



WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

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Mental health is an important aspect of health that is often overlooked. With the common stressors of life (school, family, friends, the year of 2020, etc.), it is often hard to focus on your mental well-being. Here is a list of small ways to improve your mental health. These examples do not take long to do but can make a huge difference on your overall mood and happiness.

1. Write something that you are grateful for. Gratitude is linked with improved well-being and mental health. People who regularly express gratitude are happier and have lower rates of stress and depression.

2. Take a break. When you are overwhelmed, do a simple breathing exercise. Close your eyes and take 10 deep breaths. For each one, count to 4 as you inhale, hold it for a count of 4, and then exhale for 4.

3. Eat a nutritious meal. Natural chemicals, neurotransmitters, control many of the body's activities. Neurotransmitters help manage many things including emotions. The most common neurotransmitters include dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin. Dopamine activates your sense of pleasure and increases concentration. Foods that help your body produce dopamine include meat, fish, tofu, beans, milk, eggs, and lentils. Serotonin helps manage sleep and appetite. It also plays a major role in your mood. Serotonin is made in the brain from B vitamins and tryptophan. Foods high in tryptophan include dietary protein, chocolate, oats, dairy foods, and seeds. Endorphins relieve anxiety and stress. This neurotransmitter is released during exercise and can be found in chocolate and strawberries. Oxytocin is another neurotransmitter that helps you feel relaxation, love, and social connection.

4. Tell yourself something positive. How you think about yourself has a powerful effect on how you feel.

5. Go to bed on time. Sleep deprivation can negatively affect your mood. Try to go to bed around the same time each day and aim for 7-8 hours of sleep per night.

6. Exercise. Your body releases endorphins when you exercise. Endorphins are stress-relieving and mood boosting. Aim for 30 minutes of exercise daily to release endorphins.

7. Buy a coloring book! Coloring books are seen to help de-stress and reduce feelings of anxiousness.

8. Work some omega-3 fatty acids into your diet. Omega-3s are commonly found in wild salmon, walnuts, & flaxseeds and are linked to decreased rates of depression.

9. Feeling overwhelmed? Smile! Smiling can help lower your heart rate and calm you down. A simple smile can trigger the release of neural communication boosting dopamine and serotonin.

10. Enjoy 15 minutes of sunshine. Sunlight synthesizes Vitamin D, which research shows can help with depression and mood disorders. Many people are Vitamin D deficient so you should get your levels tested! In addition to sunlight, you may need a supplement.

