

Wellness Wednesday

14 Things You Can Do Every Day to Protect Your Mental Health As You Age

Aging brings you face to face with the loss of loved ones, children leaving the nest and physical changes such as reduced energy levels. These types of events can “give rise to negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, loneliness and lowered self-esteem,” according to the American Psychological Association. Growing older can also come with a slew of positive changes, too. “But any kind of change, even joyful changes, can bring up a variety of emotions, including anxiety, overwhelm, loneliness and depression,” said Connie Habash, a licensed marriage and family therapist in Menlo Park, California. Therefore, it’s essential to make your mental health a priority, especially throughout your later years.

Here are a handful of ways in which you can emotionally support yourself throughout the journey of growing older:



1. Meditate

“Meditation is a great way to protect your mental health as you age,” said Jodi Baretz, a licensed clinical social worker and author of *Mindful Is the New Skinny*. “Not only does it train your brain to focus and improve your attention, it decreases anxiety and increases your ability to enjoy the everyday moments of your life.” Baretz added that meditation can also increase your tolerance of the uncomfortable and help you become less reactive, which decreases stress. And studies show that it may go a long way in preventing age-related cognitive decline.

2. Stay connected

As people get older, there can be a tendency to withdraw from others. Retirement, friends passing, kids moving away all contribute to this social isolation. But it’s important to trade a night in with Netflix for an occasional dinner out with friends. “The most important thing you can do is stay in communication with others,” said Colleen Mullen, a licensed marriage and family therapist at San Diego’s Coaching Through Chaos. “Find a new social group, swim, play Bingo, join a walking group or book club.” Mullen also noted that staying socially connected keeps your mind in a healthier place, which can in turn positively boost your overall well-being.

3. Adopt an attitude of gratitude

Studies suggest that taking a moment to count your blessings can boost your happiness. “Practicing gratitude has been demonstrated to help people manage stress, decrease depression, increase empathy and decrease aggression,” Mullen said. Steven M. Sultanoff, a clinical psychologist in Costa Mesa, California, suggested ending your day by recalling three things that you are grateful for at the moment.

4. Check in with your body

Between smartphones, television and a 24/7 news cycle, our minds are always busy. But mindfulness has been linked to reduced anxiety and the reduction of mental stress. However, a “mindful body scan” may help whenever you are feeling overwhelmed, according to Karinn Glover, an assistant professor of the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

The process is simple: Spend five to 15 minutes breathing deeply and focusing your thoughts on your body, sensations, areas of discomfort or tension, starting at your feet and moving upward progressively until you get to the top of your head, Glover said. “It’s a wonderful way to practice getting in touch with your body so stress and tension don’t become overwhelming,” Glover added.

5. Get moving

“Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which brings oxygen, which helps prevent the dreaded ‘brain fog’ that so many women complain about once they reach a certain estrogen-deprived age,” said Maria Shriver, founder of The Women’s Alzheimer’s Movement and Move for Minds — the organization’s annual fundraising initiative. For the best results, the organization recommends a combination of aerobic exercise and weight or resistance training.

6. Try something new

“Keep an open mind,” said Susan London, director of social work at Shore View Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. She suggested taking any opportunity possible to step out of your comfort zone. “You never know the kinds of experiences you might have as a result of this, and it could change the course of your life without you even realizing it,” London added. Shriver also advocated for challenging your mind. “Mental activity offers benefits to brain health. Learn something new to create new neural connections,” Shriver said. Try studying an unfamiliar language or taking up an instrument.

7. Pop a probiotic

Approximately 90 percent of serotonin (the neurotransmitter in the brain that releases feel-good chemicals) is made in the belly, along with other important mood-regulating neurotransmitters, said Sarah Morgan, a functional nutritionist and founder of Buddies In My Belly. “The neurotransmitters made in the belly directly impact brain functions like mood, memory, focus, sense of well-being and more,” she explained.

Research suggests that taking a daily probiotic may help ward off depression. Morgan also recommended eating a diet high in plant foods that are rich in prebiotic fibers to keep your gut bacteria “healthy and happy.” This includes vegetables, nuts, seeds, fruit, beans and whole grains.

8. Form a new routine

Many Americans strive to retire by the age of 65. But sitting at home all day with nothing to do can take a toll on you emotionally. According to Ramani Durvasula, a professor of psychology at California State University, “having a routine can provide meaning and purpose, which many view as two of the most essential ingredients for health.” Sign up to volunteer, take on a part-time job in an industry that has always fascinated you, try a new hobby, become a mentor or get involved in local civic activities.

