

choose
well



*It's ok
to not be ok*

*My Guide to
Mental Health Resources*

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Why Do We Care?.....	4
Getting Started.....	5
Food, Exercise and Sleep.....	6
Prevention of Mental Illness.....	7
Nutrition for Optimal Mental Health.....	8
Physical Activity and Mental Health.....	9
Sleep and Mental Health.....	10
Parents and Caregivers.....	12
Post-partum Depression and Anxiety.....	13
Single Parenting.....	14
School-aged Children and Teens.....	15
Depression.....	17
Anxiety.....	18
Stress.....	20
Worksheet: When Managing Stress is Hard.....	21
Stress Reduction Exercises.....	22
Make a Stress Management Action Plan.....	25
Resources.....	26
Closing.....	28

Acknowledgment:

This toolkit was developed in collaboration with Well Being Trust, which provided resources and insight.



“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, more unabashed conversation about illness that affects not only individuals, but their families as well.”

-Glenn Close

Introduction

The purpose of this toolkit is to empower you with the resources, training materials and support to talk about behavioral health and stigma with your team or loved ones. As our organization continues to evolve as a dynamic health care organization, the health of all caregivers – both physically and mentally - is of utmost importance for the success of each individual and our organization.

Objectives

- Learn how to have conversations about you and your loved one's mental health and well-being
- Learn some tips on improving mental health and well-being
- Resources for all types of mental and behavioral health issues
- Learn about the tools in this kit and how you can utilize them at home and at work

The Discussion about Mental Health

People experiencing mental health conditions often face rejection, bullying and even discrimination. This can make their journey to recovery longer and more difficult. This stigma has been described as shame that can be felt as a judgment from someone else or a feeling that is internal, something that confuses feeling bad with being bad.

Navigating life with a mental health condition can be tough, and the isolation, blame and secrecy that is often encouraged by stigma can create huge challenges to reaching out, getting needed support and living well. Learning how to normalize and discuss mental health in our daily lives is important for all of us in our journey to better overall health for ourselves and our loved ones.

In this toolkit you will find reflections, resources, and strategies to enable you to take control of you and your family's mental health. You can jump around in the toolkit based on what sections apply to you and your unique situation.

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.”
– Fred Rogers

Why Do We Care?

- **1 in 5** (46.6 million) adults in the United States experience a mental health condition in a given year.
- **1 in 25** (11.2 million) adults in the United States experience a serious mental illness in a given year.
- Approximately **46.6 million** adults in the United States face the reality of managing a mental illness every day.
- Half of all lifetime mental health conditions begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24, but early intervention programs can help.
- **Up to 90%** of those who die by suicide have an underlying mental illness as revealed by psychological autopsy. 46% of those who die by suicide have a diagnosed mental illness.
- Suicide is the **10th leading cause** of death in the United States. With effective care, suicidal thoughts are treatable, and suicide is preventable.
- Individuals with mental health conditions face an average **11-year delay** between experiencing symptoms and starting treatment.
- Common barriers to treatment include the cost of mental health care and insurance, prejudice and discrimination, and structural barriers like transportation.
- Even though most people can experience relief from symptoms and support for their recovery in treatment, **less than half** of the adults in the United States get the help they need.

Getting Started

Mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being, and mental illnesses are common and treatable. So much of what we do physically impacts us mentally –it's important to pay attention to both our physical health and our mental health, which can help us achieve overall well-being.

A healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, as well as heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other chronic health problems. It can also play a big role in helping people recover from these conditions. Taking good care of your body is part of an all-around approach to mental health. Taking a daily walk is a great way to boost both your mental and physical health. Try a short walk during your lunch break or perhaps an after dinner walk with a family member or pet.

Getting the appropriate amount of exercise can help control weight, improve mental health, and help us live longer, healthier, more fulfilled lives. Sleep also plays a critical role in all aspects of our life and overall health. Getting a good night's sleep is key to having enough physical and mental energy to take on daily responsibilities. And we all know that stress can have a huge impact on all aspects of our health, so it's important to take time to focus on stress-reducing activities like meditation or yoga.

Mental illnesses are real, and recovery is always the goal. Living a healthy lifestyle may not be easy, but by looking at our overall health every day – both physically and mentally – we can go a long way to ensure our total well-being.

