

Take charge of your mental health



You can maintain good mental health or improve your mental health and well-being by practicing smart lifestyle choices. The self-care strategies outlined below can help you take charge of your mental health. For each strategy, indicate if you do it most of the time, sometimes or rarely.

Self-assessment: Take care of your body¹

How often do you practice this habit?	Self-care strategies
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<p>Get enough sleep.</p> <p>Try to keep as regular a sleep schedule as you can and get seven to eight hours of quality sleep every night. Sleep deprivation promotes mood swings, irritability and general unhappiness. It is also linked to many chronic physical and mental conditions, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, depression and schizophrenia. The quality of sleep is just as important as the quantity of sleep. Tips for getting a good night's sleep are provided below.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<p>Participate in regular physical activity.</p> <p>Physical activity and exercise have been shown to help improve some mental conditions, including in people who are also taking antidepressant medication. Over the long term, regular aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking) also helps to prevent depression from coming back.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<p>Practice healthy eating habits.</p> <p>Eating healthy meals and snacks can make a difference when dealing with mental illness. Weight management is often a challenge. Try to include vegetables, fruits, whole grains as well as lean meats, fish and low-fat dairy products every day. Stay away from processed foods, added sugar and sodium and caffeine. Make sure you're getting enough vitamins, minerals and other healthy nutrients from your food, especially omega-3 fatty acids, folate and vitamin B12.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<p>Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.</p> <p>Smoking, vaping or drinking too much alcohol as a way to cope with stress make matters worse. They are harmful to your health and actually reduce your coping skills. Avoid taking drugs to cope, unless your health care provider has prescribed medications for you. Always take medications exactly as directed.</p>

Self-assessment: Take care of your mind^{1,2}

How often do you practice this habit?	Self-care strategies
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	Relax and recharge. Set aside time for yourself. Even a few minutes of quiet time can be refreshing and help to calm your mind and reduce anxiety. Many people benefit from practices such as deep breathing, visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, stretching, meditation and yoga. Select a technique that you will enjoy and practice it regularly.
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	Focus on positive thoughts. Monitor your “self-talk” (the things you say to yourself) and choose to think positive thoughts. Consider starting each day by listing things you are grateful for. Maintain a sense of hope, work to accept changes as they occur and try to keep problems in perspective. Recognize that some days will be better than others.
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	Use your moral compass or spiritual beliefs for support. If you draw strength from a belief system, it can bring you comfort during difficult times.
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	Limit screen time. Turn off electronic devices for some time each day. Make a conscious effort to spend less time in front of a screen — television, tablet, computer and phone. Also, limit exposure to news media. In times of an emergency or disaster, constant news of all types can heighten fears. While it is important to look for reliable sources of national and local recommendations, try to limit news and social media that may expose you to rumors and false information.
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	Set priorities. Set reasonable goals each day and outline steps you will take to reach those goals. Give yourself credit for every step in the right direction, no matter how small. Remember, small steps build success.

Tips for getting a good night’s sleep

- Have a comfortable, safe and quiet place to sleep. A dark room with a cool temperature generally promotes better sleep.
- Don’t go to sleep hungry. If needed, have a healthy bedtime snack. Avoid a large meal late at night to prevent indigestion.
- Exercise regularly, but don’t do strenuous exercise at bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine for at least six to eight hours before bedtime. Caffeine is a stimulant that blocks sleep-inducing receptors in the brain and fools the body into thinking it’s not tired.
- Avoid screen time for at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Expose your face and skin to sunlight for at least 15 to 20 minutes each day, ideally in the morning, to keep your body’s internal clock adjusted and promote good sleep.
- Be aware that medications, including over-the-counter drugs, may contain ingredients that disrupt sleep. Examples include decongestants and pain relievers. Know the side effects of any medications you take

**What can you do?**

Take charge of your lifestyle and make your mental health a priority.



Sources:

1. Mayo Clinic. COVID-19 and your mental health, 2020.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Coping with Stress, 2019.

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