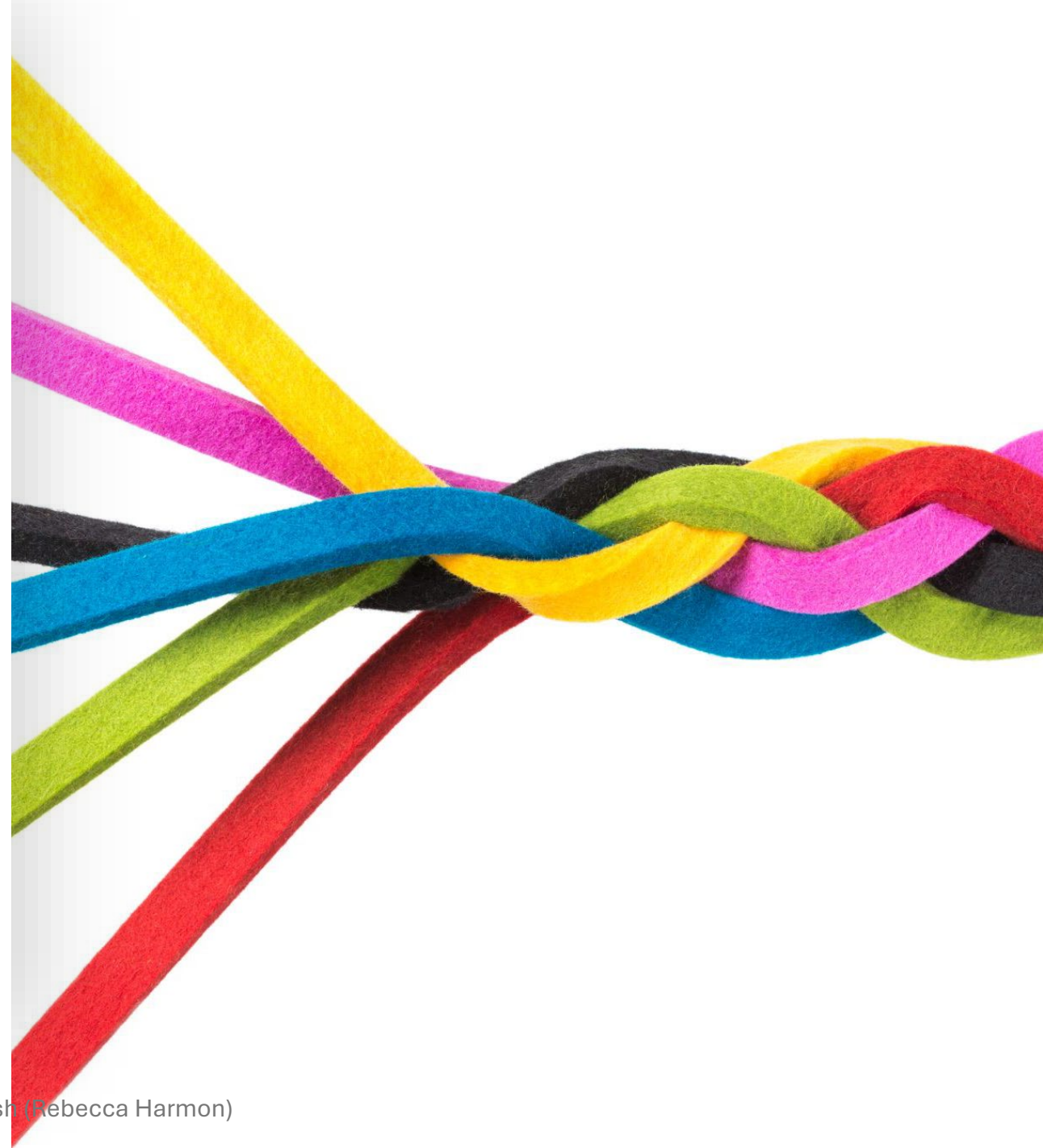
- Of those in poor or very poor health, 92% said knitting** improved their health.
 - 82% said knitting relaxed them
 - 65% of said knitting for others made them feel useful
- 92% said knitting improved their mood
- 67% of our knitters are over 60.
 - Many in their 80s and 90s
 - Some are as old as 100!

** Knitting was the focus of this study, but others have shown that crocheting, knitting, stitching, sewing, quilting, etc. show similar results

The conclusion?

Activities like crochet, knitting, sewing, cross-stitch, quilting, etc.

“...promote the development of neural pathways in the brain that help to maintain cognitive health.”



Social Isolation and Loneliness

- Isolation and loneliness is becoming a public health crisis across the globe (esp. in Western societies)
- Some quick stats:
 - Loneliness slows recovery from illness in the elderly
 - Loneliness is recognized as a “major public health concern”
 - It is reported to be more damaging than smoking 15 cigarettes a day!
 - Lonely people have a 64% increased chance of developing clinical dementia.



Fiber Arts as the Cure?!

“The inherent psychological and social benefits that are known to come from knitting (and similar) practice, together with the satisfaction that comes from creating an end product (Hosegood, 200975), are an indication of its potential to contribute to personal and social wellbeing.”



