

Tips for Maintaining Mental and Emotional Health

Mental and emotional health are often challenging to preserve in our modern-day, busy and hectic lives.

To lessen the impact of stressful wear and tear, consider implementing some of these helpful strategies into your daily routine.

Maintain good physical health. This point is so basic it's often overlooked. Our physical health affects our emotional health much more than we realize. It's hard to feel down mentally when you feel great physically. Make sure to eat well. Avoid fast, fried, and processed food. Reduce the amount of sugar and unhealthy items you eat. Anytime you use self discipline to pass up that donut, you'll feel better about yourself than you would if you gave into your temptation. Exercise! So many people dislike or avoid exercise but it is easily one of the best things you can do to improve your emotional wellbeing. Get outside and walk, breathe the fresh air. Better yet, do some weight or resistance training. Feeling strong physically makes you feel strong in all aspects of your life. Get enough sleep. Develop a consistent sleep schedule. Decide on an appropriate bed time and spend an hour winding down from the day before that time. You should shut out blue light (TV, computer, telephone) an hour before bed. This will allow you to fall asleep faster. If you wake up in the middle of the night, don't look at your clock. This makes it harder to fall asleep and often leaves a person wide awake worrying about how much sleep they are missing out on. Wake up an hour earlier than necessary. This will reduce stress as you will have adequate time to get ready and even relax before you start your busy day.

Learn to release anger and other negative emotions. Learn to forgive and move on. Don't hold grudges or replay negative experiences in your mind. Vent if you have to. Talk to a friend, yourself, or even an empty chair. Shake it off. Walk it off. Accept that there will be emotional struggles in life. We will experience pain, sadness, loss, grief, insults, and frustrations. However, there is absolutely no value in holding onto them longer than necessary. Harboring anger or ill feelings builds emotional toxicity, which ultimately affects your overall health.

Keep your brain active. Don't let complacency or boredom set in. In order to feel alive and vibrant we need to keep our minds active by learning new things and challenging ourselves. Why do we worry? Because we have nothing better to do with our time. When our minds are not active and focused, they'll usually find something negative to keep us focused on.

Stimulate your senses. As well as keeping your mind active, enjoy beautiful art, listen to music that lifts your spirits or try a new gourmet dish. Buy flowers to have around to look at and smell. Burn candles that have a pleasant sent. Holiday scented candles can bring back happy memories of family gatherings and times when our lives were more carefree. Our senses need to be reawakened every now and then.

Have fun and don't take yourself too seriously. Balance in life is important for maintaining emotional health. Too much emphasis on work causes stress as well as wear and tear on the body and mind. Take time off; go to the beach, the park or a movie to take your mind off

your current quandaries. Chances are when you come back you will see things from a fresher, more productive perspective.

Maintain supportive relationships. Maintain good relationships with friends and family for much needed feedback, a shoulder to lean on or a different perspective. Often we get so caught up in our own problems and misery we can't see the forest for the trees. Having an objective pair of eyes and ears can give you a whole new way of thinking.

Donate your old clothes, furniture or items you don't use anymore to your local Good Samaritan, Salvation Army, church or charity of your choice. It will make you feel good, first by helping someone out and secondly by cleaning out your closets and basements of 'stuff' you haven't put to use in a long time.

Take some yoga classes, learn to meditate or incorporate a relaxation technique into your routine. This doesn't have to involve sitting with your legs crossed and humming. There are numerous meditation and relaxation videos on YouTube. It's easier to focus and follow along to someone's instructions than to try meditation on your own. YouTube also has binaural beats. These have been scientifically proven to change brain waves and functioning. There are beats for relaxation, sleep, stress reduction, overcoming trauma, coping with addiction, enhancing memory, and feeling more mentally focused. Listen to these before going to sleep or starting your day. I will tell you from personal experience that doing this for 15-30 minutes a day, for 30 days will have a significant impact on your overall functioning. I rank it right up there with exercise.

Learn to savor and appreciate the moment. How many times have we heard that life is too short? We get so caught up in the whirlwind that we forget to live in the present moment. Next time you are in line at the grocery store or waiting on car repairs, put down your phone and look at the world around you. Look at the people around you and wonder what makes them tick. Look at how many colors you can see and differentiate. Identify an object, say its name to yourself, and take a deep breath. Do this with three different objects. This will keep you in the moment, feeling grounded, and relaxed. It's time to slow down and enjoy the now!

-Josh Warnica, LCSW