



Wellness Matters

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It's OK Not to Be OK

Mental Health Awareness Month, observed every May, serves as a crucial reminder that mental health is just as important as physical health. This observance is meant to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage individuals to seek help when needed.

More than half of adults in the United States will experience mental illness—which refers to a variety of diagnosed conditions that affect one's mood, behavior, feelings, or thinking—at some point in their lives. Mental illnesses can occur occasionally, while others are chronic. The most common mental illnesses include anxiety disorder, major depression, and bipolar disorder. However, roughly half of adults with mental illness in the United States don't receive the treatment they need.

Common barriers to receiving treatment include the high costs of and difficulty accessing mental health care, mental health provider shortages, and the stigma associated with mental health. When left untreated, mental health conditions can affect the ability to manage both work and personal responsibilities.

You Are Not Alone

Mental health conditions are common, real, and often treatable. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness, so consider the following ways to gain mental health support:

- **Talk to someone you trust**—a friend, mentor, or family member—and share your feelings.
- **Use confidential 24/7 hotlines** for immediate support. The SAMHSA's National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP [4357]) is a treatment referral and information service. You can also call or text 988 for the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for yourself or others experiencing a mental health crisis.
- **Join support groups** to gain a sense of community and understanding.
- **Practice self-care activities**, such as exercise, healthy eating, quality sleep, mindfulness, and hobbies.
- **Seek professional help** from therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists to navigate mental health challenges.

Most people experience mental health challenges at some point, and seeking help is a courageous—and critical—step toward recovery.

4 Reasons Why Reading Is Good for Your Brain

Reading is often considered a leisurely activity, but its benefits extend beyond entertainment. Daily reading can significantly impact mental health by enhancing cognitive function, reducing stress, and fostering emotional well-being. Some health practitioners even pursue bibliotherapy—books used as a therapeutic tool—to support and treat individuals living with anxiety, depression, and grief.

Here are four reasons why incorporating reading into your daily routine helps your brain:


1. **Cognitive stimulation**—Regular readers are more likely to maintain their cognitive ability as they age.
2. **Stress reduction**—Reading for as little as six minutes can reduce stress by 68%. It can also be a healthy escape from daily stressors. You immerse yourself in a new world and, without visuals, can invent or visualize it yourself.
3. **Improved focus**—Reading requires concentration and attention to detail, which can improve one's general ability to focus on tasks.
4. **Social skill development**—Frequent fiction readers often have better social ability and can easily empathize with others.

While it's clear that reading is beneficial, mental illness may impact one's ability to read. If that's the case, here are some tips for improving your relationship with reading:

- **Listen to audiobooks.** Yes, listening to a book counts. Many people find it easier to process auditory words versus written words.
- **Select books you like.** Don't give in to pressure to read classic or new releases that people are talking about. Read the genres you actually enjoy. This can also keep you motivated.
- **Read short formats.** If an entire book feels intimidating, opt for short stories, magazines, or even interesting articles. Experiment with different formats to find what you like best.
- **Don't pressure yourself.** If your identity feels tied to reading or you're worried about reading goals, let that self-imposed pressure go and focus on other hobbies that bring you joy.

Making reading a daily habit can yield many cognitive and emotional benefits. For further guidance, contact a mental health professional.

WHOLE GRAIN HEALTHY GAINS



Whole grains provide the nutrients necessary for your overall health and can reduce your risk of many chronic diseases. Make sure you're getting three to five servings of whole grains daily.

Whole Grain Benefits

- Reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.
- Helps with weight management.
- Helps prevent neural tube defects, spina bifida, and anencephaly during fetal development when consumed before and during pregnancy.
- Provides an excellent source of dietary fiber, B vitamins, (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and folate) and minerals (iron, magnesium and selenium).
- Helps the body release energy from protein, fat, and carbohydrates, and are also important for a healthy nervous system.
- Boost immune system.

How Can You Get Your Fill?

- Eat whole wheat, bran, oat, or multigrain breads, cereals, muffins, and rolls.
- Choose whole grain oatmeal—it provides 4 grams of fiber per serving.
- Replace all-purpose flour with whole-wheat flour.
- Cook with whole grain pasta, brown rice, or bulgur (cracked wheat).
- Snack on multigrain, rye, or whole grain crackers.

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