

## **Mental Wellness – Healthy Habits for Mental Health**

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### **What is Mental Wellness?**

We often focus on our body's ailments or our physical well-being, but when was the last time you paid attention to your mental wellness? To attain an overall balance of well-being, we all need to strive for both physical and mental wellness.

Appreciating your mental health means being able to function during your day-to-day activities, and feeling confident that you can rise to a challenge when it presents itself. Just like with physical health, there are actions you can take to increase your mental well-being.

### **Maintaining Mental Health:**

Whether it is for yourself, a friend, a family member or a co-worker it is important to be on the lookout for symptoms regarding declining mental wellness. Symptoms may vary from person-to-person and mental health problem to mental health problem, but the following are some common symptoms to look out for:

- Depression that lasts longer than a few weeks.
- Confused thoughts, delusions, and/or hallucinations.
- Extreme fears or anxiety that seems out-of-place.
- Lack of motivation for an extended period of time.
- Ongoing feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.
- Withdrawal from favourite activities or hobbies.
- Extreme mood swings, or overly reckless behaviour.
- Difficulty with attention and/or concentration.
- Sudden onset of irritability.
- Disruption to usual sleep patterns.
- Talk or thoughts of suicide.

### **Triggers for Mental Health Problems:**

There is no single cause for mental health problems, and the person experiencing a mental health problem is also not to blame. Often, mental health problems are a complex interaction of many reasons that add to a person becoming mentally unwell. There are three main triggers for Mental Health Problems:

## 1. Biological Factors

Biological factors can lead to symptoms such as depression, anxiety, or changed behaviours. Everyone is at-risk for changes in their brain due to these factors. Recognizing these changes is an important part of treatment and the return to wellness. Some factors that may trigger an onset of a mental health problem include:

- Pre-natal damage
- Birth trauma
- Viral infection
- Substance Abuse



## 2. Genetics

Some mental health problems are more common among close family members which suggest that genetics plays a role too. People do not necessarily inherit a mental health diagnosis itself, but may inherit the tendency to get it. Some mental health problems that are considered hereditary include:

- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Autism

## 3. Psychological and Social Influences

Psychological and social influences are also major contributors to mental health, and negative experiences within our family and/or social circle can have a huge impact on our ability to cope. Mental Health Problems can be triggered by a traumatic event or situation and/or prolonged stress; some examples include:

- Lack of support from relationships and friendships
- Child abuse and neglect
- Family violence
- Severe or prolonged stress
- Unemployment and/or financial stressors
- Major changes in life

## Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being:

An individual's emotional and mental well-being comes from a combination of their attitudes, personality, support systems, and brain chemistry. To keep our minds mentally well try incorporating these healthy habits into your daily routine:

### **1. Sleep:**

Many children and most adolescents are sleep-deprived. Children should have 10 to 12 hours of sleep a night, and adolescents require a minimum of nine hours a night. Try to set up a soothing bedtime routine by doing the following:

- Try to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Keep the bedroom dark or dimly lit, cool and quite.
- Limit stimulating activities before bed.
- Remove TV, computer, phone and video games from the bedroom.
- Avoid caffeine (soda, energy drinks, coffee, tea and chocolate) after 3 p.m.
- If hungry a light snack prior to bed can help; milk and other dairy products contain tryptophan a natural sleep-promoter that can be a good bedtime snack.

### **2. Exercise:**

Exercise stimulates the chemicals that improve mood and release the stress that builds up in everyone. 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day is recommended. Vigorous exercise will cause you to sweat and be out-of-breath, and needs to be done at least three times a week. Examples of vigorous physical activity include: walking, running, swimming and biking. Try to also limit TV, video games or computer time to two-hours per day, and be a role model for your children as it is good for you too!

### **3. Nutrition:**

Set up regular snack and meal times; most children do well with three meals and two or three snacks per day. Encourage your youth to eat a healthy breakfast that will give them energy to think throughout the day. Also, eat as a family when you can, and limit sweet drinks and pop/soda. Make sure to enjoy food from the four food groups: vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives and meat and alternatives. Try and find one food from each food group your child likes, and make it available. More information on balanced meals can be found on Canada's Food Guide.

### **4. Relaxation:**

Providing children with a hobby or activity that relaxes them, and allows them to get away from the stress of the day can go a long way in improving their mental health. Activities like meditation or mindfulness, breathing exercises, or muscle relaxation can be a great help. Reading and doing puzzles can be a good distraction, or just "chilling out" in a healthy way is great.

### **5. Stress Management:**

Acknowledge your child's feelings, and let them know we all make mistakes. Be supportive, and listen to their concerns. Make sure you have clear expectations, and do not over-schedule them with too many activities. Be a good example by keeping calm in stressful situations, teaching them about consequences (both good and bad), and provide them with some control and independence (like arranging their rooms, etc.)

Encourage them to talk to someone or keep a journal to help get out emotions; encourage other soothing activities (i.e. reading, drawing, puzzles, or yoga).

## Local Resources:

- **Pathways for Children and Youth** - [www.pathwayschildrenyouth.org](http://www.pathwayschildrenyouth.org) 613-546-1422 ext. 1
- **Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth** - [www.opendoors.on.ca](http://www.opendoors.on.ca) - 1-877-232-8260
- **Children's Mental Health Services of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties** - [www.cmhs-hpe.on.ca](http://www.cmhs-hpe.on.ca) - 613-966-3100
- **Youthab (Youth Habilitation Quinte Inc.)** - [www.youthab.ca](http://www.youthab.ca) - 1-866-859-9222
- **Children's Mental Health of Leeds & Grenville** - [www.cmhlq.ca](http://www.cmhlq.ca) - 1-800-809-2494
- **Frontenac Community Mental Health and Addiction Services** - [www.fcmhas.ca](http://www.fcmhas.ca) - 613-544-1356
- **Kingston Community Counselling Centre** - [www.k3c.org](http://www.k3c.org) - 613-549-7850 ext.3230
- **Kids Help Phone** - 1-800-668-6868
- **LGBT Youthline** - 1-800-268-9688

## Online Resources:

For more information on developing healthy habits for mental wellness please check out these helpful sites:

- [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)
- [www.caddra.ca](http://www.caddra.ca)
- [www.fcmhas.ca](http://www.fcmhas.ca)
- [www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com)
- [www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca](http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca)
- [www.mhww.org/strategies.html](http://www.mhww.org/strategies.html)
- [www.nasponline.org/resources/mentalhealth](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/mentalhealth)

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