Resources:

Quiz: [How much do you know about mental health?](#)



choose
well

Food, Exercise and Sleep

Prevention of Mental Illness

Some mental illnesses cannot be prevented, and must therefore be diagnosed and treated as soon as they begin to appear. However, there are things we can do to take care of ourselves (namely our nutrition, our physical activity, and our sleep and stress reduction) that can impact our overall physical and mental health.

New research has shown that poor diet and mental illness may be linked, and that exercise can help to prevent physical and mental health symptoms from worsening.

Sleep and mental health are closely connected. Sleep deprivation affects our psychological state and mental health. And those with mental health problems are more likely to have insomnia or other sleep disorders.

More research still needs to be done in the fields to look at the prevention of mental illness through healthy lifestyle, but we do know that these factors are extremely important to our overall well-being.



- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Sleep

“Self-care is not selfish. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.
– Eleanor Brownn”

Nutrition for Optimal Mental Health

Our brains are always on -- taking care of our thoughts and movements, breathing, heartbeat and senses. It works hard, even when we are asleep. This means our brain require a constant source of fuel -- which comes from what we eat. The choices we make about what we eat directly affects the structure and function of our brains, and ultimately our moods. The field of Nutritional Psychiatry is relatively new, however there is data regarding the association between diet quality and mental health across countries, cultures and age groups – depression in particular. It has also been found that diet during early life is linked to mental health outcomes in children. For those with an active mental illness, experts caution that while diet can be part of a treatment plan, it shouldn't be considered a substitute for medication and other treatments.

Important Notes:

- People who eat a diet high in whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, legumes, fish and unsaturated fats (like olive oil) are up to 35% less likely to develop depression than people who eat less of these foods.
- Highly processed, fried and sugary foods have little nutritional value and should be avoided. Research shows that a diet that regularly includes these kinds of foods can increase the risk of developing depression by as much as 60%.
- Good nutrition starts in the womb. The children of women who eat diets high in processed, fried and sugary foods during pregnancy have more emotional problems in childhood. Similarly, diets low in whole, nutrient-dense foods and diets higher in junk and processed foods during the first years of life are linked to more emotional problems in children.

Key Nutrients:

- **Omega 3 Fatty Acids:** Essential to brain health, reduce inflammation and risk of heart disease. Found in oily fish (salmon, trout, mackerel, anchovies, sardines) as well as walnuts, flax seeds, chia seeds, and dark leafy green vegetables.
- **B Group Vitamins:** Help regulate neurotransmitters, immune function, and amino acids. Found in green leafy vegetables, whole grains, fish, poultry, and lean meats, as well as some breakfast cereals.
- **Vitamin D:** Important for optimal brain functioning, including mood and critical thinking. Fatty fish like salmon and tuna have the most naturally occurring Vitamin D. Also found in eggs, some dairy foods, and fortified cereal and beverages. Sunlight is a major source: 5-30 minutes of exposure twice a week generally produces enough Vit D in the body.

Source: Mentalhealthamerica.net

More Resources:

Article: [Gut Feelings: How Food Affects Your Mood](#)

Article: [Mental Health America: Eat Well](#)

Article: [Healthy Food Therapy: Eating for a Healthy Body and Mind](#)

Handout: [Complimentary Health Approaches](#)

Ted Talk: [The Surprisingly Dramatic Role of Nutrition in Mental Health](#)

Physical Activity and Mental Health

Staying active can benefit many aspects of your health and can even prevent physical and mental health symptoms from worsening. It's important to incorporate some type of exercise daily to ensure your body and your mind are healthy. Exercise benefits nearly all aspects of our health, and when a person doesn't get enough exercise, they are at increased risk for health problems. Physical activity can help prevent mental illness and is an important part of treatment.

People who exercise regularly tend to do so because it gives them an enormous sense of well-being. They often feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, have sharper memories, and feel more relaxed and positive about themselves and their lives. It's also powerful medicine for many common mental health challenges.

- Just **one hour a week** of exercise is related to lower levels of mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders.
- One study found that for people with anxiety, exercise had similar effects to cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in reducing symptoms.
- For people with schizophrenia, yoga is the most effective form of exercise for reducing symptoms associated with the disorder.

How Much is Enough?

