

AUGUST IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

"Your mental health is everything - prioritize it. Make the time like your life depends on it, because it does." – Mel Robbins



It's Essential

Establishing and supporting good mental health is essential to our overall health and quality of life because it affects how we think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others. It is more than the absence of a mental illness. Good Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being, (National Institute of Mental Health, 2022).

Constant Stressors

With COVID-19 as a constant stressor, new spotlights on the need to address structural racism in society, as well as the rising cost of living due to inflation and the ever-competing inputs for our attention, It is more important than ever to examine how mental wellbeing in the United States can be supported. Every aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic has shined a spotlight on the need to attend to mental wellness, (Pinals, 2020).



Here are some startling statistics from the US Department of Health and Human Services:



Suicide remains the second leading Cause of death among youth...

- ...aged 10 to 14 and adults aged 24 to 35.
- Suicide was responsible for nearly 46,000 deaths in 2020 but more people attempt or have serious thoughts of suicide or have critical risk factors for future suicide, (CDC).
 - **988** is the new three-digit code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline,
 - Health plans and health insurance issuers that offer mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) benefits must provide those benefits comparable to their coverage for general medical and surgical care. So don't wait to use these services.

Opioid overdose deaths were rising prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

- In 2020 there was a 30% increase in overdose deaths, with nearly 92,000 overdose deaths.
- Recent national surveys of young people show alarming increases in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and other behavioral health challenges that have been increasing consistently over the past decade.
 - Last year the Surgeon General issued a new Advisory – PDF to highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis, outlining the pandemic's unprecedented impacts on the mental health of America's youth and families, as well as the mental health challenges that existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic.



There is an increase in Children diagnosed with mental health conditions

- In March 2022, a new HHS study showed significant increases in children diagnosed with mental health conditions from 2016 to 2020, including an increase of nearly 30 percent in the number of children diagnosed with anxiety or depression.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data shows that in 2021, more than a third of high school students reported experiencing poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.



(US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2020)

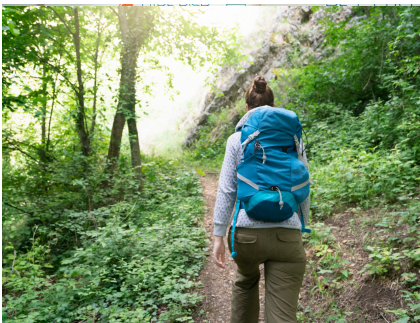


12 Tips for Better Mental Health

When it comes to mental health, it is important to establish a habitual strategy early on. It should be done every day in small increments that allow for protection from stress and that support coping abilities.

Here are some tips to implement daily, based on a study conducted by the Mental Health Foundation to help support better mental health:

1. Get closer to nature. Nature can have a really calming effect on us. Consider “forest bathing”. This is where you go to a forest or wooded area and experience the different smells, sounds, and textures, tuning your senses to what’s around you, and getting connected with your natural surroundings.



2. Learn to understand and manage your feelings. Give your feelings your attention without judging them. Naming what you’re feeling is also likely to help. Talking kindly to yourself, in the same way, that you might reassure a small child whom you care about, is also important. It can be very comforting. Write down how you are feeling in a notebook or on your phone. Using positive affirmations can also be helpful. [Take a Self-Care Assessment.](#)

(The Mental Health Foundation, 2021)

3. Talk to someone you trust for support. Just talking things through with a person you trust can help and feel like a relief.

4. Be mindful of using drugs or alcohol to cope with feelings. No-one wants to feel bad and for some people, drugs and/or alcohol offer temporary relief. If you think you may be using drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings, then it may help at first to simply notice it, without beating yourself up about it. Being understanding and kind to yourself is good for your mental health. A possible next step could be to talk with someone you trust.

“The experience I have had is that once you start talking about [experiencing a mental health struggle], you realize that actually you’re part of quite a big club.”

