

10 things you can do for your mental health

Try some or all of the 10 tips below to help find the right balance in your life during uncertain times. If you are receiving treatment for a mental illness, these tips can help you manage your disorder and support your treatment and recovery.

1. VALUE YOURSELF. Treat yourself with kindness and respect, and avoid self-criticism. Make time for your hobbies and favorite projects, or broaden your horizons. Do a daily crossword puzzle, plant a garden, take dance lessons, learn to play an instrument or become fluent in another language.

2. TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY. Taking care of yourself physically can improve your mental health. Be sure to eat nutritious meals, avoid cigarettes, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep and **EXERCISE**. In fact, exercise has been shown to help decrease depression and anxiety, and improve people's moods.

3. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH GOOD PEOPLE. People with strong family or social connections are generally healthier than those who lack a support network. Make plans with supportive family members and friends, or seek out activities where you can meet new people, such as a club, class or support group.

4. GIVE OF YOURSELF. Volunteer your time and energy to help someone else. You'll feel good about doing something tangible to help someone in need—and it's a great way to meet new people.

5. LEARN HOW TO DEAL WITH STRESS. Like it or not, stress is a part of life. Practice good coping skills: Do Tai chi, exercise, take a nature walk, play with your pet or try journal writing as a stress-reducer. Also, remember to smile and see the humor in life. Research shows that laughter can boost your immune system, ease pain, relax your body and reduce stress.



6. QUIET YOUR MIND. Try meditating or reaching out spiritually through prayer. Relaxation exercises and prayer can improve your state of mind and outlook on life. In fact, research shows that meditation may help you feel calm and enhance the effects of therapy.

7. SET REALISTIC GOALS. Decide what you want to achieve professionally or personally, and write down the steps you need to take to realize your goals. Aim high, but be realistic and don't over schedule. You'll enjoy a tremendous sense of accomplishment and self-worth as you progress toward your goal.

8. BREAK UP THE MONOTONY. Although our routines make us more efficient and enhance our feelings of security and safety, a little change of pace can help perk up a tedious schedule. Alter your jogging route, plan a road-trip, take a walk in a different park, hang some new pictures or try a new restaurant.

9. AVOID DRUGS AND ALCOHOL. Keep alcohol use to a minimum and avoid drugs. Substance abuse is one of our society's biggest health concerns. Sometimes people use alcohol or other drugs to "self-medicate" the symptoms of a mental disorder. But in reality, alcohol and drugs only aggravate mental illness.

10. GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT. Seeking help is a sign of strength—not a weakness. And it is important to remember that treatment is effective. People who get appropriate care can recover from mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and lead full, productive lives.

To learn more, call Peninsula Community Mental Health Center at (360) 457-0431.