



### Hate to Exercise?

You don't have to love running or lifting weights to increase your activity level. You can walk or bike to work or appointments, throw a ball for your dog, garden, dance, and park far from your destination so you have to walk the rest of the way. Shoot for 30 minutes (three 10-minute sessions work too) of activity on most days. Try to get your arms and legs moving too, as with walking, swimming, martial arts or yoga. To help you complete your 30 minutes, focus on how your feet feel as you push off the pool wall or hit the ground, or the rhythm of your breath, or the sun on your face. Keep it positive!

## The Path to Emotional Wellness

### How to Improve Your Resiliency

Your mental health and wellness affects practically every aspect of your life—how you think, feel and act at home and work, with family, friends, colleagues and the general public. People who are emotionally healthy tend to go about their day with a sense of purpose. They engage in enjoyable activities and balance them with their work and family life. They have fulfilling relationships and have a positive outlook.

Emotional wellness means being able to adapt to change during life's difficult times. Being emotionally well doesn't mean you won't experience disappointment or loss. It's more about how you manage sadness, anxiety and pain. Being able to bounce back from stressful situations or other adversity is an indicator of emotional wellness.

#### Need a Tune Up?

Think you could stand to boost your mood, become more resilient and/or increase your happiness? You're not the only one! Becoming—and staying—emotionally healthy takes some attention to the things that matter most. Experts at the National Institutes of Health and Harvard HelpGuide suggest these strategies.

**Prioritize spending time with people.** Good old-fashioned face-to-face conversation can do wonders for your mood. Call your family and friends, make plans to share a meal

or run errands together. Even a friendly smile at people in the check-out line or on the bus can breathe fresh life into your day (and theirs!).

If you don't feel you have anyone to reach out to, consider inviting a neighbor or co-worker for coffee, or reconnecting with an old friend. If you are new to town or looking for new faces, seek groups that meet regularly and bring together people with similar interests like garden and bridge clubs, networking groups, volunteer or exercise groups.

It is possible to have relationships with people through social media, chat rooms and text/email messaging, but keep in mind that connecting with others in meaningful ways requires direct contact. The physical presence, human touch and nonverbal experience is essential.

**Find meaning in your life.** Having a purpose in your life to do things that benefit you and others is associated with alleviating stress and pain. You can find meaning in your life through your family and friends, career, creative projects, causes you care about, pets, religious affiliations, and caring for important people in your life. Whatever you enjoy most, be sure to find time for it. It will make doing the things you have to do more bearable.

**Develop a more positive mindset.** Negative emotions are natural

### Ignore or Address?

One in five people this year will struggle with a diagnosable mental health condition. Most people will experience emotional health concerns some time in their life. It's important to notice the signals that something is wrong rather than "stuff" the feelings or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol.

If you have tried the strategies described here and feel you need more help, you have options. Your employer may offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your primary care provider can rule out medical conditions, and social workers and other therapists are available at community health centers and private practices. KnovaSolutions can also offer support to you and your family members.

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when responding to difficult situations. But if we spend too much time thinking about the past or worrying about what we can't change, negative emotions can wreak havoc. You can stay positive by remembering the positives. Think about what is good in your life (your best friend, niece, cat, the job you love). Forgive yourself for the mistakes you've made. Learn from them, but then move on without dwelling on them. Do good deeds for people each day and remember how you've helped others when you are feeling low.

### Keep your stress levels in check.

Stress is a given. It will always be a part of life, and in many ways, it motivates us to get things done. But it can also take a toll on emotional health if it goes unchecked. What's your favorite way to relieve stress: spend time with people who are good listeners, relax with a lavender pillow on your eyes, listen to your favorite music, take a walk or go to the gym (see below), watch a movie, meditate or pray? These are but a few of the ways to relieve tension. Find what works for you so you can relax when stress begins to build.

### Stay active and feed your brain.

The mind and body are forever linked. Exercising and eating healthy foods lead to a better sense of well-being. With exercise, the body releases endorphins, the feel-good chemicals that improve mood and give you energy. Regular activity is associated with better mental health, reduced stress, better sleep and improved memory. Being active outdoors has the added benefit of breathing fresh air and being in nature. Every city has a park!

A healthy diet feeds your body and mind, and a poor diet depletes it. Bad mood, poor sleep, low energy, sickness are all byproducts of a poor diet. Watch out for caffeine, alcohol, sugary snacks, fried foods, and refined carbohydrates like white rice

and bread. Foods like chicken and fish, nuts, leafy greens, avocados, beans and fresh fruits help to boost mood and energy.

**Develop good sleep habits.** Our bodies rely on sleep to restore. Cutting back on sleep may work occasionally but eventually it will leave you rundown with a decreased ability to handle stress and think clearly. Some people can fall asleep the minute their head hits the pillow, but others need time to unwind. That's when having a nighttime sleep routine in place helps.

If bedtime is at 10 pm, start turning off electronic devices and completing tasks around 8 pm. Wind down by taking a warm bath, listening to soothing music, practicing relaxation techniques such as mindful breathing or gentle stretching, and/or reading by a soft light. Decide to postpone worrisome thoughts until the next day when you can be more resourceful. Journaling can help to "offload" negative feelings onto paper. Shoot for getting 7-9 hours each night by going to bed and rising at the same time every day (weekends too!). Keep your bedroom as cool, dark and quiet as possible. If you are bothered by city noise or neighbors, try a fan or white noise machine.

### The Goal is Resiliency

All these strategies help give you a healthy baseline so when life sends a curve ball, you are in a better position to receive it. By tending to your needs, rather than ignoring or "stuffing" them, you are building resiliency and emotional wellness.

Your KnovaSolutions clinician is available to help you improve your emotional wellness. Let us lend an empathetic ear as you work to overcome life's challenges and setbacks. We offer information, support and all the time you need to improve your health and emotional well-being. Give us a call at **800/355-0885**.