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Wellness Matters

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Stay Healthy

Boost Your Mental Well-Being

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans have overall reported increases in anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide. In these uncertain times, building resilience is a priority; safeguard your mental well-being for the days ahead with these steps:

Express Gratitude Take five minutes a day to write down the things that you are grateful for. This has been proven to lower stress levels and can help change your mindset from negative to positive. Build time into your routine to practice positivity or express gratitude to change your outlook and boost your mood.

Get Exercise Regular exercise can improve brain function, reduce anxiety, and boost self-image. Exercise outdoors is even better. Try to get outside periodically throughout the day. Whether just time in your backyard or a complete outdoor exercise routine, either provides fresh air and a change of

scenery. Outside time also helps promote higher vitamin D levels, which the body makes when skin is directly exposed to the sun. Those with higher levels of vitamin D may have a lower risk of cancer, heart disease, depression, and more. Many are



deficient without realizing it; time outside can help correct that.

Get Enough Sleep Try for 7-8 hours of sleep each night to improve your physical and mental health; less can put you at risk for health issues. Lack of sleep is linked with chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression, and obesity. Regular sleep deficiency can lead to chronic fatigue. Sleep quality is also key:

if you wake up throughout the night, awake feeling unrested (even if you slept 7+ hours), or have breathing issues while sleeping, talk with your doctor.

Don't Obsess Over the News

It can be easy to become overwhelmed by watching the news and reviewing COVID-19 updates. While it's important to be informed, avoid fixating on the latest news. For example, instead of monitoring the news all day, check for updates once in the morning and once at night; turn off continual news notifications to your phone.

Maintain an Overall Routine

A structured daily routine can help to maintain normalcy in unusual times. Knowing what is next in your day helps you focus and avoid distress.

Try these positive steps to help preserve your mental well-being. If you have concerns, talk with your doctor or contact your mental health professional.

Selecting a Mental Health Professional

For the many Americans who seek help from a mental health professional, selecting a provider is a decision to make carefully. Credentials, competence, and your own comfort level are worth considering.

Psychiatrists have medical degrees, can prescribe medication, and have completed three years of residency training (beyond medical school) in mental health care.

Psychologists have a doctorate in psychology and, generally, complete one or two years of internship prior to licensure.

Professional Counselors have, at minimum, a master's degree in a mental health discipline and two years of post-graduate supervised experience.

Marriage and Family Therapists typically have a master's degree or doctorate in marriage and family therapy plus at least one year of supervised practice.

Social Workers have a minimum of a master's degree in social work and at least two years of post-graduate supervised experience.

Finding the right professional can require work. If you are depressed or have another mental illness, it can be difficult to do that work on your own; try locating a provider through your insurer, primary doctor, or referrals from friends or family.

Consider factors that are important to you like age, race, gender, religion, and cultural background; rule out those providers that don't meet your criteria. Once you identify a potential provider, ask the following and more to help you make a decision:

- What types of treatment do you provide?
- How will we determine treatment goals?
- How will we measure progress?
- Do you handle emergencies?
- Do you charge for missed appointments?



Healthy & Nutritious Cut Back on Salt

Monitoring your daily sodium intake can have major health benefits, like reducing your risk of heart attack or stroke and lowering your blood pressure. February is [American Heart Month](#); take care of your heart by limiting your sodium intake to no more than 1,500 milligrams per day. If you need to reduce the amount of salt in your diet, get started now:

- Limit restaurant meals: typical restaurant meals are high in sodium. Order lower-sodium options or cook at home more often.
- Read the facts: ingredients to avoid due to their high salt content include sodium chloride, monosodium glutamate, sodium bicarbonate, and disodium phosphate.
- Avoid high salt foods: many brands offer low-sodium varieties of foods like cottage cheese, canned soups, spaghetti sauce, and beans.
- Put away the salt shaker: avoid adding salt before and after cooking. Experiment with other flavors such as black pepper, garlic, lime or lemon juice, and red wine vinegar.
- Avoid a sedentary lifestyle: combine your reduced salt diet with exercise and an overall healthy lifestyle to lower your risk.