So much Good News!

- Crocheting, knitting, needlework, quilting, sewing, ...(etc.)
 - Support healthy living!
 - Are vehicles that help to reduce loneliness and isolation!
 - Help people better manage chronic pain!
 - Are known to support cognitive function!
 - Provide supportive tools for people with anxiety and/or depression!



Pause for participation

Sharing: experiences that support the research



Is there “bad” news?

- We must take care that our hobbies do NOT contribute to negatives in our lives.
 - We are often unaware when this begins to happen.



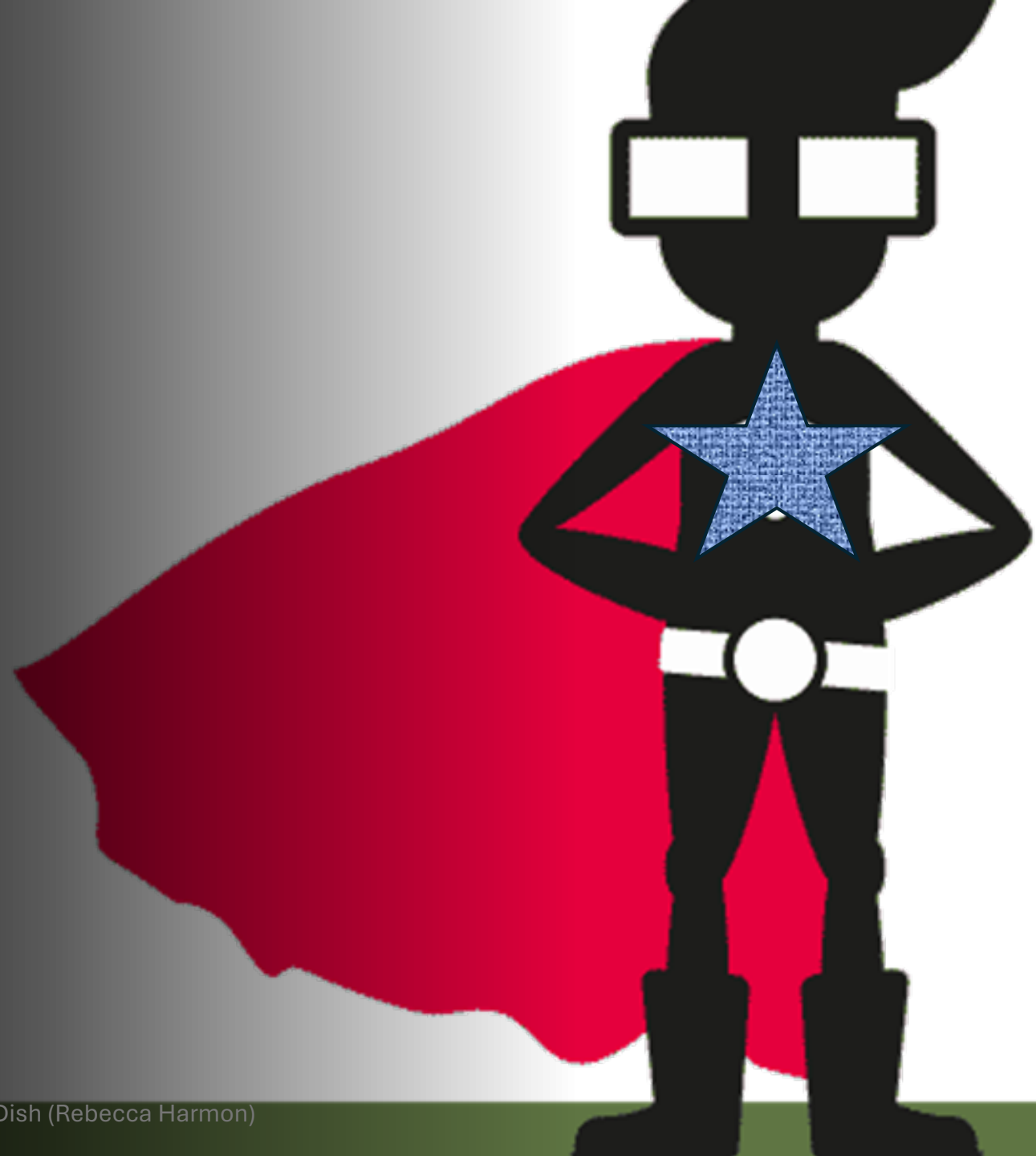
Consider these:

- Spending money we may not have (*esp. credit cards*)
 - Family discord around money
- Justifying avoidance behaviors because “*crafting is good for me,...*”
 - Letting things go around the house
- Isolating ourselves to spend time crafting
 - RSVP = ‘No’
- Our ever-growing fabric or yarn stash
- Other



