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Mental health and substance use
information you can trust



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

tips for good mental health

Part of the Plainer Language Series

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tips for good mental health

You have probably heard about different ways to take care of your body. Did you know that you can take care of your mind, too?

Mental health is the way we think and feel about ourselves and the world around us. When we practice good mental health, it is easier to handle stress and other problems. In this sheet, you will learn different ways to build good mental health. You will learn how to:

1. Take care of your body
2. Practice healthy thinking
3. Slow down
4. Have fun
5. Reach out



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1. Take care of your body

Our bodies and our minds are connected. When you take care of your body, you also take care of your mind.



Eat well

Food is our fuel. It gives us important nutrients that help our bodies work. It makes sense that the better we eat, the better we work. Our brains work better, too. Research shows that the food we eat is a big part of mental health. Healthy foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains give us the nutrients to work our best.



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Here are some tips on taking care of your body:

- Eat regularly, so your body has enough fuel to work well all day. Skipping meals can make you feel tired or irritable.
- Watch out for too much caffeine. Caffeine is the part of coffee and black tea that gives you energy. It is in other drinks and snacks, too. Caffeine can add to feelings of anxiety. It can also stop you from sleeping well.
- Watch how much sugar you eat. Eating sugar gives you a quick burst of energy. But when that energy is gone, you feel more tired. It can lower your mood and make you feel irritable.
- Watch your alcohol use. Alcohol just hides problems for a short time. It makes sadness, stress and other feelings harder to deal with later on.



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To learn more about eating well, talk to a dietician. Dietitians have special training to help people eat well. In BC, you can talk to a dietician for free. Call 8-1-1 or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/dietitian to learn more.

Exercise

Exercise is good for your body. But did you know that it is also good for mental health? Here are a few ways exercise can help:



- It helps us cope with stress.
- It lowers anxiety.
- It lifts our mood.
- It boosts our energy.
- It helps us feel good about ourselves
- It helps us sleep well.

You do not have to spend a lot of time for these effects, either. Just 30 minutes a day, three or four days a week is enough to see big changes. It does not matter what kind of activity you do.

Here are some tips for boosting the mental health effects of exercise:

- Pick something you enjoy. Remember, you can do any activity that gets you moving! If you like the activity, you are more likely to do it.
- Focus on how the activity makes you feel.
- Exercise with someone else. You will get the benefits of exercise, plus you will connect with someone else. This is also good for your mental health. You are also more likely to keep up with your exercise sessions if you plan them with someone else.
- The next time you feel sad, worried or stressed, try going for a walk outside. Walking is a fast and easy way to feel better about things in your life.



If you have a health problem, talk to your doctor before you start a new exercise program.

Get enough sleep

Sleep has a huge effect on mental health. When we get enough sleep, it is easier to cope with stress, handle problems, concentrate, think positively and remember things.

The exact amount of sleep you need is based on your own body. You know that you are getting enough sleep when you do not feel sleepy during the day.

It is easy to think that we can get more done if we cut back on sleep. But it is harder to get things done when we do not get enough sleep.

Here are some things to try if you do not sleep well:

- Avoid exercising too close to your bedtime. Exercise gives you energy. But slow, relaxing activities like yoga can help calm you down before bed.
- Avoid big meals, alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine before bed. Caffeine is the part of coffee or black tea that makes you feel awake.



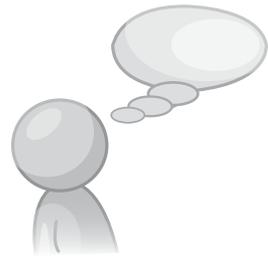
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- Make sure your room is comfortable for sleeping. Many people find that they sleep best when their room is dark, quiet and cool.
- Stick to quiet activities just before bed, like reading.
- Follow a routine. Try to go to bed around the same time every night and wake up around the same time every morning, even on weekends.
- Only use your bedroom for sleeping and sex. Do work or watch TV in a different room.
- Avoid naps during the day if you have a hard time sleeping at night.
- Avoid sleeping pills. You may fall asleep faster, but they do not give you good, restful sleep.

Most people have sleep problems from time to time. If you often have sleep problems, it is best to talk to your doctor.

2. Practice healthy thinking

Good mental health does not mean that we only ever have happy thoughts. Sad or upsetting things are part of life. Problems are also part of life. Good mental health means looking at the situation for what it really is.



Watch for thinking traps

The way we think about something has a big effect on the way we feel. If we feel like we can handle a problem, we often feel good. If we do not think that we can handle a problem, we often feel bad.

Sometimes, we think that something is bad, even when it is not true. These thoughts are sometimes called “thinking traps.” They are traps because they are easy to fall into and can get us stuck and feeling bad.



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Here are some common thinking traps:

- Thinking that bad things always happen to you. “I wanted to go to the beach, but now it is raining. This always happens to me! Now my day is ruined!”
- Thinking that something can only be all good or all bad. “I did not do as well as I wanted on that last test. I am not smart enough for this course.”
- Focusing only on the negative part of a situation. “My team won, but I cannot believe I missed that shot. I must be very bad at soccer. Maybe I should stop playing.”
- Jumping to conclusions before you know what really happened. “My friend did not call me back. She must not like me very much.”

