

A woman with dark, curly hair, wearing an orange button-down shirt, smiling and standing with her arms crossed against a dark grey background.

MOVE YOUR MIND FOR MENTAL WELLNESS

Mental fitness or mental health lifestyle strategies can contribute significantly to the well-being of people and populations.

The Mental Health Foundation characterizes good mental health by a person's ability to fulfil a number of key functions and activities, including:

- the ability to learn
- the ability to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions
- the ability to form and maintain good relationships with others
- the ability to cope with and manage change and uncertainty.

Take note of the following lifestyle strategies to build your mental fitness, and help you cope.

Strategy 1: Move your body. Be physically active throughout the day. Exercise can help manage chronic pain and reduce emotional pain. Research on depression, anxiety and exercise shows that the psychological and physical benefits of exercise

can also help improve mood and reduce anxiety reports the Mayo Clinic.

Strategy 2: Eat real food. Include multicolored fruits and vegetables. Fish that includes omega-3 fish oils, while avoiding the four species with high mercury levels (shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish). Long-chain omega-3 PUFAs may reduce the risk of progression mental disorders.

Strategy 3: Unplug from excessive media immersion if the news feed leaves you feeling blue. Constant exposure to mass media can sway opinions and influence emotions. Evidence from a variety of cross-sectional, longitudinal and empirical studies implicate smartphone and social media use in the increase in mental distress.

Strategy 4: Build solid relationships. Rich relationships may reduce mental health risks ranging from the common cold to stroke, mortality and multiple psychopathologies. Social



relationships play an important role in mental health and wellbeing - especially in persons with disabilities. Solid scientific evidence shows that social relationships affect a range of health outcomes, including mental health, physical health, health habits, and mortality risk.

Strategy 5: Mind your happiness. Find a hobby. Studies suggest that when participating in pleasurable recreation activities, positive emotions can ensue.

Strategy 6: Learn to self-manage your stress. Meditation, religion, spirituality, and relaxation classes are ways to connect to a support network. Religious/spiritual beliefs and practices are commonly used by both medical and psychiatric patients to cope with illness and other stressful life changes. Get plugged into a network that facilitates positive emotions including well-being, happiness, hope, optimism, meaning and purpose, and a sense of control over life.

A large volume of research shows that people who are a part of a spiritual, religious or wellbeing group have better mental health and adapt more quickly to health problems compared to those who do not have a support network. Positive emotions can lead to healthy behaviors such as; altruism, being kind or compassionate, forgiveness, and gratitude.

Strategy 7: Get your sleep. Aim for at least 8 hours of sleep. If you are not sleeping soundly, seek support to improve your sleep strategies. Improvement in sleep habits may reduce paranoia feelings and benefit your mental health.

Strategy 8: Get guidance. Seeking mental health treatment can ease your mind. Many people around the world are navigating mental health obstacles, be sure to get professional help if you are feeling depressed, hopeless, excessive anxiety, no interest in life or you feel overwhelmed with emotions.

The NAMI HelpLine can be reached Monday through Friday, 10 am–6 pm, ET.

1-800-950-NAMI (6264) or info@nami.org

Additional literature:

<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-66-7-579.pdf>