- The general recommendation is 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity 5 days a week- but this doesn't have to be done all at once, you can also break it into 10-minute intervals, 15 times a week.
- Even just a few minutes of physical activity are better than none. If you don't have time for 15 or 30 minutes of exercise, or if your body tells you to take a break after 5 or 10 minutes, that's okay, too.
- Muscle strengthening exercises should be incorporated in at least twice a week. This includes yoga, lifting weights, resistance band exercises, and things like push-ups and sit-ups. If you are new to any of this, it is always best to consult your primary care provider before getting started.
- The key is to commit to some moderate physical activity (however little) on most days. As exercising becomes a habit, you can slowly add extra minutes or try different types of activities.

Source: *Mentalhealthamerica.net*

More Resources:

Article: Help Guide: [The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise](#)

Article: [Taking Care of Your Body](#)

Article: [How Your Mental Health Reaps the Benefits of Exercise](#)

Handout: [Complimentary Health Approaches](#)

Sleep and Mental Health

Many people experience problems sleeping including not getting enough sleep, not feeling rested and not sleeping well. This problem can lead to difficulties functioning during the daytime and have unpleasant effects on your work, social and family life. Problems sleeping can be secondary to a medical illness such as sleep apnea, or a mental health condition like depression. Sleep issues can also be a sign of an impending condition. In addition to affecting sleep itself, many medical and mental health conditions can be worsened by sleep-related problems.

More than one-half of insomnia cases are related to depression, anxiety or psychological stress. Often the qualities of a person's insomnia and their other symptoms can be helpful in determining the role of mental illness in a person's inability to sleep. Early morning wakefulness can be a sign of depression, along with low energy, inability to concentrate, sadness and a change in appetite or weight. On the other hand, a sudden dramatic decrease in sleep which is accompanied by increase in energy, or the lack of need for sleep may be a sign of mania.

Many anxiety disorders are associated with difficulties sleeping. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is frequently associated with poor sleep. Panic attacks during sleep may suggest a panic disorder. Poor sleep resulting from nightmares may be associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Substance abuse can also cause problems with sleep. While alcohol is sedating in limited quantities, intoxication with alcohol can make you wake up numerous times in the night and disturbs your sleep patterns. Some sedative medications may cause sleepiness during intoxication but can disturb sleep and cause serious problems sleeping in people who are addicted to or withdrawing from these medications.

Set Yourself up for Sleep Success

- Make sure you have a comfortable bed and mattress
- Keep your room between 60-68 degrees
- Make sure the room is nice and dark, use blackout curtains or a mask if that helps
- Make sleep a priority- try to make sure you are in bed for an adequate number of hours each night (for most adults this is 7-8 hours)
- Try to go to bed and get up at similar times every day

Source: NAMI.org

More Resources:

Article: [Sleep and Work](#)

Article: [Sleep Disorders: the connection between sleep and mental health](#)

Article: [Your Guide to Healthy Sleep](#)

Fact Sheet: [Mental Health America Sleep Fact Sheet](#)

choose
well



For Parents

Parents and Caregivers

Parenting and caregiving can be extremely rewarding, but is also almost universally challenging. Different issues arise every step of the way. Perhaps you are a new parent struggling with post-partum anxiety or depression, maybe you are trying to navigate being a single parent, or you could be worried that your adolescent or teen may be experiencing some behavioral health issues of their own.

When a friend or family member develops a mental health condition or you find yourself struggling with one, it's important to know that you're not alone. 1 in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental health condition. Mental health professionals have effective treatments for most of these conditions, yet in any given year, only 60% of people with a mental illness get the care they need.

As a result, family members and caregivers often play a large role in helping and supporting those with behavioral health issues. Millions of people

have experienced the thoughts and questions you might be having now. You may be doing your best to help a family member who doesn't have access to care or doesn't want help. Or you may want to learn how to support and encourage someone who has been hospitalized or experienced a similar mental health crisis.

Being a parent provides caregivers with the opportunity to set your child up on a lifetime of good mental health and well-being by modeling healthy behaviors, improving empathy, and more. Children often (though not always) copy their parents, and early habits can form lifetime bonds, so being a new parent provides a unique opportunity to get a child off on the path of good mental health and well-being. The information provided here can help you better understand some of the issues that you might face.



