9 WAYS YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH TODAY

PLATINUM HEALTH

Sure, diet and exercise help. But so does opening up to a friend. Mental health is much more than a diagnosis. It's your overall psychological well-being—the way you feel about yourself and others as well as your ability to manage your feelings and deal with everyday difficulties. And while taking care of your mental health can mean seeking professional support and treatment, it also means taking steps to improve your emotional health on your own. Making these changes will pay off in all aspects of your life. It can boost your mood, build resilience, and add to your overall enjoyment of life.

1 Tell yourself something positive

Research shows that how you think about yourself can have a powerful effect on how you feel. When we perceive our self and our life negatively, we can end up viewing experiences in a way that confirms that notion. Instead, practice using words that promote feelings of self-worth and personal power. For example, instead of saying, "I'm such a loser. I won't get the job because I tanked in the interview," try, "I didn't do as well in the interview as I would have liked, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to get the job."

2   Write down something you are grateful for

Gratitude has been clearly linked with improved well-being and mental health, as well as happiness. The best-researched method to increase feelings of gratitude is to keep a gratitude journal or write a daily gratitude list.

Generally contemplating gratitude is also effective, but you need to get regular practice to experience long-term benefit. Find something to be grateful for, let it fill your heart, and bask in that feeling.

3   Focus on one thing (in the moment)

Being mindful of the present moment allows us to let go of negative or difficult emotions from past experiences that weigh us down. Start by bringing awareness to routine activities, such as taking a shower, eating lunch, or

walking home. Paying attention to the physical sensations, sounds, smells, or tastes of these experiences helps you focus. When your mind wanders, just bring it back to what you are doing.

4   Exercise

Your body releases stress-relieving and mood-boosting endorphins before and after you work out, which is why exercise is a powerful antidote to stress, anxiety, and depression. Look for small ways to add activity to your day, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator or going on a short walk. To get the most benefit, aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise daily, and try to do it outdoors. Exposure to sunlight helps your body produce vitamin D, which increases your level of serotonin in the brain. Plus, time in nature is a proven stress reducer.
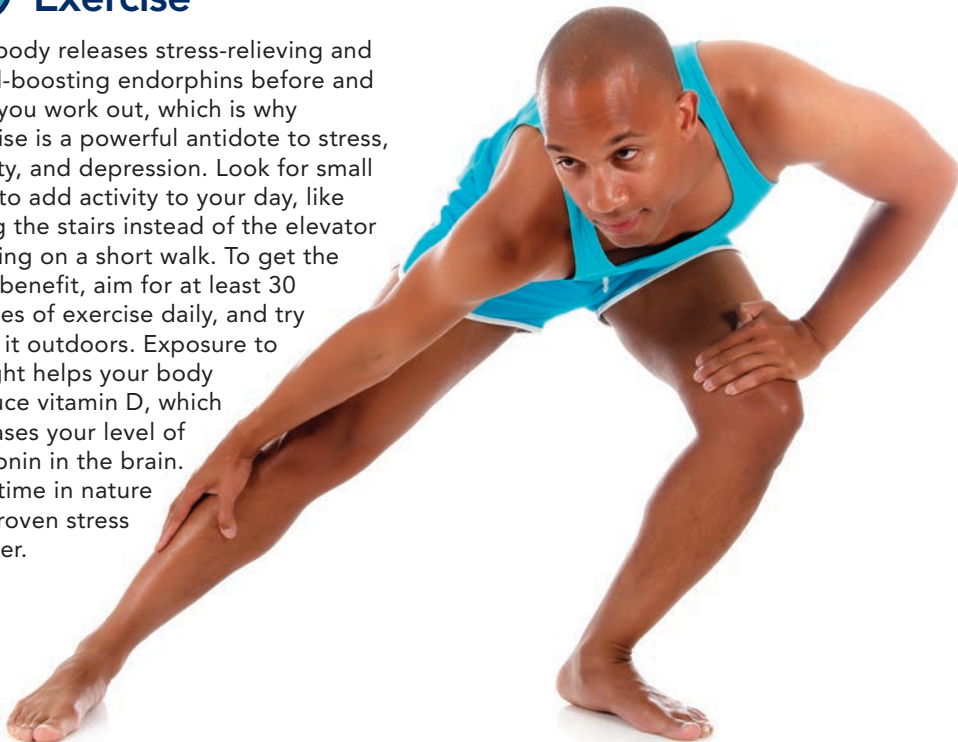
⑤ Eat a good meal

What you eat nourishes your whole body, including your brain. Carbohydrates (in moderate amounts) increase serotonin, a chemical that has been shown to have a calming effect on your mood. Protein-rich foods increase norepinephrine, dopamine, and tyrosine, which help keep you alert. And vegetables and fruits are loaded with nutrients that feed every cell of your body, including those that affect mood-regulating brain chemicals. Include foods with Omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (found in fish, nuts, and flaxseed.) Research shows that these nutrients can improve mood and restore structural integrity to the brain cells necessary for cognitive function.

⑥ Open up to someone

Knowing you are valued by others is important for helping you think more positively. Plus, being more trusting can increase your emotional well-being because as you get better at finding the positive aspects in other people, you become better at recognising your own.

7 Do something for someone else

Research shows that being helpful to others has a beneficial effect on how you feel about yourself. Being helpful and kind - and valued for what you do - is a great way to build self-esteem. The meaning you find in helping others will enrich and expand your life.

8 Take a break

In those moments when it all seems like too much, step away, and do anything but whatever was stressing you out until you feel a little better. Sometimes the best thing to do is a simple breathing exercise: Close your eyes and take 10 deep breaths. For each one, count to four as you inhale, hold it for a count of four, and then exhale for another four. This works wonders almost immediately.

9 Go to bed on time

A large body of research has shown that sleep deprivation has a significant negative effect on your mood. Try to go to bed at a regular time each day, and practice good habits to get better sleep. These include shutting down screens for at least an hour before bed, using your bed only for sleep or relaxing activities, and restricting caffeinated drinks for the morning.

Start today. You have the power to take positive steps right now to improve your resilience and emotional health. Don't wait until you're in a crisis to make your mental health a priority. Besides, it is easier to form new habits when you are feeling strong. You can then implement those habits when you need them most. Pick something from this article that resonates with you and try it. Then, try something else. Slowly putting in place routines, habits, and regular patterns will help you feel better through gradual change.

For assistance please call the Mental Health Department and you will be directed to the nearest Mental Health Professional – 014 590 1700.