

If you want to optimize your mental health, the following recommendations will assist you.

Aerobic Exercise

Research shows that regular aerobic exercise can help individuals with major depression achieve and maintain long-term remission. Those who walk, jog, bike, swim, etc., for 20 minutes 3 to 4 times a week see a decrease in depressive symptoms. Aerobic exercise also helps with anxiety, irritability, sleep, alertness and energy. Don't wait to start, even if your time is limited. Gaining energy is like earning returns on investments; start with the little you have and watch it grow over time.

Nutrition

Eating a well balanced diet has a great benefit to mental health. The body is designed to function best when its needs are met. Starting with breakfast and ending with supper, it is important to feed your body regularly and maintain a healthy variety and balance to your diet.

Avoid "empty calories" or "junk food" – highly processed foods high in sugar, white flour or fats. More than 2 cups of coffee a day can also be detrimental

Drink lots of water - your body and brain will perform better.

Supplements

Good mental health requires optimal amounts of vitamins and minerals. Additional supplements to our diet can be beneficial in managing depression, anxiety and mood swings. Some examples are:

Multi-vitamin – overall health

B-complex – energy, anxiety, and depression

Omega 3 fatty acids – brain and heart (can be purchased in liquid or capsule form, also found in fish oil)

Chromium Picolinate 400mcg – burns fat and builds muscle, stabilizes blood sugar

Melatonin – sleep

Vitamin E – antioxidant

Vitamin C – aids healing, and increases resistance to viral illness

Keeping a Journal

Writing down thoughts, feelings, and patterns of behavior adds a proven boost to mental health. A person who journals has an increased awareness of self and he/she may be better able to release regret, frustrations and worries and positively integrate negative experiences. Writing can also help with the process of reconciliation and forgiveness. It can assist in bringing freedom from destructive patterns of thought and behavior and help to process and integrate negative experiences. Journalling brings clarity and perspective and facilitates growth and transformation.

Faith

It is very important to be in right relationship with God. Your spirit must be nurtured in order to have maximum mental and physical health. Research shows that individuals with strong faith and spiritual discipline have a greater sense of contentment and joy in life. You can enhance your faith by participating with a church family, praying, reading the Bible, looking for God's purpose for your life and reaching out to help others.

Therapy

Individual therapy and group therapies have proven to be effective in decreasing symptoms of depression, anxiety, panic, and obsessive compulsive disorder. Finding a therapist that is a good match, being committed and working on goals are all helpful in optimizing your health, productivity and the quality of your relationships. As in any endeavor, good coaching maximizes performance.

Creative Expression

Discovering what you really enjoy and incorporating it into your daily/weekly routine is of great benefit. Finding a way to express one's self through a creative outlet has been found to enhance life satisfaction and helps minimize symptoms and episodes of mood disorders. Drawing and painting, calligraphy, writing poetry or prose, playing a musical instrument, cooking and interior decorating are a few examples of different creative outlets. Utilizing your gift will give you a sense of self-worth and satisfaction as you contribute to the world around you.

Helping Others

We are relational beings. We are made for love. Often, anxiety and depression paralyze and rob us of our sense of self worth. We may be tempted to withdraw from relationships just when we need to press in. Remember the widow who put her two cents into the temple offering. Jesus said she gave more than anyone else. Don't despise small gifts. God knows what it costs you. You'll feel better if you share the little you have.

Purpose

Having a sense of direction and purpose for your life, is very important in maintaining a healthy attitude, especially in times of adversity. You can overcome huge obstacles when focused on an important goal. Writing your goals will help you achieve them. Remember that we tend to set short-term goals too high and long-term goals too low.

Books such as The Purpose Driven Life and What Color is Your Parachute? can be very useful in clarifying your values, your beliefs and your direction in life. As Christians, life can be a great adventure as we grow in knowing God, knowing self and reaching out to others. You can make a difference!