You can challenge your thinking trap by looking at the facts. The next time you notice yourself falling into a thinking trap, ask yourself questions to find the facts. Here are some questions to ask:



- Is there any proof to back up this thought?
- Have I thought about all sides of the situation? Is there anything I missed?
- Have I been in this position before? What happened then?
- If my friend was in the same situation, what would I say?

Once you have looked at the facts, you can replace the thinking trap thought with a more balanced thought.



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Solve problems

We face problems every day. We can fix some problems easily, but other problems are not as easy to solve. When we do not take action, stress can build up until we do not know what to do next.



This is an easy way to tackle problems. The next time you are facing a problem, follow these steps:

Step 1: Decide what the problem is. Try to be as exact as possible. It is easier to solve a problem when you know what needs to be fixed.

Step 2: Think of different solutions or end goals. Think of as many as you can. Write them all down, even if they seem silly.

Step 3: Pick the solution that you think will work best.

Step 4: Decide what you need to do to try your solution. This is your plan. You can break your plan into smaller steps if you need to.

Step 5: Put your plan into action. Remember to use your balanced thinking skills.

Step 6: Look back to see if your plan worked. If it did not work, pick a different solution from your list in Step 2 and make a new plan. Keep going until you find a solution that works.

3. Slow down

We all need to take time to slow down and relax. It is a big part of managing stress and enjoying our lives.

When we do not take time to slow down, stresses can add up until we feel too overwhelmed to do anything.

When we relax, it is easier to see problems and solutions clearly. It is easier to manage difficult feelings, and it is easier to see the good sides of things. It is easier to focus on what is happening now instead of worrying about the past or future.



How you relax is up to you. Yoga, meditation, tai chi and breathing exercises are popular activities. Other people relax by reading, doing art, exercising, spending time in nature or playing with pets. Many community centres or community groups have classes you can join. You can also learn more online or in books.

4. Have fun!

Doing things we enjoy is good for our health. It helps us feel refreshed and helps us feel good about ourselves. Then it is easier to cope with stress and other problems. When we feel sad or worried, we often stop doing the little things that make us happy. This makes us feel worse.

Make a list of the things you can do each day that make you happy. Then give yourself time for these activities. Use your problem-solving skills to find ways to add more of these activities in your life. Here is an example. You may put “reading funny books” on your list, but you think that you do not have time to read. After doing some problem solving, you might start bringing your book to work or school to read during your lunch break.

5. Reach out

The people in our lives are a big part of our own mental health. We help each other out, share the good times, and learn from each other.



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Connect with others

Social networks are a big part of our overall mental health. Our social networks are the people in our lives who support us, celebrate our successes and help us deal with problems.

There are many different ways we can help each other.

- Some people are good at dealing with feelings. This can help us feel comforted.
- Some people are good at helping out, like babysitting or grocery shopping. This can help us manage day-to-day chores.
- Some people are good at sharing a different point of view. This can help us look at problems more realistically.
- Some people are good at sharing information. This can help us find better solutions.



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Most of us have networks of different people. It might include family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, neighbours and other important people.

Here are some tips for building a strong support network:

- Ask for help. Others cannot help you if they do not know what you need.
- Think of new ways to meet people. If you enjoy a particular activity, joining a group or class is a good way to meet others with the same interests.
- Join a support group. This is a good way to find help for a specific problem.
- Let go of bad relationships. Some people in our networks might not support us. It is hard, but sometimes we need to let go of these people.

Help others

Helping others helps us feel good about ourselves. It is also a good way to meet other people and learn new skills. Try asking your favourite group or organization if they have volunteer work.



Get help when you need it

To stay healthy, we need to find help when we start to feel unwell.

The same is true for mental health.

Mental health problems are easier to care for when they are caught quickly. If you are feeling unwell and nothing seems to help, it is important to talk to your doctor or counsellor.

Where can I learn more about good mental health?

Check out these resources for more on taking care of your mental health:

Wellness Modules on HeretoHelp

Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca for the Wellness Modules. They are worksheets that help build good mental health. There are sheets on managing stress, social support, healthy thinking skills, getting a good night's sleep, solving problems, and more. HeretoHelp is the website of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information.

Bounce Back program

Visit www.bouncebackbc.ca for information on the Bounce Back program. Bounce Back is for people dealing with low mood, stress or anxiety. You learn skills from a DVD or you can talk to someone on the phone. The program is free. Talk to your doctor if you want to sign up for Bounce Back. Bounce Back is run by the Canadian Mental Health Association.

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

This booklet was written by the Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division. It is based on current research and resources. We also check key facts with doctors and other mental health experts. Please contact us if you want to know what resources we used.

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HeretoHelp is a project to the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. The BC Partners are:

- AnxietyBC
- BC Schizophrenia Society
- Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division
- Centre for Addictions Research of BC
- FORCE Society for Kid's Mental Health
- Family Services of the North Shore, Jessie's Legacy Program
- Mood Disorders Association of BC

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