



Part of University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

## ☞ Exercise and Laughter

Turn to Page 2 to better understand how exercise and laughter can improve your mental health.

## ☞ Healthy Lifestyle

Consider these steps to help develop and maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

### Welcome!

This quarter's theme is a Healthy Lifestyle. We welcome your feedback at [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com).

### DidUknow?

Small steps can improve your mood, increase energy levels, and help you to choose more positive lifestyle choices.

#### Time management tips:

- ◆ Create a balanced schedule between work, family, social activities, and downtime.
- ◆ Don't overcommit yourself. Distinguish between 'shoulds' and 'musts.'
- ◆ Leave earlier in the morning to prevent the stress of being rushed.
- ◆ Plan regular breaks to clear your mind. Short breaks help to recharge the mind and create better productivity.

#### Task management tips:

- ◆ Prioritize tasks by creating a list and tackle them in order of importance, beginning with the high-priority items.
- ◆ Break projects into small steps by making a step-by-step plan rather than focusing on everything at once.
- ◆ Delegate responsibility whether at home, school, or work. Let go of the desire to control or oversee every little step.

#### Source:

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/work\\_stress\\_management.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/work_stress_management.htm), April 22, 2010.  
© Helpguide.org. All rights reserved.

To use our WorkLife Resource Center, e-mail or call us for your company code: [ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com](mailto:ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com)

1.800.647.3327

[www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com)

LifeSolutions is a confidential workplace benefit available at no cost to you and members of your household.

## Healthy Lifestyle

Taking care of your body is a powerful first step toward mental and emotional health. The mind and the body are linked. When you improve your physical health, you'll automatically experience greater mental and emotional well-being. For example, exercise not only strengthens our heart and lungs, but also releases endorphins, which are powerful chemicals that energize us and lift our mood.

The activities you engage in and the daily choices you make affect the way you feel physically and emotionally. Consider these steps to help develop and maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

- ◆ **Get enough rest.** To have good mental and emotional health, it's important to take care of your body. That includes getting enough sleep. Most people need seven to eight hours of sleep each night in order to function optimally.
- ◆ **Learn about good nutrition and practice it.** The subject of nutrition is complicated and not always easy to put into practice. But the more you learn about what you eat and how it affects your energy and mood, the better you can feel.
- ◆ **Exercise to relieve stress and lift your mood.** 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 mental health benefits, aim for 30 minutes or more of exercise per day.
- ◆ **Get a dose of sunlight every day.** Sunlight lifts your mood, so try to get at least 10 to 15 minutes of sun per day. You can do this while exercising, gardening, or socializing.
- ◆ **Limit alcohol and avoid cigarettes and other drugs.**

In order to maintain and strengthen your mental and emotional health, it's important to pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Don't let stress and negative emotions build up. Make it a goal to maintain a balance between your daily responsibilities and the things you enjoy. If you take care of yourself, you'll be better prepared to deal with challenges if and when they arise.

#### Tips and strategies for taking care of yourself:

- ◆ **Appeal to your senses.** Stay calm and energized by appealing to the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Listen to music that lifts your mood, place flowers where you will see and smell them, massage your hands and feet, or sip a warm drink.
- ◆ **Engage in meaningful, creative work.** Do things that challenge your creativity and make you feel productive, whether or not you get paid for it — things like gardening, drawing, writing, playing an instrument, or building something in your workshop.
- ◆ **Get a pet.** Yes, pets are a responsibility, but caring for one makes you feel needed and loved. There is no love quite as unconditional as the love a pet can give. Some pets can also get you out of the house for exercise and expose you to new people and places.
- ◆ **Make leisure time a priority.** Do things for no other reason than that it feels good to do them. Go to a funny movie, take a walk on the beach, listen to music, read a good book, or talk to a friend. Doing things just because they are fun is not indulgence. Play is an emotional and mental health necessity.
- ◆ **Make time for contemplation and appreciation.** Think about the things you're grateful for. Meditate, pray, enjoy the sunset, or simply take a moment to pay attention to what is good, positive, and beautiful as you go about your day.

Everyone is different; not all things will be equally beneficial to all people. Some people feel better relaxing and slowing down while others need more activity and more excitement or stimulation to feel better. The important thing is to find activities that you enjoy and that give you a boost.

Excerpted with permission from *Improving Emotional Health*. Visit [http://helpguide.org/mental/mental\\_emotional\\_health.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/mental_emotional_health.htm) to see the full article with links to related articles.  
© Helpguide.org. All rights reserved.

## Exercise and Improved Mental Health

When you think of improving your overall mental health or treating conditions like depression and anxiety, do you consider physical activity? There is a growing body of research that says you just might want to.

