



Fifteen Ways to Improve Your Mental Health

Relax

Let go of your tensions every chance you get. Forget yourself for a while by becoming engrossed in a good book, listening to your favorite music, or walking on the beach. Visit your local park and sit quietly among the trees. Other ways to relax include working on a hobby, meditating, or gardening. Build some relaxation time into each day.

Be Kind to Yourself

People are frequently too hard on themselves when things don't go "right." Pay attention to your negative thoughts about yourself and counteract them with positive statements. Instead of saying to yourself, "I'm stupid, I'll never get this right," try saying, "I'm alert and I catch on quickly." Mean it when you say it. It takes a little practice, but it changes your whole perception of yourself.

Eat Properly

Nutrition has a lot to do with feeling mentally positive. Limit your intake of sugar, fat, salt, caffeine, and alcohol, and help yourself stay mentally fit. If you're used to dining alone, try eating out once in a while. It's a nice way to treat yourself and be around other people at the same time.

Learn to Say "No"

Sometimes if we feel others are demanding too much of our time or attention, we need to say "No." If that's a difficult thing for you to do, if you're afraid of hurting another person's feelings, or of not being liked if you say "No," read a book or attend a class on assertiveness training.

Find a Friend

Friendships are very important to mental fitness. In fact, working on a friendship is one of the best ways to continue growing as a person. Expressing feelings and ideas to another person can help us clarify what is truly important to ourselves.

Exercise

Check with your doctor about the level of exercise that is best for you. Even a brisk 15-minute walk 3 times a week can do wonders for how you think and feel.

Do It Now

Procrastination can lead to negative feelings about yourself. Waiting until you “feel like it” can sometimes take forever. One doesn’t have to go overboard, but it can feel satisfying at the end of a day to have accomplished a hard task or met a difficult situation head-on. And don’t forget to reward yourself for having done a good job!

Adapt to Change

Change is inevitable and can be stressful. Don’t resist it. Change is a necessary part of life, so be patient and allow yourself time to adapt.

Express Your Feelings

Try to find ways to express your feelings. For some people, that’s a hard thing to do. Going to a movie where others are likely to be laughing or crying can be a safe way to express your emotions. Don’t be afraid to feel “down” sometimes, everyone does. Try recording your thoughts in a journal, or even write a letter to the editor of your newspaper. Emotions are natural responses to the experiences of life. Learn to let them pass through you.

Grieve Losses

Sadness and grief are natural and appropriate responses to the losses that we all experience. Grief over the loss of a loved one can be very painful and may last for some time. By being kind to ourselves, we survive and have the potential for coming back stronger than ever.

Test Your Assumptions

Sometimes, in our interactions with other people, we make the most incredible assumptions and act as if they are true. Rather than feeling rejected or hurt by what you thought someone meant, it might be worth the risk to ask, “What did you mean when you said...?”

Questions?

Call 206-598-4720

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

Rest

Get a good night's sleep. Not everyone needs the same amount, but it should be restful sleep. There are many techniques available to help promote relaxation. Don't hesitate to nap during the day, if your schedule allows. If you feel overworked and tired, try finding a quiet place to sit by yourself for a few moments, take a few deep breaths and make a conscious effort to relax your entire body.

Review Your "Shoulds"

If you feel stuck by some things you "should" be doing and aren't, set a time limit by which you will either have them done or get rid of them. Staying stuck in the middle and continually saying, "I should..." is a good way to punish yourself. Make a list and remind yourself of all the things you've done "right."

Have a Laugh

Nurture your sense of humor, especially about yourself. Trying to see the humorous side of things makes even the most difficult situations easier to bear. Laughter is good medicine. Being too serious limits your ability to enjoy life. As the noted French author Jean Cocteau once pointed out, "Angels fly because they take themselves lightly."

Ask for Help

If you need emotional support, or a shoulder to lean on, don't be afraid to ask for it. There are times in life when the strongest among us must look outside ourselves for comfort and advice. If friends can do the job, ask them to help. If not, be assured that professional help is available. Ask others for assistance in finding the professional help that's right for you.

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