

Health Insights

October 2020

Understanding Mental Health

What is Mental Health? Your mental well-being includes how you think, act, and feel. It also helps you cope with stress, relate to others, and make decisions. According to the World Health Organization, there's not a specific definition of mental well-being. However, various studies agree that achieving a state of mental well-being includes being able to:

- Realize your full potential
- Work productively
- Cope with normal stresses of life
- Contribute meaningfully to your community

Mental well-being includes mental health, but goes far beyond treating mental illness. For example, you could go through a period of poor mental health but not necessarily have a diagnosable mental illness. And your mental health can change over time, depending on factors such as your workload, stress, and work-life balance.

What is mental illness? Mental illness refers to a variety of conditions that affect your mood or behavior, feelings, or thinking. Mental illnesses can occur occasionally, while others are chronic and long-lasting. Common mental illnesses include anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.

Mental illness is more prevalent than you might think. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 5 U.S. adults will experience a mental illness in any given year, and more than 50% will experience mental illness at some point in their life.

Why is mental well-being important? Your mental well-being is tied directly to your physical health. Individuals with poor mental health or untreated mental illness are at risk of developing many chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and obesity.

Poor mental health can also cause negative effects in your work life as well as in your social life. If you have poor mental health, you may experience productivity issues at work and withdrawal or feelings of loneliness.

How can you improve your mental well-being? Because it's such a crucial component of your health, it's important to focus on maintaining or improving your mental health. Here are three simple ways to do so every day:

- Express gratitude. Taking five minutes a day to write down the things that you are grateful for has been proven to lower stress levels and can help you change your mindset from negative to positive.
- Get exercise. You probably hear all the time how beneficial exercise is to your overall health, but that's because it's true. Exercising can improve brain function, reduce anxiety, and improve your self-image.
- Get a good night's sleep. Strive for seven to eight hours of sleep a night to improve your mental health.

Where can I learn more? For more information about mental well-being, please contact your doctor.



Mental Health Moment

Meditation and Mental Health

Maintaining your mental health during these uncertain times can be challenging, especially if you're not sure how to get started. That's where meditation can help. There are many different types of meditation to try, and you can see its positive effects after a few minutes.

Studies show that meditation is effective in controlling anxiety, enhancing the immune system, and reducing conditions such as high blood pressure, substance abuse, and chronic pain.

How to Practice Meditation

Mastering meditation takes practice, but getting started is easy and takes just minutes of your time. Try these two quick mindful meditation techniques next time you're feeling stressed. You can also find many apps and guided practices online.

- **One-Minute Relaxation Breathing:** Close your eyes and take a deep breath in for a count of four, and then exhale for a count of eight. Repeat five times.
- **Five-Minute Body Scan Meditation:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position and take a few moments to find a calm, steady breath. Bring your awareness to sensations in your body, where you will spend several slow breaths on each focal point beginning with the left toes and all the way through the left hip. Repeat on the right side. From there, follow the same process through your torso, arms, and up through your head.

Tips for Successful Meditation

Keep the following tips in mind to have a successful meditation session:

- Schedule a meditation session like an appointment
- Find a designated meditation spot
- Use noise-canceling headphones
- Don't get discouraged

Reduce Stress

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Stress can give you a rush of energy when it's needed most. But if stress lasts a long time—a condition known as chronic stress—those “high alert” changes become harmful rather than helpful. Learning healthy ways to cope with stress can also boost your resilience.

To Help Manage Stress:

- **Get enough sleep.**
- **Exercise regularly.** Just 30 minutes a day of walking can boost mood and reduce stress.
- **Build a social support network.**
- **Set priorities.** Decide what must get done and what can wait. Say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- **Think positive.** Note what you've accomplished at the end of the day, not what you've failed to do.
- **Try relaxation methods.** Mindfulness, meditation, yoga, or tai chi may help.
- **Seek help.** Talk to a mental health professional if you feel unable to cope, have suicidal thoughts, or use drugs or alcohol to cope.





Southwestern Vegetable & Chicken Soup

Ingredient List:

- 2 medium poblano peppers
- 2 tsp. canola oil
- 12 oz. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed, cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 ½ c. chopped onion (1 large)
- 1 ½ c. chopped red or green bell pepper (1 large)
- 1 ½ c. green beans, cut into ¼-in. pieces, or frozen, thawed
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp. chili powder
- 1 ½ tsp. ground cumin
- 6 c. red-sodium chicken broth
- 1 (15 oz.) can black beans or pinto beans, rinsed
- 1 (14 oz.) can diced tomatoes
- 4 c. chopped chard or spinach
- 1 ½ c. corn kernels, fresh or frozen
- ½ c. chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ c. fresh lime juice

To roast the poblano peppers, position oven rack about 5 inches from the heat source; preheat broiler. Line the broiler pan with foil. Broil whole poblanos, turning once, until starting to blacken, 8 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a paper bag and let steam to loosen skins for about 10 minutes. When the poblanos are cool enough to handle, peel, seed, stem and coarsely chop; set aside.