“Your kids require you most of all to love them for who they are, not to spend your whole time trying to correct them.”
-Bill Ayer

- Post-partum depression & anxiety
- Single Parenting
- Parenting School-aged Children and Teens

Post-partum Depression and Anxiety

Approximately 15% of new mothers will experience what is classified as postpartum depression (PPD), and about 10% will experience postpartum anxiety (PPA). Both of these conditions are treatable and can range in severity. The “baby blues” differ from PPD and PPA in that the symptoms are not as severe and usually resolve in about 1-2 weeks. If symptoms persist longer than that, or if they are ever accompanied by thoughts of harming oneself or others it is important to seek treatment immediately.

8 Warning Signs of Postpartum Depression (PPD)

1. **Your baby blues don't get better:** A dip in mood following birth is common, but if this hasn't resolved within 2 weeks it could be the sign of something more serious.
2. **Sadness or guilt consume your thoughts:** Frequent crying spells or feeling unhappy about being a parent may be among the first signs of PPD.
3. **You lose interest in things you enjoy:** Are you still enjoying your favorite foods, movies and spending time with your partner? If not, you may consider talking to your doctor.
4. **You have trouble making decisions:** You can't decide whether or not to get out of bed, take a shower, change baby's diaper or go for a walk. Maybe you are too tired, or maybe you don't care.
5. **You worry you won't be a good mom:** Worry is normal, but constant preoccupation with this can mean more.
6. **Your sleep patterns have changed:** Well, of course! But if you are unable to nap when your baby is, or you find yourself sleeping all the time, these may be warning signs.
7. **You've had big, stressful changes in your life:** Fighting with your partner, losing a loved one-stressful events like these can worsen your sadness and trigger PPD.
8. **You think of harming yourself, your baby, or others:** These thoughts are advanced signs of PPD or possibly postpartum psychosis. It is important to immediately seek treatment if this is the case.

Postpartum Anxiety (PPA)

Postpartum anxiety can involve physical symptoms similar to PPD. Changes in eating and sleeping, dizziness, hot flashes, rapid heartbeat, and nausea can all be signs of PPA, as well as the inability to sit still or focus on a particular task at hand. For the majority of women, these feelings kick in sometime between birth and baby's first birthday, but in some cases, they begin much earlier (during pregnancy).

Resources:

Postpartum Depression: [recognition and treatment](#)

[Interview with Mrs. California USA Universal 2017, Dawnel DeRubeis and Dr. Clayton Chau](#)

Postpartum Anxiety: [The Other Baby Blues We Need to Talk About](#)

Single Parenting

Being a parent changes your life. Parenthood is immensely rewarding but still challenging for each and every parent. If a parent is managing the family without the help of another partner, it can come with specific challenges. There are many reasons a person might be taking on parenting on their own, but regardless of the reason, single parenting is on the rise in the United States. With the right support and mindset, single parents can raise happy, healthy children while staying happy and healthy themselves.

Some Single Parent Challenges/Stressors

- Negotiating custody and visitation
- Navigating financial issues
- Obtaining health care
- Finding additional role models
- Helping children deal with loss
- Helping children cope with parental conflict
- Acquiring child care

Some Ways to Cope

Avoid beating yourself up. You may not always give your kids home-cooked meals or have a tidy home. Oftentimes being a single parent means some shifting of priorities. Spending time with your kids and practicing self-care should top the list. Try to focus on what you can do to keep your child or children healthy and happy instead of worrying about the things that they may be missing out on.

Don't focus on the negative. If your child does have contact with their other parent, don't use them to deliver messages. Try to not complain about or criticize your ex in front of them. Find role models for your child that can demonstrate healthy adult behaviors.

Communicate and be consistent. Try to provide routines throughout the year to ensure a sense of stability for yourself and your child. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings around both family and non-family issues. Try not to hide from tough questions or sweep them under the rug.

Take care of yourself. Pay careful attention to how you are caring for or neglecting your mental, physical and emotional health. Don't abandon your own goals- motivated people are happier people and therefore better parents. Above all, utilize your support network for your own mental and emotional health as well as your child or children's.

Resources for Single Parents:

Article: [14 Tips for Single Parents](#)

Article: [Successful Single Parenting](#)

Article: [Single Parenting: Finding Support](#)

Website: [Resources, Support, Networking \(Single Parent Advocate\)](#)

School-aged Children and Teens

Once your children are in school a whole host of new opportunities for their mental health and well-being arise—school presents an opportunity for children to learn some independence and interact with others to learn empathy and social skills that are vital for having a strong and healthy life. Children and teens are subject to many pressures and it can be challenging to know how to best support them through these trying times.