Physical activity can help you boost self-esteem, allow your body to handle stress more effectively, and improve overall cognitive functioning. It can even help improve your mood through the release of hormones like epinephrine and serotonin, similar to the way antidepressants work.

### Get started:

Studies show that exercising for 30 minutes three times a week is as effective as taking a prescription antidepressant. Even short bursts of physical activity (think walking for 10 minutes) can help you feel better, meaning you don't have to spend hours at the gym to feel the positive effects of exercise.



### Get moving

Not sure how to get in 30 minutes of physical activity each week? Below is a list of suggested activities that may help get you moving.

- ◆ **Take a walk.** Even a 10-minute walk (like during lunch) can help improve your mood and reduce stress. It can also help you be more productive and focused.
- ◆ **Use the stairs instead.** Try taking the stairs once or twice a week instead of taking the elevator.
- ◆ **Park farther away.** Try to find a spot that's a little farther than you normally park.
- ◆ **Be your own remote control.** Get up to change the channel instead of using the remote.
- ◆ **Clean house or do yard work.** An extra 15 minutes of vacuuming or weeding can help get your body moving *and* get something checked off your to-do list.
- ◆ **Do some light stretching.** Reach your arms above your head, take a deep breath, and stretch.

### Get support

Our EAP professionals are happy to talk with you by phone or in person. We'll brainstorm with you about what you could do to feel better. If you want to be more active, we'll help you get ready and cheer you on! We'll also connect you with other helpful resources.

#### References:

- *Are There Connections Between Exercise and Mental Health?* February 21, 2008. Retrieved on September 9, 2009, from <http://www.healthtalk.com/public/printer-92.shtml>.
- Logan, Michael. *Exercise and Mental Health*. Retrieved on September 9, 2009, from <http://www.askmikethecounselor2.com/exercise-and-mental-health.html>.
- O'Brien, Kelly. *Exercise for Mental Health*. 2004. Retrieved on September 9, 2009, from <http://www.thinkmuscle.com/O'Brien/exercise-for-mental-health.htm>.
- Panning, Jennifer C. *Mental Health Benefits of Exercise*. Retrieved on September 9, 2009, from <http://www.findcounseling.com/journal/health-fitness>.
- Sharma, Madaan, and Petty. *Exercise for Mental Health*. 2006. Retrieved on September 9, 2009, from <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1470658>.
- The American Psychological Association (APA). (n.d.). *Exercise fuels the brain's stress buffers*. Retrieved September 9, 2009, from the APA Help Center: <http://www.apahelpcenter.org/>.

## Why do you need humor to stay emotionally healthy?

A healthy sense of humor is related to being able to laugh at oneself and one's life. Laughing at oneself can be a way of accepting and respecting oneself. Lack of a sense of humor is directly related to lower self-esteem. Humor is essential to mental health for a variety of reasons.

### Mental health benefits of laughter

- ◆ Humor enhances the ability to affiliate or connect with others.
- ◆ Humor helps replace distressing emotions with pleasurable feelings. You cannot feel angry, depressed, anxious, guilty, or resentful and experience humor at the same time.
- ◆ Lack of humor can cause one's thought processes to stagnate, which can lead to increased distress.
- ◆ Humor changes behavior. When you experience humor you talk more, make eye contact with others, touch others, etc.
- ◆ Humor increases energy, and with increased energy you may perform activities that you might otherwise avoid.
- ◆ Finally, humor is good for mental health because it makes you feel good!

### How can you expand your sense of humor?

A sense of humor is developed by putting time, focus, and energy into experiences that make people laugh and feel good. The tips below can help you add to your capacity for laughter.

- ◆ **Look for the everyday humor.** Start looking for the absurd, silly, incongruous activities that go on around you each day.
- ◆ **Observe infants and young children** to learn how to find delight and amusement in the most ordinary things.
- ◆ **Increase your exposure to comedies**, sitcoms, joke books, comedy clubs, etc.
- ◆ **Hang around funny friends**, or better yet, marry a funny partner.
- ◆ **Take a 5-10 minute humor break each day.** Read jokes, add to a humor notebook, or listen to a funny tape.
- ◆ **Remind yourself to have fun.**
- ◆ **Spend time with people who help you see the bright side**, and whenever possible, avoid people who are negative.
- ◆ **Avoid conversation, news, entertainment**, etc., that frightens, upsets, and distresses you or makes you feel sad and unhappy.

#### Source:

Help Guide. Modified February 10, 2007. *Humor and laughter: Health benefits and online sources*. Retrieved June 6, 2007 from <http://www.helpguide.org>. Log in to see the full article with links to related articles. © Helpguide.org. All rights reserved.