— Prince Harry

5. Get Help in Managing Debt. Money problems can be unavoidable and you may have no choice about being in debt. Fears about paying debts, bills, and essentials such as food and electricity can be very stressful. If you feel responsible for sending money back home, or you’re the only earner in our household, you may feel burdened and isolated. The truth is, you’re never alone with money problems. Research shows they are one of the most common and serious sources of stress for many people. Even if our finances are impossible to change, sharing our fears with another person who’s not involved, and who you trust, is likely to help us feel less alone and overwhelmed. This may help us to see new ways forward.

“Mental health...is not a destination, but a process. It’s about how you drive, not where you’re going.”

— Noam Shpancer, PhD

Mental Health Focus

At the center of our national mental health crisis is a severe shortage of behavioral health-trained providers. Over one-third of Americans live in designated [Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas](#), areas that have fewer mental health providers than the minimum their population would need.

(US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2020)



Tip of the month #1

“I think it’s really important to take the stigma away from mental health... My brain and my heart are really important to me. I don’t know why I wouldn’t seek help to have those things be as healthy as my teeth.”

—Kerry Washington, from HuffPost



12 Tips for Better Mental Health Continued

6. Work on improving your sleep. For many people, sleep is often the first thing that suffers when you're struggling with your mental health. Adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep a night, including enough dreaming sleep and enough deeper sleep.

7. Be kind to yourself and others. Research shows that being kind is good for both sides. Being kind can boost our mood, help us feel more capable, strengthen our connections with others and even help us cope better with stress. Doing volunteer work and getting together with other people to work for good causes can help us feel connected with other people and the world around us. It can give us the sense that we can make a difference. All of this is good for our mental health.



8. Get and stay active. Moving our bodies – with sport, gardening, dancing, cycling, walking the dog, doing the cleaning, or going to the gym, for example – are great ways to improve our mental health and physical health. Exercise releases “feel good” hormones, that reduce feelings of stress and anger. It also helps us feel better about our bodies. It can improve our sleep too. If it involves other people like being part of a team, a class, or a group we see regularly, that can also boost our mental health.

(The Mental Health Foundation, 2021)

9. Practice gratitude and Strengthen social connections. Keeping a journal where you can jot down what you are grateful for can be helpful, along with improving connections with friends, family community, and more.

10. Work on healthy eating. A balanced diet, with lots of vegetables and fruit, is essential for good physical and mental health. How we eat is also important. Having meals with other people can help to grow relationships – with family, friends, partners, and colleagues. This is really important in protecting everyone's mental health and preventing problems.

“There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn't.”

— John Green

11. Be open to new experiences. Life can feel more interesting, lively, and rewarding when we are open to trying new experiences and experimenting with how we do things. It could be as simple as changing what we have for breakfast or the route we walk with the dog or as intricate as planning an adventure holiday. You might find a new place that you love, discover a talent you didn't know you had, or meet someone new and important.

12. Stay hopeful by planning things to look forward to. Having things to look forward to, including activities you find fun, can help you cope with difficult situations. Making plans for things you enjoy can increase your sense of hope, which is important for our mental health. This could be for anything from small pleasures, like a cup of tea or your favourite TV programme or dance class, up to a trip with family or friends, or going to see your favorite film, sports team, band or singer.

The Mental Health Foundation Study

The study acknowledges that some of its recommendations will be harder to follow for many people, because of influences beyond their control.

These include living in poverty or in places with heavy traffic noise and lack of green space, (The Mental Health Foundation, 2021)

(The Mental Health Foundation, 2021)



Tip of the month #2

“Sometimes self care is exercise and eating right. Sometimes it's spending time with loved ones or taking a nap. And sometimes it's watching an entire season of TV in one weekend while you lounge around in your pajamas. Whatever soothes your soul.”

— Nanea Hoffman

When To Seek Professional Help?



When you Need More Support

Although the above 12 recommendations can be helpful for some, others of us may need greater support. Don't be afraid to reach out for help.

We all need help during periods of our lives. And you never know who you may also be helping in seeking out support for yourself.