Children and teens can develop the same mental health issues as adults, but their symptoms may be different. It's important to try to recognize the signs in your child and seek help as soon as possible. Some warning signs in children and teens include:

- Mood changes
- Intense feelings
- Behavior changes
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Physical symptoms (commonly headaches and stomach aches)
- Physical harm
- Substance abuse

The resources on this page are meant for you as a parent, but also to share those you feel are appropriate and relevant for your children. Please remember that our Caregiver Assistance Program is for you AND your family and don't hesitate to reach out.

Additional Resources:

[Well Being Trust Mental Health School Toolkit for Parents](#)

Video: [Well Being Trust Anti-Stigma Suicide Awareness](#)

Video: Breaking the Stigma: [A Short Film about Mental Health](#)

Handout: [5 Ways You Can Help Prevent Bullying](#)

Article: [How to Get Your Kids Back to School Ready](#)

Article: [5 Ways to Be Well as You Head Back to High School](#)

Article: [Is it a Mental Health Problem or Just Puberty?](#)

Article: [How to Talk to Your Kids About Mental Health](#)

Tool: [Depression Self-Assessment for Kids and Teens](#)

[Botvin LifeSkills Training](#)

A close-up photograph of two young women smiling and hugging each other. The woman on the left has dark hair and is wearing sunglasses on her head and a colorful patterned shirt. The woman on the right has long, light brown hair and is wearing a black top with a beaded bracelet. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor setting. The text 'choose well' is overlaid in the top right corner in a bold, orange, sans-serif font.

choose
well

Depression & Anxiety

Depression

It's normal to feel sad or down from time to time, but if you start to feel overwhelmed by hopelessness or despair, you may need to explore what is truly going on. Depression changes how you feel, think and function in your daily activities. It can interfere with your ability to work, eat, sleep, and enjoy life, making getting through the day a difficult task. If untreated, depression can become a serious health condition, so it is important to recognize the signs and seek out help as soon as possible.

Some Common Symptoms:

- **Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness:** Feeling like nothing will ever get better and you can't improve your situation
- **Loss of interest in daily activities:** Losing your ability to feel joy or pleasure, no longer enjoying normal hobbies or activities
- **Appetite or weight changes:** Significant weight gain or loss, or a noticeable increase or decrease in your appetite
- **Sleep changes:** Most notably insomnia, with early morning wakefulness, or oversleeping
- **Anger or irritability:** Feeling agitated, restless or violent with a low tolerance level and short temper
- **Loss of energy:** Feeling fatigued, sluggish and drained. Even small tasks may feel exhausting
- **Self-loathing:** Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt. Harshly criticizing yourself for anything that goes wrong
- **Reckless Behavior:** You take risks you normally would not, engaging in escapist behavior like substance abuse, reckless driving, etc.
- **Concentration Problems:** Trouble with focusing, being indecisive or being forgetful
- **Unexplained aches and pains:** You have an increase in physical complaints – such as headaches, stomach aches and back pain

When you're feeling depressed or suicidal, your problems don't seem temporary—they seem overwhelming and permanent. But with time, you will feel better, especially if you get help. If you are having any thoughts of harming yourself please call **1-800-273-TALK**.

If you think a friend or family member is considering suicide, express your concern and seek help immediately. Do not leave them alone. Talking openly about suicidal thoughts and feelings can save a life.

Other Resources:

[More information about depression](#)

[Depression Self-Assessment](#)

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Information and links for screener and assessment tools

“ You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf. ”

Anxiety

An estimated 264 million people worldwide have an anxiety disorder. It is the most common form of mental illness and left untreated can have a significant impact on your physical health. . If you have an anxiety-related disorder your fear or worry does not go away and can get worse over time. Most people who seek treatment and make some lifestyle changes experience a significant improvement in their quality of life.

Differences between anxiety and depression:

Though depression and anxiety are two different medical conditions, sometimes their symptoms, causes and treatments can overlap. Here are some tips for how you can tell the difference.

