

## Boosting Your Mental Health

You know that you need to eat healthy foods and get some exercise to feel good and live longer. Another key part to living longer is your mental health.

Good mental health is just as important as good physical health. But we all face changes in life that can challenge our emotional well-being. For example, even if you always looked forward to retirement, you might miss working. Or maybe you've moved and you miss your old friends.

Whatever happens in your life, make your mental health a priority. You'll feel better and deal with stress better. These ideas can keep your spirits up:

- Stay in touch with family and friends. Maintaining relationships is good for your mental health. Call and visit your children or grandchildren. If you don't have family or friends nearby, join a local church or synagogue, or a community organization.
- Give yourself time to adjust to major life changes. This includes not only obvious negative events, like the death of your spouse or a friend, but also positive events like moving or retiring. These can be accompanied by a sense of loss. Grieving any loss is natural and necessary.
- Keep busy with mentally stimulating activities. Consider volunteering or taking a class. Explore new interests like learning another language.
- Consider getting a pet. A pet can be a wonderful companion. Pet owners get more exercise and have more social contact than those without a pet.
- Exercise. Take a walk or ride a bike. Exercise improves how you feel mentally, as well as physically.
- Get enough sleep. Lack of sleep can contribute to depression. Try to get as much sleep as you need. Although we often say that a person needs about 8 hours of sleep per night, this is only an average number. Some people find they need more. It's important that you find out for yourself how many hours you need for restful, restorative sleep.
- Practice optimism and good humor. A positive attitude and laughter boost your mood. Spend time with people who make you laugh. Rent funny movies.
- Be open to learning about new technology and what aspects of it may fit with your lifestyle and interests.

Keep this list handy and add ideas of your own. It's worth putting good mental health on the top of your "to do" list every day.

### Do you feel down?

It's impossible and unrealistic to expect to be cheerful all the time. Some days are harder than others. But if you just can't shake your sadness or you have mysterious aches and pains, you may be suffering from clinical depression.

Like heart disease and diabetes, clinical depression is an illness that can be treated. Depression may be the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain, heredity, a stressful life change, or medicine. It could be a combination of these. It may develop after a particular event or for no apparent reason. It can also be secondary to another underlying medical problem (for example, hypothyroidism) or a consequence of using drugs or alcohol.

Many people don't realize that they have depression. To help determine whether you may be depressed, answer the following questions:

- Do you feel sad or hopeless but don't know why?
- Do you have lasting aches and pains that don't respond to treatment?
- Have you lost interest in activities you used to enjoy?
- Do you have trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
- Do you frequently feel worthless or guilty?

- Do you have trouble sleeping at night?
- Do you worry that you sleep too much?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, and you have felt this way for more than 2 weeks, talk to your healthcare provider because you may be depressed. Treatment can help you feel good again—but first, someone has to know you feel bad.

### **Call 988 in a crisis**

If you feel suicidal at any time, call or text 988 to get help right away. You will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). Lifeline is free and available 24/7. They are also available by calling 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255).

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