



IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING A FOCUS ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH AS A NEW SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS

Mental health plays a large role in the overall well-being of adults and students. During the past three years of managing our lives through the Covid pandemic along with a recent wave of more new positive cases, Americans have reported a decline in their mental health.

List of key statistics to help destigmatize the topic of mental health:

- 1 in 5 Americans suffers from a mental illness (NIMH).
- 45% of adults in the U.S. have reported distress since the beginning of the pandemic (World Health Organization).
- Anxiety disorders are the highest reported mental health issue in the US with 42.5 million Americans claiming to suffer from this illness (Mental Health America).
- Mental illnesses start showing symptoms by age 14 (National Alliance on Mental Illness).
- About 1 in 4 American adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year, and one in 10 adults will suffer from a depressive illness, such as major depression or bipolar disorder (Johns Hopkins).

- Mental health crises account for 60 million visits to primary care and 6 million emergency room visits annually (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- 41% of Americans dealt with an untreated mental illness (Mental Health First Aid).
- 10.7% of the world suffers from some form of mental illness (Our World in Data).
- 40 million Americans suffer from anxiety (Anxiety and Depression Association of America).

Quick review of what is mental health?

Our mental well-being includes how we think, act and feel. It also helps us to cope with stress, relate to others and make sound healthy decisions. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is not a specific definition of mental well-being. However, various studies agree that it includes being able to:

- Realize your full potential
- Work productively
- Cope with normal stresses of life and
- Contribute meaningfully to your community.

Mental well-being includes mental health but goes far beyond treating mental illness. For example, you could go through a period of poor mental health but not necessarily have a diagnosed mental illness. Our mental health can change over time depending on factors such as your stress level, workload and work/life balance.

What is mental illness?

Mental illness refers to a variety of conditions that affect one's behavior or mood, feelings and overall mindset. Mental illnesses can occur periodically, while others are chronic and long lasting. Common mental illnesses include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Mental illness is more prevalent than you might think. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 5 U.S. adults will experience a mental illness in any given year and more than 50% will experience mental illness at some point in their life. Understanding these facts can help us all to destigmatize the topic of mental health.

Why is mental well-being important?

Mental well-being is directly connected to our physical health. Individuals with poor mental health or untreated mental illness are at risk of developing many chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart disease and obesity.

Poor mental health can also cause negative effects on your work life as well as on your social life. If you have poor mental health, you may be less productive at work and may experience withdrawal or feelings of loneliness.

How can you improve your mental well-being?

Because it is such a crucial component of your health, it is important to focus on maintaining and/or improving your mental health. Here are three simple ways to do so every day:

1. **Express gratitude.** Take a few minutes each day to write down the things that you are grateful for has been proven to lower stress levels and can help you change your mindset from negative to positive.
2. **Get exercise.** This is somewhat obvious and often forgotten just how beneficial exercise is to your overall health, but it is true. Exercising along with a healthy diet can improve brain function, reduce anxiety and improve your self-image.
3. **Get a good night's sleep.** Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep a night to improve your mental health.

Where can I learn more?

For more information about mental well-being, please have an open and clear discussion with your primary care doctor or licensed therapist. In addition, your current health insurance company likely has self-help wellness tools available to you at no cost. Lastly, please consider connecting with any mental health wellness programs or initiatives within your school district.

Important Disclaimer: We strongly recommend connecting with a licensed professional for an assessment and a complete understanding of your current and future employee benefits coverages and compliance requirements.

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