Sleep problems, trouble concentrating, and fatigue are all symptoms of both anxiety and depression and irritability may also manifest in both conditions. People certainly may suffer from both anxiety and depression, but the following are a few ways to distinguish the two for those who suffer from one or the other:

- People with depression may move more slowly, and their reactions can seem flattened or dulled
- People with anxiety tend to be more “keyed up” as they try to keep up with their racing thoughts
- People with anxiety often have and sometimes express fear about the future
- People with depression have less fear about the future and are often resigned to thinking things will continue to be bad

If you have symptoms that you think might be pointing to depression, anxiety, or both it is important to see a health care provider as soon as possible or make an appointment with a mental health specialist.

More Resources:

[Information on managing anxiety](#)

[Generalized anxiety disorder screener](#)

Video: [Anxiety: What is it?](#)

Article: [Anxiety: Stop Negative Thoughts](#)

choose
well



Stress

Stress

It's natural for our mind and body to respond to stress- both positive and negative. However, there can be periods of time where stress becomes overwhelming and all-consuming. If we don't deal with this type of stress it can lead to more serious issues. Here are some resources for managing and coping with daily stressors.

When Managing Stress is Hard

A worksheet to help identify areas of stress and ways to cope

Stress Reduction Exercises

Some simple exercises you can do at home or at work

Make a Stress Management Action Plan

5 Steps to help take control of stress

Worksheet: When Managing Stress is Hard

Making changes to the way you handle stress can be tough. But it is possible. Here are some questions to think about that might help you get started.

1. What do you want to change about how you manage stress?

2. What are the negative effects of how you currently handle stress? Are they getting in the way of living your life the way you want?

3. If you made changes, how would life get better?

4. What has worked before to help you make and keep changes to your lifestyle?

5. What is one thing you can do during a defined period of time (one day/week/month/year, etc) to start making the changes to how you deal with stress that you mentioned in question number one?

6. Who or what can help you stay accountable to yourself? This can be someone who is working on changes with you or helping you stay on track. It can also be an app or wearable device that helps you track things.

7. How can you break up your goal into smaller milestones? How can you reward yourself for reaching these milestones?

Activity developed with help from: Mental Health America

Stress Reduction Exercises

1) Deep breathing

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple yet powerful relaxation technique. It's easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. While apps and audio downloads can guide you through the process, all you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

How to practice deep breathing:

Instead of breathing from the chest, breathe from the belly. Belly breathing stimulates the vagus nerve, which runs from the head down the neck, through the chest, and to the colon. This activates your relaxation response, reducing your heart rate and blood pressure and lowering stress levels.

Source: Harvard Men's Health Watch May 2019

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying down. Put a small book on your stomach and breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.

Stress Reduction Exercises

2) Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. With regular practice, it gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body. This can help you react to the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind.

Progressive muscle relaxation can be combined with deep breathing for additional stress relief.

Practicing progressive muscle relaxation

Consult with your doctor first if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles.

- Start at your feet and work your way up to your face, trying to only tense those muscles intended.
- Loosen clothing, take off your shoes, and get comfortable.
- Take a few minutes to breathe in and out in slow, deep breaths.
- When you're ready, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels.
- Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10.
- Relax your foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and how your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
- Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- Shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the different muscle groups.
- It may take some practice at first but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

Progressive muscle relaxation sequence

1. Right foot, then left foot
2. Right calf, then left calf
3. Right thigh, then left thigh
4. Hips and buttocks
5. Stomach
6. Chest
7. Back
8. Right arm and hand, then left arm and hand
9. Neck and shoulders
10. Face

Stress Reduction Exercises

3) Body Scan Meditation

This is a type of meditation that focuses your attention on various parts of your body. Like progressive muscle relaxation, you start with your feet and work your way up. But instead of tensing and relaxing muscles, you simply focus on the way each part of your body feels, without labeling the sensations as either “good” or “bad”.

- Lie on your back, legs uncrossed, arms relaxed at your sides, eyes open or closed. Focus on your breathing for about two minutes until you start to feel relaxed.
- Turn your focus to the toes of your right foot. Notice any sensations you feel while continuing to also focus on your breathing. Imagine each deep breath flowing to your toes. Remain focused on this area for one to two minutes.
- Move your focus to the sole of your right foot. Tune in to any sensations you feel in that part of your body and imagine each breath flowing from the sole of your foot. After one or two minutes, move your focus to your right ankle and repeat. Move to your calf, knee, thigh, hip, and then repeat the sequence for your left leg. From there, move up the torso, through the lower back and abdomen, the upper back and chest, and the shoulders. Pay close attention to any area of the body that causes you pain or discomfort.
- After completing the body scan, relax for a while in silence and stillness, noting how your body feels. Then slowly open your eyes and stretch, if necessary.