9. Get your Zs

“As you age, unfortunately, insomnia becomes an issue for many Americans, afflicting almost half of adults over the age of 60,” said Bill Fish, a certified sleep science coach and co-founder of Tuck. A lack of sleep can lead to mental health ailments such as anxiety and depression. And a 2012 study linked sleeplessness with an increased risk of Alzheimer’s. “Your brain goes through a rebooting process each night, essentially recharging itself, so we feel brighter and refreshed in the morning,” Fish said. “If you aren’t achieving the recommended sleep of seven to nine hours per night, you aren’t giving the brain a chance to recover to take on the day ahead.”

10. Practice self-love

Developing a compassionate relationship with your body will go a long way in helping you to combat any dissatisfaction that may coincide with the process of aging. Richard Matzkin, psychotherapist and co-author of *Art Of Aging*, suggested practicing positive affirmations and visualization to achieve this.

“The thing that kills self-love most is negative self-judgment,” he said. “You can counter this with positive self-talk. When negativity arises, rather than allowing yourself to be drawn into self-defeating, negative thoughts, replace it with thoughts about what you like about yourself.”

11. See a therapist

If you begin to feel sad, frustrated or anxious, you might want to consider giving therapy a try. “Therapists can help identify counterproductive patterns in thinking and emotion that will help you get back to loving life quickly, should you hit a rough spot,” said Whitney Owens, a licensed clinical psychologist in Las Vegas.

Grief can also be a reason to call in a professional. There is no shame in getting support from an experienced practitioner who understands what you are going through. “Don’t ignore the signs. If you are experiencing grief for an inordinate amount of time, usually longer than a year after the loss of a loved one, don’t be afraid to seek help,” London said.

12. Keep a positive support system

Having a good support system can help to tackle conditions like stress and depression. Surround yourself with people who love and care about you. That also means cutting out toxic people. “Stop catering to people who suck your drive. Let them go,” Durvasula, the professor of psychology, said.

13. Laugh out loud

Next time something makes you laugh, take note and try to include more of that in your life. “Happiness goes hand-in-hand with laughing, and humor is a great stress reliever,” said James Polo, a psychiatrist in Tacoma, Washington. “Mentally fit individuals tend to take time to celebrate funny things and laugh about them out loud.”

14. Spend time in nature

Going outdoors can improve your physical and mental health. So whether you spend time in your yard pruning the bushes, going for a hike in the forest, or simply sitting in a local park to take in the peace and serenity, getting outside may help to brighten your day. “The feelings of awe and gratitude when we stand atop a stunning vista or when we see a rose slowly bloom in our garden, uplift us and maintain our appreciation of the beauty that we have in our lives all around us,” Habash said.

Article source: <http://bit.ly/2ICMeTl>



One day or day one, you decide.

This Week's Exercise

CROSS BAND PULLBACK



Try it: Stand with your feet under the shoulders and slide the resistance band under the arches of your feet. Make sure the slack on either side is even, then cross them, grabbing the handles. Bend the knees and hinge forward with a straight back. Pull the band so the handles come up near the chest and shoulders. Squeeze the shoulder blades together and point the elbows backward. Continue looking at the floor in front of you to maintain a straight back.

Source: <http://bit.ly/2IEWAC4>

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

CHEESECAKE BROWNIES



Ingredients

Nonstick cooking spray
2 large eggs
3/4 cup finely ground almond meal or flour
1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1/8 teaspoon kosher salt
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 cup raw honey
2 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
1/2 cup semisweet chocolate chips
6 ounces 1/3 less fat cream cheese,
softened in the microwave
2 tablespoons sugar

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Spray a nonstick 9 x 9-inch baking pan with cooking spray and line with two strips of parchment 8 inches wide and long enough to leave a 2-inch overhang on all sides.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk 1 large whole egg with 1 egg yolk (separate the whites and reserve, set aside).
3. Add 1/4 cup water, the honey, and 1 teaspoon of the vanilla and stir with the spatula until combined.
4. In a large bowl, whisk together the almond meal, cocoa powder, salt, and baking soda.
5. Pour the egg mixture into the bowl with the dry mixture and mix well with a spatula. Fold in the chocolate chips.
6. Pour the batter into the prepared baking pan.
7. Soften the package of cream cheese in the microwave, mix in sugar, reserved egg white and remaining 1 teaspoon vanilla.
8. Pour over the brownie mix and spread over the top with a spatula, marbelize the with a toothpick.
9. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 30 minutes.
10. Let cool for at least 30 minutes before cutting into 12 bars.

Nutrition Information

Yield: 12 servings
Serving size: 1 brownie

Amount Per Serving:
Freestyle Points: 7
Points +: 5
Calories: 182
Total fat: 10g
Saturated fat: 4g
Cholesterol: 34.5mg
Sodium: 164mg
Carbohydrates: 21g
Fiber: 1.5g
Sugar: 18g
Protein: 4g

Recipe source:
<http://bit.ly/2IBD4Gx>