Seek Professional Help When the following Occur

Seek professional help if you are experiencing severe or distressing symptoms that have lasted two weeks or more, such as:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable
- Inability to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities



Don't Wait Until Symptoms Are Overwhelming

Don't wait until your symptoms are overwhelming. Talk about your concerns with your primary care provider, who can refer you to a mental health specialist if needed. If you don't know where to start, read the [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\) Tips for Talking With Your Health Care Provider fact sheet](#). Learn more about how to get help or find a provider on the [NIMH's Help for Mental Illnesses webpage](#).

(National Institute of Mental Health, 2021)



What To Do In a Crisis?



Who To Call In An Emergency?

If you or someone you know are thinking about harming yourself or themselves or attempting suicide, tell someone who can help right away or **dial 911 in an emergency**.

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(Lifeline\)](#) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255),
- or text the [Crisis Text Line](#) (text HELLO to 741741).

Both Services are Free & Available 24 Hours a Day, 7 Days a Week

All calls are confidential. Contact social media outlets directly if you are concerned about a friend's social media updates, or dial 911 in an emergency.



Learn More

Learn more on the [Lifeline website](#) or the [Crisis Text Line website](#).

For additional information about suicide prevention, please see [NIMH's Suicide Prevention webpage](#).

(National Institute of Mental Health, 2021)

More Helpful Resources

Federal Resources

- [NIH Emotional Wellness Toolkit](#): This NIH toolkit provides six strategies for improving your emotional health.
- [NIH Social Wellness Toolkit](#): This NIH toolkit provides six strategies for improving your social health.
- [MedlinePlus: How to Improve Mental Health](#): MedlinePlus provides health information and tips for improving your mental health.
- [CDC COVID-19: Care for Yourself](#): The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information on caring for yourself, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [CDC COVID-19: Coping With Stress](#): CDC provides information on how to cope with stress, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[FindTreatment.gov](#)

Millions of Americans have a substance use disorder. Find a treatment facility near you.

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

Call or text 988

Free and confidential support for people in distress, 24/7.

[National Helpline](#)

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Treatment referral and information, 24/7.

[Disaster Distress Helpline](#)

Immediate crisis counseling related to disasters, 24/7.

Other Resources

- [DBSA Wellness Toolbox](#) (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance)
- [Live Your Life Well](#) (Mental Health America)
- [Mental Health: Keeping Your Emotional Health](#) (American Academy of Family Physicians)
- [Parity Reference Guide for Family Members and Caretakers](#) provides an overview of the essential information necessary for understanding mental health and substance use disorder parity.
- [New Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefit Resources](#)
- [Know Your Rights, Parity for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefits](#). This guide gives consumers and those in need of services an overview of parity laws, including common limits placed on behavioral health benefits and services and guidance on what to do if an individual feels their rights have been ignored.
- [Overdose Prevention Strategy](#) prioritizes four key target areas—primary prevention, harm reduction, evidence-based treatment, and recovery support.
- [Drug Overdose and Health Equity](#)
- [5 Types of Opioid Treatment Programs and How They Work](#)



More Helpful Resources

- [SAMSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\)](#). SAMHSA's National Helpline is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. Tel:
- [Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) – Find treatment
- [Behavioral Health Workforce Tracker](#), a new database of over 1 million behavioral health providers. The tracker will allow users to visualize the availability of behavioral health providers by geography, provider type, and Medicaid acceptance status.

“My dark days made me stronger. Or maybe I already was strong, and they made me prove it.”

– Emery Lord

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”

– Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

- [White House Fact Sheet on Improving Maternal Health](#)
- [Mental Health for Children and Parents](#)
- [Mental Health for Adolescents and School Health](#)
- [Protecting Youth Mental Health](#)
- School-Based Health Services:
 - [ECCP®](#) provides early childhood mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention services to children who are at risk of suspension/expulsion from early care and education settings due to behavioral and mental health concerns.
 - [Social and Emotional Support for Families and Children: Guide for Parents](#)

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