4) Mindfulness Meditation

Rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on the past, mindfulness meditation switches the focus to what’s happening right now, enabling you to be fully engaged in the present moment.

Meditations that cultivate mindfulness have long been used to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions. Some of these practices bring you into the present by focusing your attention on a single repetitive action, such as your breathing or a few repeated words. Other forms of mindfulness meditation encourage you to follow and then release internal thoughts or sensations. Mindfulness can also be applied to activities such as walking, exercising, or eating.

A basic mindfulness meditation:

1. Find a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted or distracted.
2. Sit on a straight-backed chair or cross-legged on the floor.
3. Find a point of focus, such as your breathing—the sensation of air flowing into your nostrils and out of your mouth or your belly rising and falling—or an external focus, such as a candle flame or a meaningful word that you repeat throughout the meditation.
4. Don’t worry about distracting thoughts that go through your mind or about how well you’re doing. If thoughts intrude your relaxation session, don’t fight them, just gently turn your attention back to your point of focus.

Make a Stress Management Action Plan

By: © liveandworkwell.com. All rights reserved. June 06 2017

Follow these steps to help take control over your stress and learn how to manage it.

1. Make a list of all the things giving you stress – from the special project at work to your child's report card to your financial situation.
2. Cross off all the things you cannot control.
3. With the remaining stress factors, think of ways you can change the situation or reduce the stress. Many times, just identifying one small, doable action will significantly reduce the stress.
4. Look at what can be delegated to others, both at work and at home.
5. Review the items you crossed off the list. Remind yourself these are a source of unnecessary stress, because these are out of your control.

Here is an example to help you get started: You may feel stressed about an upcoming project at work. This project has many tasks and you worry you won't complete it on time. You also worry your supervisor won't like what you prepare.

Make a list of your stressors.

- Completing special project within given time frame.
- Supervisor won't like special project

Next assess what you cannot control. You are not in control of how your supervisor feels or perceives your work. You can meet the standards outlined, but you cannot change how your supervisor feels. What you can do is to be sure ahead of time you know exactly what your supervisor expects from you.

Brainstorm what you can do to ensure you can complete the project. Breaking it into manageable pieces makes the project less overwhelming and will help reduce some of your stress.

Now you are doing what you can with what you can control.

Other Stress Resources:

Article: [Caregiver Stress](#)

[Managing Stress Coloring Page](#)



choose
well

Resources

Resources

Reflections:

Starting your meeting off with a reflection can be a powerful way to get your team centered and bring them to the present moment. Incorporate one of the provided slides into your team meetings.

The slides are ready to be copied and pasted into your meeting presentation.

[Click here to download](#)

Caregiver Assistance Program:

Sometimes, keeping our lives in balance is difficult and we need a little help to restore our equilibrium. That's why our Caregiver Assistance Program is there for you at no cost. Check out the free services offered.

[Click here to learn more](#)

Key Contact Numbers:

Caregiver Assistance Program

Optum: 844-875-5716

Lyra (Alaska Only): 844-311-6223

Anthem (NorCal Only): 800-999-7222

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Free & Confidential, Available 24/7

Crisis Text Line:

Text HOME to 741741, 24/7 Crisis support in the US

Helpful Websites:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org

Mental Health America:

<http://mentalhealthamerica.net>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org

National Institute of Mental Health:

www.nimh.nih.gov

Postpartum Support International:

www.postpartum.net

Well Being Trust:

<https://wellbeingtrust.org/>

The free resources on this page can be used or mentioned in meetings or passed along to your team so they have them on hand. We encourage you to check out the tools and resources, so you know what is available.



choose
well

*Your present
circumstances
don't determine
where you can
go; they merely
determine where
you start.*

-Nido Qubein

Closing thoughts...

We must take a whole person approach to well-being. As we do this, we need to focus on how we can help people access opportunities to improve their lifestyles and support those around us in making healthy changes—the healthy choice should be the easy choice for everyone! Mental health and well-being resources are at all of our fingerprints—and subtle changes can pay massive dividends. We leave you with the question of how will do your part to make sure that everyone can achieve their fullest potential?