

# May is Mental Health Awareness Month



Feeling stressed? Stress can damage your focus, your mood, and your relationships. There are, however, practical tools to help you cope. The following tips can help strengthen one of your greatest assets: your mental health. Good mental health keeps you productive, energetic, happy and hopeful—even in the face of life's challenges.

## **1) Connect with others**

Humans are social animals. Research suggests that people who feel connected are happier, healthier, and may even live longer. To build connections, join a club or enroll in a class. You will already share a common interest with other group or class members. Boost existing connections by committing a set amount of time to your loved ones each week—without cell phones, laptops, iPods or other distractions.

## **2) Stay positive**

Thinking negatively can affect your mood and your health. People who regularly focus on the positive are less upset by painful events and memories. Ask yourself how realistic your fears are, and don't assume the worst. Keep a gratitude journal, and write down anything that makes you smile. Remember your achievements and successes instead of dwelling on failures.

## **3) Get physically active**

Stress-induced hormones released during exercise can help prevent heart disease, relieve insomnia, and reduce anxiety and depression. Schedule regular physical activity by writing it in your calendar. Work out with a friend— it's harder to break a commitment to someone else than to ourselves. You can find small ways to get active even when you are busy. Try walking a bit faster or further when you shop for groceries, for example.

## **4) Help others**

Research suggests that people who consistently help others experience less depression, greater calm, and fewer pains. Volunteer with a community organization— you can make a valuable contribution while forging connections, developing your skills, and learning more about an area that interests you. Helping doesn't always require huge commitments; even small gestures are appreciated. Telling someone what you admire about them may also boost your mood.

## **5) Get enough rest**

People who do not get enough sleep face a number of possible risks, including weight gain, decreased memory, impaired driving, and heart problems. To create restful nights, avoid drinking caffeine six to eight hours before bed, and finish any next-day preparations an hour before bed. If you cannot fall asleep after 15 minutes, avoid frustration by getting up until you feel more tired.





#### **6) Create joy and satisfaction**

Positive emotions can boost your ability to bounce back from stress. To increase your joy and satisfaction, identify the high points of your day, and try to engage in those activities more. Do something you loved as a child, listen to a humor CD in your car, or watch a comedy.

#### **7) Eat well**

Eating healthy food can boost your energy, lower the risk of developing certain diseases, and influence your mood. To promote good nutrition, eat regularly— skipping meals can make your blood sugar drop, which may leave you nervous or irritable. Resist junk food by packing healthy snacks such as raisins or nuts, and include a variety of nutrients in your diet.

#### **8) Take care of your spirit**

People who have strong spiritual lives may be healthier, live longer, and suffer less from stress. Connect to what you find meaningful. Talk to others who share similar spiritual beliefs, and learn from each other. Enrich your life by reading inspiring texts for insights.

#### **9) Deal better with hard times**

Most of us will face some particularly tough times in our lives, like a loss or divorce. Having ways to cope with these challenges can protect your health and well-being. Tackle problems by making a list of possible solutions, then picking one and breaking it into manageable chunks. Get support from others who have gone through similar situations. Organize your thoughts by writing about upsetting events.

#### **10) Get professional help if you need it**

If the problems in your life are stopping you from functioning well or enjoying daily activities, professional help can make a big difference. There is hope: more than 80 percent of people who are treated for depression improve. If you or someone you know is in need, call your Employee Assistance Program at **1-800-451-1834**.

Content Source: **Mental Health America Website**  
<http://mentalhealthamerica.net/>

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