Let's talk about Mental Health

Your mental health is very important. You will not have a healthy body if you don't also take care of your mind. People depend on you. It's important for you to take care of yourself so that you can do the important things in life—whether it's working, learning, taking care of your family, volunteering, enjoying the outdoors, or whatever is important to you.

Good mental health helps you enjoy life and cope with problems. It offers a feeling of well-being and inner strength. Just as you take care of your body by eating right and exercising, you can do things to protect your mental health. In fact, eating right and exercising can help maintain good mental health. You don't automatically have good mental health just because you don't have mental health illness. You have to work to keep your mind healthy.

Nutrition and Mental Health

The food you eat can have a direct effect on your energy level, physical health, and mood. A healthy diet is one that has enough of each essential nutrient; contains many foods from all of the basic food groups; provides the right amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight; and does not have too much fat, sugar, salt, or alcohol.

By choosing foods that can give you steady energy, you can help your body stay healthy. This may also help your mind feel good. The same diet doesn't work for every person. In order to find the best foods that are right for you, talk to your health care professional. Visit https://www.choosemyplate.gov/ to help find personalized eating plans and other interactive tools to help you make good food choices.

Some vitamins and minerals may help with the symptoms of depression. Experts are looking into how a lack of some nutrients—including folate, vitamin B12, calcium, iron, selenium, zinc, and omega-3—may contribute to depression. Ask your doctor or another health care professional for more information.

Exercise and Mental Health

Regular physical activity is important to the physical and mental health of almost everyone, including older adults. Being physically active can help you continue to do the things you enjoy and stay independent as you age. Regular physical activity over long periods of time can produce long-term health benefits. That's why health experts say that everyone should be active every day to maintain their health.

If you are diagnosed with depression or anxiety, your doctor may tell you to exercise in addition to taking any medications or receiving counseling. This is because exercise has been shown to help with the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Your body makes certain chemicals, called endorphins, before and after you work out. They relieve stress and improve your mood. Exercise can also slow or stop weight gain, which is a common side effect of some medications used to treat mental health disorders.

Sleep and Mental Health

Your mind and body will feel better if you sleep well. Your body needs time every day to rest and heal. If you often have trouble sleeping—either falling asleep, or waking during the night and being unable to get back to sleep—one or several of the following ideas might be helpful to you:

- Go to bed at the same time every night, and get up at the same time every morning. Avoid sleeping in (sleeping much later than your usual time for getting up). It will make you feel worse.
- Establish a bedtime ritual by doing the same things every night for an hour or two before bedtime so your body knows when it is time to go to sleep.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Eat on a regular schedule, and avoid a heavy meal prior to going to bed. Don't skip any meals.
- Eat plenty of dairy foods and dark green, leafy vegetables.
- Exercise daily, but avoid strenuous or invigorating activity before going to bed.
- Play soothing music that shuts off automatically after you are in bed.
- Try a turkey sandwich and a glass of milk before bedtime to make you feel drowsy.
- Try having a small snack before you go to bed, something like a piece of fruit and a piece of cheese, so you don't wake up hungry in the middle of the night. Have a similar small snack if you awaken in the middle of the night.
- Take a warm bath or shower before going to bed.
- Place a drop of lavender oil on your pillow.
- Drink a cup of herbal chamomile tea before going to bed.

You need to see your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- You often have difficulty sleeping, and the solutions listed above are not working for you.
- You awaken during the night gasping for breath.
- Your partner says that your breathing stops when you are sleeping.
- You snore loudly.
- You wake up feeling like you haven't been asleep.
- You fall asleep often during the day.

Stress and Mental Health

Stress can happen for many reasons. Stress can be brought about by a traumatic accident, death, or emergency situation. Stress can also be a side effect of a serious illness or disease.

There is also stress associated with daily life, the workplace, and family responsibilities. It's hard to stay calm and relaxed in today's hectic lives. People have many roles: spouse, parent, caregiver, friend, worker. With all you have going on in your life, it seems almost impossible to find ways to de-stress—but it's important to find those ways. Your health depends on it.

Common symptoms include

- Headache
- Sleep disorders
- Difficulty concentrating
- Short temper
- Upset stomach
- Job dissatisfaction
- Low morale
- Depression
- Anxiety

Remember to always make time for you. It's important to care for yourself. Think of this as an order from your doctor, so you don't feel guilty! No matter how busy you are, you can try to set aside at least 15 minutes each day in your schedule to do something for yourself, like taking a bubble bath, going for a walk, or calling a friend.