

Mind Your Health

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

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Mental health problems are real, common and treatable— Depression is never a “normal” part of life, no matter what your age, gender or health situation. Each May for more than 50 years, Mental Health Awareness Month highlights the importance of good mental health. Caring for your mind, as well as your body, is good for overall health and is key to your success at home, work and school. Most Americans know the value of keeping physically fit with exercise, a nutritious diet and regular check-ups. But too few people realize that their mental health requires the same level of attention—mental health and physical health go hand in hand. Many of us do not give much thought to our stress and anxiety levels even though they affect the way we get along with our family, friends and coworkers. Although about 16% of American adults will develop depression at some point, only one-fifth will receive the care they need to treat the condition. Mental health, just like physical health, is treatable and crucial to a productive and enjoyable life. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness—taking care of your self is an act of strength.

The following are several tips for keeping mentally fit:

- Get Physical. The things you do to maintain your physical health will also help protect your mental health and reduce stress. Eat well, get plenty of exercise, and cut down on tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.
- Talk it out. When you are faced with a problem or a bad day, share your feelings.
- Take one thing at a time. Make a list of things to do, prioritize it and break it into manageable pieces.
- Get your mind off your troubles. Read, play or listen to music. Make time for pleasure.
- Write in a journal. Identifying the source of your stress can help you cope and gain control.
- Give yourself a break. No one is perfect. Allow yourself to be human.
- Manage your anger. Retreat before you lose control and handle the problem when you and the other person involved have had a chance to calm down.
- Get up from behind your desk. Get out of your chair, stretch or take a short walk.
- Use positive visual imagery. Close your eyes and imagine a place where you have felt at peace for a few minutes. You'll feel refreshed and have a better handle on the tasks you need to complete.
- Get screened and get help, if necessary. Sometimes, no matter how much we try to maintain our mental health, we can be completely overwhelmed by feelings that do not go away or impair our ability to function. If this happens to you, ask your primary care provider to refer you to a mental health practitioner in your area. A free self-assessment is available at www.depression-screening.org or contact Traci Hawkins for hard copy materials.

Traci Hawkins is a clinical psychologist with offices in Brooklyn and Ann Arbor. She has 15 years of experience providing child, adolescent and adult psychotherapy. She specializes in eating disorders, weight loss, depression, anxiety, marriage repair and enrichment, grief and loss, Christian therapy and goal achievement. For more

information on childhood depression or other mental health questions, feel free to contact:

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