



Helpguide's 6 Keys to Mental Health



Why are we often reluctant or unable to address our mental health needs?

Our inability to address our mental health needs stems from a variety of reasons:

- In some societies, mental and emotional issues are seen as less legitimate than physical issues. They're seen as a sign of weakness or somehow as being our own fault.
- Some people mistakenly see mental health problems as something we should know how to "snap out of." Men, especially, would often rather bottle up their feelings than seek help.
- In the modern age, we're obsessed with seeking simple answers to complex problems. We look for connection with others by [compulsively checking social media](#) instead of reaching out to people in the real world; to boost our mood and ease depression we take a pill, rather than address the underlying issues.
- Many people think that if they do seek help for mental and emotional problems, the only treatment options available are medication (which comes with unwanted side effects) or therapy (which can be lengthy and expensive). The truth is that, whatever your issues, there are steps you can take to improve the way you feel and experience greater mental and emotional well-being. And you can start today!

Staying active is as good for the brain as it is for the body

The mind and the body are intrinsically linked. When you improve your physical health, you'll automatically experience greater mental and emotional well-being. Physical activity also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals that lift your mood and provide added energy. Regular exercise or activity can have a [major impact on mental and emotional health problems](#), relieve stress, improve memory, and help you to sleep better.

But what if I hate to exercise?

Well, you're not alone. Pounding weights in a gym or jogging on a treadmill isn't everyone's idea of a great time. But you [don't have to be a fitness fanatic](#) to reap the benefits of being more active. Take a walk at lunchtime through a park, walk laps in an air-conditioned mall while window shopping, throw a Frisbee with a dog, dance to your favorite music, play activity-based video games with your kids, cycle or walk to an appointment rather than drive.

You don't have to exercise until you're soaked in sweat or every muscle aches. Even modest amounts of physical activity can make a big difference to your mental and emotional health—and it's something you can engage in **right now** to boost your energy and outlook and help you regain a sense of control.

Tips for starting an exercise routine

- Aim for 30 minutes of activity on most days. If it's easier, three 10-minute sessions can be just as effective. **Start now** by taking a walk or dancing to a favorite song.
- Try rhythmic exercise that engages both your arms and legs, such as walking, running, swimming, weight training, martial arts, or dancing.
- Add a mindfulness element to your workouts. Instead of focusing on your thoughts, focus on how your body feels as you move—how your feet hit the ground, for example, the rhythm of your breathing, or the feeling of wind on your skin.

Foods that adversely affect mood

- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Trans fats or anything with "partially hydrogenated" oil
- Foods with high levels of chemical preservatives or hormones
- Sugary snacks
- Refined carbs (such as white rice or white flour)
- Fried food

Foods that boost mood

- Fatty fish rich in Omega-3s such as salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, tuna
- Nuts such as walnuts, almonds, cashews, peanuts
- Avocados
- Flaxseed
- Beans
- Leafy greens such as spinach, kale, Brussel's sprouts
- Fresh fruit such as blueberries