

# Caring for Your Mental Health

Mental health is emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health is just as important as physical health. In fact, mental and physical health are connected, and you need both to be healthy. Some signs of good mental health (*well-being*) include:

- Being able to attend to tasks at home, school, or work.
- Being able to manage stress and emotions.
- Practicing self-care, which may include:
  - A regular exercise pattern.
  - A reasonably healthy diet.
  - Supportive and trusting relationships.
  - The ability to relax and calm yourself (*self-calm*).
- Having pleasurable hobbies and activities to do.
- Believing that you have meaning and purpose in your life.
- Recovering and adjusting after facing challenges (*resilience*).

You can take steps to build or strengthen these mentally healthy behaviors. There are resources and support to help you with this.

## Why is caring for mental health important?

Caring for your mental health is a big part of staying healthy. Everyone has times when feelings, thoughts, or situations feel overwhelming. Mental health means having the skills to manage what feels overwhelming. If this sense of being overwhelmed persists, however, you might need some help. If you have some of the following signs, you may need to take better care of your mental health or seek help from a health care provider or mental health professional:

- Problems with energy or focus.
- Changes in eating habits.
- Problems sleeping, such as sleeping too much or not enough.
- Emotional distress, such as anger, sadness, depression, or anxiety.
- Major changes in your relationships.
- Losing interest in life or activities that you used to enjoy.

If you have any of these symptoms on most days for 2 weeks or longer:

- Talk with a close friend or family member about how you are feeling.
- Contact your health care provider to discuss your symptoms.
- Consider working with a mental health professional. Your health care provider, family, or friends may be able to recommend a therapist.

## What can I do to promote emotional and mental health?

### Managing emotions

- Learn to identify emotions and deal with them. Recognizing your emotions is the first step in learning to deal with them.
- Practice ways to appropriately express feelings. Remember that you can control your feelings. They do not control you.
- Practice stress management techniques, such as:
  - Relaxation techniques, like breathing or muscle relaxation exercises.

- Exercise. Regular activity can lower your stress level.
- Changing what you can change and accepting what you cannot change.
- Build up your resilience so that you can recover and adjust after big problems or challenges. Practice resilient behaviors and attitudes:
  - Set and focus on long-term goals.
  - Develop and maintain healthy, supportive relationships.
  - Learn to accept change and make the best of the situation.
  - Take care of yourself physically by eating a healthy diet, getting plenty of sleep, and exercising regularly.
  - Develop self-awareness. Ask others to give feedback about how they see you.
  - Practice mindfulness meditation to help you stay calm when dealing with daily challenges.
  - Learn to respond to situations in healthy ways, rather than reacting with your emotions.
  - Keep a positive attitude, and believe in yourself. Your view of yourself affects your mental health.
  - Develop your listening and empathy skills. These will help you deal with difficult situations and communications.
- Remember that emotions can be used as a good source of communication and are a great source of energy. Try to laugh and find humor in life.

## Sleeping

- Get the right amount and quality of sleep. Sleep has a big impact on physical and mental health. To improve your sleep:
  - Go to bed and wake up around the same time every day.
  - Limit screen time before bedtime. This includes the use of your cell phone, TV, computer, and tablet.
  - Keep your bedroom dark and cool.

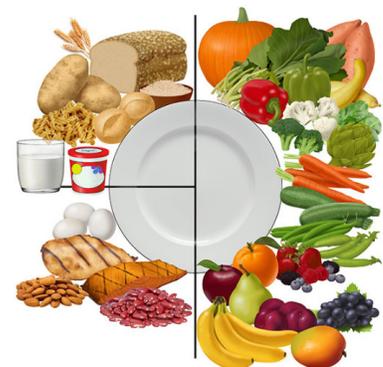
## Activity

- Exercise or do some physical activity regularly. This helps:
  - Keep your body strong, especially during times of stress.
  - Get rid of chemicals in your body (*hormones*) that build up when you are stressed.
  - Build up your resilience.



## Eating and drinking

- Eat a healthy diet that includes whole grains, vegetables, fresh fruits, and lean proteins. If you have questions about what foods are best for you, ask your health care provider.
- Try not to turn to sweet, salty, or otherwise unhealthy foods when you are tired or unhappy. This can lead to unwanted weight gain and is not a healthy way to cope with emotions.



## Where to find more information

You can find more information about how to care for your mental health from:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- National Institute of Mental Health: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm)

## Contact a health care provider if:

- You lose interest in being with others or you do not want to leave the house.
- You have a hard time completing your normal activities or you have less energy than normal.
- You cannot stay focused or you have problems with memory.
- You feel that your senses are heightened, and this makes you upset or concerned.
- You feel nervous or have rapid mood changes.
- You are sleeping or eating more or less than normal.
- You question reality or you show odd behavior that disturbs you or others.

## Get help right away if:

- You have thoughts about hurting yourself or others.

**If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:**

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24 hours a day.**

## Summary

- Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. It involves understanding your emotions and behaviors, and taking steps to cope with them in a healthy way.
- If you have symptoms of mental or emotional distress, get help from family, friends, a health care provider, or a mental health professional.
- Practice good mental health behaviors such as stress management skills, self-calming skills, exercise, and healthy sleeping and eating.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.