

HOLIDAY MENTAL HEALTH:

MAINTAINING MENTAL WELL-BEING DURING THE WINTER SEASON

Seasonal Changes Impact Mental Health

- The winter season changes our circadian rhythms, our body's "natural clock" that helps to regulate mood and sleep. Lack of sunlight causes a drop in serotonin and an increase in melatonin, which can cause a person to feel tired or depressed.
- Colder weather often results in less exercise and more time indoors, which can negatively affect mood, energy, sleep, stress levels, and even cognition.
- There are types of depression related to the seasons, such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Some of the factors that make a person more likely to experience SAD are geographical location, genetics, and having bipolar disorder or major depression.

Mayo Clinic, 2022

Follow a Routine

Keeping a healthy routine has been shown to improve sleep quality, maintain good health, and decrease stress levels all of which affect mental well-being. Creating a schedule of your daily tasks and fun activities can help maintain a healthy balance, even when work or school is not in session. Avoid creating an overwhelming or unrealistic schedule.

Northwestern Medicine, 2022

Exercise

Keeping active has a multitude of benefits, including lower stress, better sleep quality, improved mood, increase in energy levels and mental alertness, and reduced tiredness. Many physical activities decrease depression and anxiety by flooding the brain with endorphins, the brain's natural hormones that enhance mood.

*Harvard Health Blog, 2017
Prim Care Companion J Clin Psychiatry, 2006*

Get Outside When Possible

Breathing in fresh air allows the lungs to work at full capacity. Absorbing vitamin D from sunlight helps to improve mood, as well as increase productivity. Even just walking outside in the winter time for a few minutes a day can have a positive impact on mental and physical well-being.

Michigan State University, 2018

Keep a Healthy Sleep Schedule

Healthy sleep is crucial, especially during winter to reduce symptoms of seasonal depression. Positive sleep patterns allow for better learning, cognition and memory. Healthy sleep positively impacts mental health and neurocognitive disorders such as depression, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorder.

The Sleep Foundation, 2022

Wood County Crisis Line: 419-502-HOPE
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988



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Add Nutritious Foods

Poor diet causes fatigue, poorer cognition, and worsens mental health. Processed foods can increase depression and anxiety. Sutter Health recommends brown rice and starchy vegetables for energy. Lean proteins like chicken meat, fish, eggs, and nuts improve cognition. Healthy snacks provide more energy than sugary and processed foods.

Sutter Health, 2022

Be Mindful of Social Media Use

Social media is designed to be addictive. It is strongly associated with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and physical health issues. When you find yourself endlessly scrolling or repeatedly checking notifications, it's time to take a break from the devices and switch to another activity like puzzles, games or books.

McLean Harvard Medical School Affiliate, 2022

Spend Time with Loved Ones

Social connection is vital to mental health. Maintaining healthy bonds with friends and family combats depression and anxiety, as well as increases self esteem, empathy, trust and cooperation. Find a social balance that works best for you. Even a text or phone call can be a positive interaction to boost your mood.

Stanford Medicine, 2014

Focus on You

You are allowed to have alone time! Take time to relax, unwind, and do activities that provide a mental and physical "reset". It is not realistic to be productive nonstop. In today's world, there are many mindfulness apps available for mobile devices that promote daily reflection and improved wellbeing.

Remember What Matters

Holidays can be a time of high stress. Take a moment to reflect on what is most important to you. Be mindful of the present moment. Don't overwhelm yourself with the stress of buying an excessive number of gifts. Remember that setting personal boundaries is always valid, especially during the busy holidays.

Seek Help if You or a Loved One Are Experiencing:

- Depressed mood most of the day
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Trouble sleeping or excessive sleeping
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Feeling fatigued and less energetic
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or harming others

health.harvard.edu

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