



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

TIPS FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH



Plainer language series

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 you think and feel about yourself and the world around you. When you look after your mental health, it is easier to handle stress and other problems. By taking care of yourself first, you will be able to take better care of others.

In this booklet, you will learn different ways to build good mental health. You will learn how to:

- 1. Take care of your body**
- 2. Practice helpful thinking**
- 3. Have fun**
- 4. Reach out**



1. TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

Your body and mind are connected. When you take care of your body, you also take care of your mind.

Eat well

We know that food gives you important nutrients that help your body work well. We also know that planning good meals can be hard and takes a lot of time. You may eat something that is the easiest to make or get. Do not forget that your choices matter, and you deserve a meal you can enjoy. Here are some tips on eating well:



- Try to eat with others when you can.
- Eat regularly, so your body has enough energy to feel good all day. Skipping meals can make you feel tired or irritable.
- Watch out for too much caffeine. Caffeine is the part of coffee, black tea and some pop that makes you more awake. Caffeine can add to feelings of anxiety. It can also stop you from sleeping well.
- Watch how much sugar you eat. When the energy sugar gives you is gone, you feel more tired. It can lower your mood and make you feel irritable.
- Watch your alcohol use. Alcohol may hide problems for a short time, but it can make sadness, stress and other bad feelings increase and be more difficult to deal with later on.

To learn more about eating well, talk to a dietitian. Dietitians have special training to help people eat well. In BC, you can call 8-1-1 to talk to a dietitian for free. Say the name of the language you need in English to get an interpreter.

Exercise

Exercise is good for your body. But it also helps you cope with stress, lowers anxiety, improves your mood and helps you feel good about yourself. 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 changes. It does not matter what kind of activity you do: walking, swimming, playing with your kids at the park are all good examples.



Here are some tips for improving mental health through exercise:

- The next time you feel sad, worried or stressed, try going for a walk outside. Walking can be a fast and easy way to feel better.
- Pick an activity you enjoy. Remember, you can do any activity that gets you moving. If you like the activity, you are more likely to do it.
- Do activities with your family members and friends. It does not have to be a sport. Jump rope or dance!
- Exercise with a friend or family member. You are also more likely to enjoy and keep up with your exercise sessions if you plan them with someone else.
- Focus on how the activity makes you feel. The right activity for you will help your mood, your stress and your confidence.
- Go to your local gym or community recreation centre. Some of them have programs to help cover costs.

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

Get enough sleep



Sleep has a huge effect on mental health. When you get enough sleep, it is easier to cope with stress, handle problems, concentrate, think positively and remember things. You get more done when you sleep well. Most adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep per night.

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

- Do not exercise too close to your bedtime. Exercise gives you energy so do it earlier. Do quiet activities just before bed, like reading, meditating, stretching or writing in a journal.
- Avoid big meals, alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine before bed.
- Avoid looking at your phone or screens right before bed.
- Make sure your room is comfortable for sleeping. Many people find that they sleep best when their room is dark, quiet and cool.
- Follow a routine. Try to go to bed around the same time every night and wake up around the same time every morning.
- Only use your bedroom for sleeping. 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 unless your doctor suggests it. 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 trouble sleeping, it is best to talk to a doctor.*

2. PRACTICE HELPFUL THINKING

Good mental health does not mean that you only have happy thoughts. There is nothing wrong with feeling upset or sad about certain situations. These are your emotions, and it is part of life. Good mental health means looking at the situation for what it really is. It is also about understanding the difference between the things you can and cannot control.



Watch out for negative thoughts and “thinking traps”

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

Sometimes, you have negative thoughts, even though they may not be true. These thoughts are sometimes called “thinking traps.” They are traps because they are easy to fall into and can make you feel stuck and upset.

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!”
- 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.”
- Expecting the worst reason for something before you know what really happened. “My friend did not call me back. They must not like me very much.”

The first step is recognizing thinking traps. It takes practice to notice thinking traps. Next, you can challenge your “thinking traps” 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 behind this thought?
- Have I thought about all sides of the situation?
- 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 based on facts.



3. HAVE FUN

When we feel sad or worried, we often stop doing the little things that make us happy. This can make you feel worse. We are sometimes taught to do everything for others. But doing things for yourself that you enjoy helps you feel refreshed and helps you feel good about yourself. Then it is easier to

cope with stress, to see problems and solutions clearly, to manage difficult feelings, and to see the good sides of things.

How you make time for fun is up to you. Some of these activities could be very simple, such as:

- Playing a game
- Doing art or making a craft
- Watching your favourite show or listening to music you like
- Spending time with people who make you laugh
- Spending time in nature, like gardening
- Eating or cooking something you enjoy
- Moving your body in a way that you enjoy, like dancing in the kitchen

4. REACH OUT

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



Connect with others

Social networks are a big part of mental health. Your social networks are the people in your life who support you, celebrate your successes and help you deal with problems. It might include family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, neighbours and other important people. Some people in your network may be good at



dealing with feelings. They may help comfort you and see a different point of view. Others may be good at helping you out. They may help with childminding or grocery shopping.

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. Asking for help can be hard. It is important to remember that asking for help is not a sign of weakness.
- Think of new ways to meet people. If you enjoy a particular activity, join a group or class to meet others with the same interests. Visit a place of worship to meet people if you belong to a faith community.
- Join a support group. This is a good way to find help for a specific problem.
- Let go of bad relationships when you can. Some people in our networks might not support us. It may be more helpful for you to take a break or spend less time with them.



Help others

Helping others helps you feel good about yourself. 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, you need to find help when you 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, talk to your doctor or a counselor.



Where can I learn more about good mental health?

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

Wellness Modules

Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca/wellness-modules for the Wellness Modules. They include worksheets that help build good mental health habits. Worksheets on stress, problem-solving and healthy thinking may help if you have a lot of anxiety. Here to Help is the website of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information.

BC Mental Health Support Line

This phone service can help you when you are worried, stressed or upset. They can help with a lot of other problems, too. They can help you find services in your community. You can also call if you just need to talk to someone. Call **310-6789** (do not add an area code) any time of day or night. You can talk to someone right away. Translators can help you in many different languages. Say the name of the language you need in English to get an interpreter.

BounceBack® program

BounceBack is for people dealing with low mood, stress, or anxiety. You learn skills in an online course. You can also talk with a trained worker called a “coach” on the phone. The program is free. Telephone coaches speak English, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Punjabi. Bounce Back is run by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Visit www.bouncebackbc.ca for information on the BounceBack program.

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.

Founded in 1918, CMHA is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians.

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Health Association
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Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Colombie-Britannique
La santé mentale pour tous



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Mental health and substance use
information you can trust