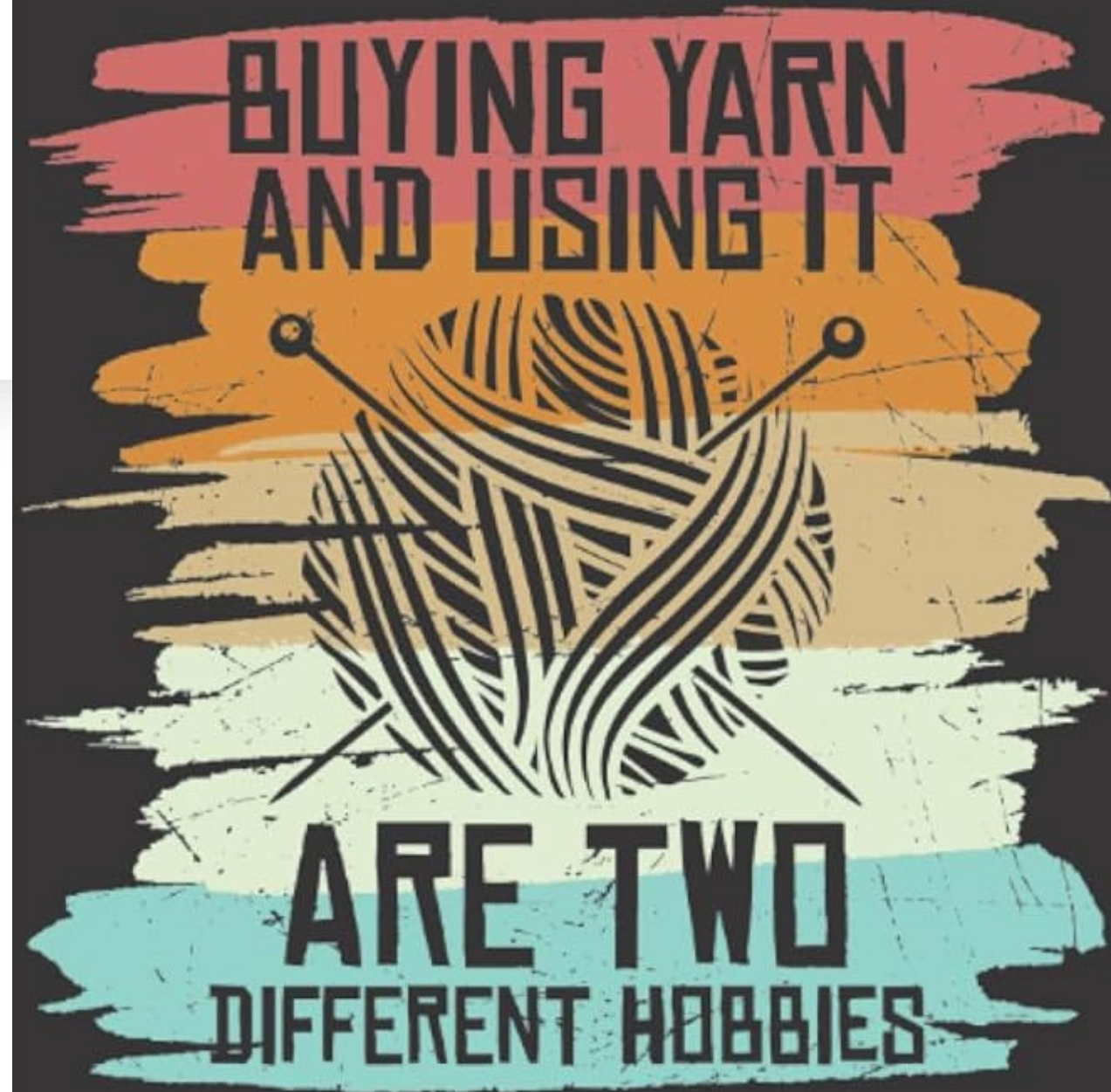
But,... yarn is my
SUPERPOWER!

Let's explore some ways to KEEP it that way.



Protecting our ‘superpower’

- Making wise choices when it comes to our fiber arts activities ensures that they will remain a **POSITIVE** influence.
- We want to keep the “*energy*” of our fiber crafts clear of guilt, fear, sadness or shame.



Fiber First-Aid

1. Clean out, organize & refresh your yarn/fabric stash.
2. Join a crochet/knitting/quilting/sewing or other craft group.
3. Learn a new stitch/technique on a regular basis.
4. Make a small gift for someone, “*just because*” !!
5. Make something for yourself!
6. Organize your WIPs
7. Shop with mindful INTENTION.
8. Start a small, NEW project using existing supplies.
9. Teach someone how to knit/crochet/sew/quilt etc.
10. Visit the library to find books on your craft.





One last note,...

- Check out my “Stitch ‘n Dish” blog site.
 - I share musings about yarn and life as well as an occasional free pattern.
 - *(nothing for sale)*

<https://StitchnDish.blog/>



**Thanks for
coming, and...**

Keep on stitchin' !!!

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References (*some of them*)

- Henry Ford Health
 - <https://www.henryford.com/visitors/caregivers/care-connections/the-benefits-knitting-and-crochet>
- Kaiser Family Foundation
 - <https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/pennsylvania>
- Knit for Peace (UK)
 - <https://knitforpeace.org.uk/knit-for-peace/the-health-benefits-of-knitting/>
 - This document lists multiple additional studies that are referenced in the article AND that I've referenced in this presentation.
- National Institutes of Health
 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK536962/>