Meanwhile, heat oil in a large soup pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add chicken and cook, turning occasionally, until lightly browned, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside.

Reduce the heat to medium and add onion, bell pepper, green beans, and garlic. Cook, stirring, until beginning to soften, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in chili powder and cumin and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in broth, beans, tomatoes and the chopped poblanos; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes. Add the reserved chicken and juices, chard (or spinach), and corn; return to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes more to heat through and blend flavors.

Top each portion with 1 tbs. each cilantro and lime juice; serve with lime wedges.

Calories: 213; total fat 6.4g 10%; saturated fat 1.3g; cholesterol 39mg 13%; sodium 386mg 15%; potassium 779mg 22%; carbohydrates 24.9g 8%; fiber 5.9g 24%; sugar 7g; protein 16.6g 33%

Hendley, J. (n.d.). Southwestern Vegetable & Chicken Soup. Retrieved September 16, 2020, from <http://www.eatingwell.com/recipe/250624/southwestern-vegetable-chicken-soup/>

Mental Health Quiz

1. One in every ____ Americans lives with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.
 - a. 7
 - b. 16
 - c. 25
 - d. 32
2. Sunlight can help boost serotonin levels and improve mood. Research suggests that exposure to the sun for at least ____ minutes a day can help improve mental health.
 - a. 15
 - b. 30
 - c. 40
 - d. 10
3. Poor mental health increases the risk for long-lasting (chronic) physical conditions such as
 - a. Heart Disease
 - b. Type 2 Diabetes
 - c. Stroke
 - d. All of the Above
4. Suicide is the ____ leading cause of death among people ages 15-34 in the United States.
 - a. 2nd
 - b. 10th
 - c. 7th
 - d. 18th
5. What you eat has a direct impact on the way you feel. Which of the following steps contribute to a depression-fighting diet?
 - a. Boosting B vitamins
 - b. Minimizing sugar and refined carbs
 - c. Not skipping meals
 - d. All of the above

See page 5 for quiz answers

Healthy Habits Calendar

October 2020 - Understanding Mental Health

Simple healthy habits can help to improve mental health! Try some of these suggestions to be more present and aware of your mental health this month!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Welcome to October: Set 1 goal to improve your mental health this month.	2	3 Saturday Solitude: Charge your phone in another room and go to bed earlier.
4	5 Meditation Monday: Find a quiet place and try a guided meditation.	6	7 Write it Out Wednesday: Write down 10 things You're grateful for.	8	9 Listen In Friday: Listen to a mental health podcast.	10
11 Rest & Relax: Go easy on yourself! Focus on resting.	12	13 Fresh Air Tuesday: Start your day outside.	14	15 Reach out Thursday: Call or connect with someone you've been meaning to.	16	17 Check in Saturday: Check in with your mental health goal.
18	19 Meditation Monday: Start your day with meditation.	20	21 Workout Wednesday: Go for a walk with a friend or family member.	22	23	24 Account Saturday: Make a list of challenges you've overcome.
25 Self-Care Sunday: Take a social media/technology break and focus on being present.	26	27 Check in Tuesday: Check in with your mental health goal.	28 Write it Out Wednesday: Write down 3 intentions for the day.	29	30 Help out Friday: Reach out to someone who may be struggling with their mental health.	31



30 Day Challenge: Meditation

Over the next month, practice meditation for 5-15 minutes at least 4 days a week. Meditation has been practiced all over the world since ancient times. It brings about physical, mental, and emotional benefits. Here are a few forms of meditation you might try during this challenge:

- **Mindfulness Meditation:** Mindfulness is a great way to gain clarity and peace of mind. Focus on what is happening in the present moment. What do you see, hear, feel, smell, etc.? Recognize what you are thinking about in the present moment and let it pass without judgment. As you let these thoughts pass, continue focusing on the present moment.
- **Moving Meditation:** A great way to meditate is by focusing on the movement of your body. This can be during physical activity, gardening, walking, yoga, etc. Focusing on your body's movements will allow you to get rid of negative thoughts and find peace.
- **Visualization Meditation:** Visualization happens when you imagine an image or place that brings you peace. As you focus on this image and the positive feelings associated with it, negative emotions will slip away.
- **Chanting Meditation:** Some people find peace in chanting words or a mantra. It narrows in your focus and emits positive energy.

Week 1	
What Day?	# of Minutes in Meditation

Week 2	
What Day?	# of Minutes in Meditation

Week 3	
What Day?	# of Minutes in Meditation

Week 4	
What Day?	# of Minutes in Meditation

Answers to Quiz:

Q1: c. 25 | Q2: a. 15 Minutes | Q3: d. All of the above | Q4: a. 2nd Leading | Q5: d. All of the above