

What Is "Normal"?

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How did it become such a powerful concept—the baseline on which everything in life is measured and the standard for which we strive? Dating back over 300 years, "normal" was first used by mathematicians and meant "made according to a carpenter's square". Over the centuries, the term has evolved to mean "usual, regular, common, or typical", and applies to people, society and behavior.

In 2020, the pandemic sent shock waves throughout the world, flipping what we once called "normal" upside down and significantly changing life as we knew it. The post-traumatic growth theory, developed by Psychologists Richard Tedeschi, PhD, and Lawrence Calhoun, PhD, suggests that people can emerge from trauma or adversity having achieved positive personal growth. Research suggests a transformation can occur when a challenge to a person's core beliefs causes them to become different than they were before. As we emerge post-pandemic, we have been given the opportunity to reshape our definition of "normal" and be different than we were before. What do you want your new standard of normal to be? Will you define it as *adequate*, maintaining the bare minimum, or *optimal*, reaching higher for the best and most desirable?

Reflecting over the past two years, what challenges have you overcome? In what areas of your life have you experienced positive personal growth? Do you have a greater awareness of work/life balance? Perhaps your priorities or values were reordered and you were surprised at what rose to the top of your priority list. Did relationships change? How? Were you able to spend a greater amount of quality time with your spouse and kids? Did physical exercise increase with long family walks around the neighborhood, or did it decrease with the closures of gyms and common areas? Did your diet improve? Were you able to enjoy more home cooked meals with fresh vegetables, or did you experience weight gain from inactivity, boredom, stress or anxiety? How did you handle fear or uncertainty?

As life speeds back up, hold on to the positive, meaningful changes, and find a way to incorporate them into your new "normal" post-pandemic life. Learn from the struggles and let go of the rest!

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT THAN YOU WERE BEFORE.



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How To Make Healthy, Home-Cooked Meals



Enjoying healthy home-cooked meals shouldn't be a flash in the pan. With restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic starting to ease more and more, we can start to consider dinners in restaurants and bars with our family and friends again. And while those

moments are going to be great to experience again and with more frequency, we should still remember not to overdo it with restaurant meals. It's helpful to know a few ways to cook healthy at home.

Adjustments During the Pandemic

One thing many people have found to be a positive during the pandemic is cooking more meals at home. Whether that means trying new recipes or learning to cook for the first time, it has become an opportunity for creativity, as well as a learning experience.

By choosing to cook at home over ordering takeout or heading to your favorite restaurant, you've already chosen a healthier option. That's because a lot of restaurant food is made with more sodium, butter or other heavy-fat additives, which you have the choice to limit when you cook at home. So, for example, grilling steak and potatoes on your own can be a more nutritional option than getting that same combo at your local steakhouse. And the health benefits can be even greater when you make some simple choices and substitutions. Choosing a lean cut of steak and preparing potatoes with fresh herbs in place of butter and tons of salt will reduce your fat and sodium intake without sacrificing savory flavor.

Planning Ahead is Key

Making your lunch the night before can help ensure you're eating healthy—especially if you're using leftovers from a healthy, home-cooked dinner! Leftovers are the perfect food to pack and take for lunch because you can control portions and calories to ensure it will be nutritious, filling and delicious.

Whenever you do your grocery shopping, be sure to take some time and plan out at least three home-cooked dinners for the week. By planning for multiple meals, you can often discover more uses for several ingredients or side dish options that can help keep your grocery budget lower. Grabbing a few different low-fat proteins, like fish, chicken, tofu or pork tenderloin can lay the groundwork for meal planning to help you choose your toppings, marinades, side dishes and even your snacks for in-between meals. It also helps you avoid last-minute calls for pizza or Chinese takeout!

Anyone Can Be a Good Cook—Maybe You Just Need Help to Get Started

Maybe you've had some bad experiences cooking from home, or aren't great at remembering to buy ingredients ahead of time. We all have some cooking-gone-wrong stories to share! But thanks to delivery meal kits, we have access to some great and healthy home-cooking options that come complete with easy-to-follow recipes and all the ingredients!

Many of the services out there not only help you customize your menus to your preferred tastes, but they also give you options for specific nutritional needs, like paleo and Keto diets, vegan or vegetarians foods, and lactose-free items. And they are great for tracking your nutritional intake and controlling portions. These services are also great for helping you avoid those nights of indecision that can lead to throwing up your hands and calling your

local restaurants for something fast and easy (and often loaded with fat and calories). Don't underestimate how much NOT having to stress about what you should make after work can do for your mental health.



Understanding Your Emotional Wellbeing

We often hear that it is vital to care for both our physical health and our mental health. The easiest way to start is by understanding that both of these are connected. If you're neglecting a balanced diet and exercise, for example, you may find that your mental health is also taking a toll. Poor physical health can lead to an increased risk of developing mental health issues. Likewise, if you're under strenuous amounts of pressure and not practicing self-care, you may find that you're feeling fatigued and even physically ill. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness. This means that the majority of adults are either directly or indirectly impacted by mental health issues.

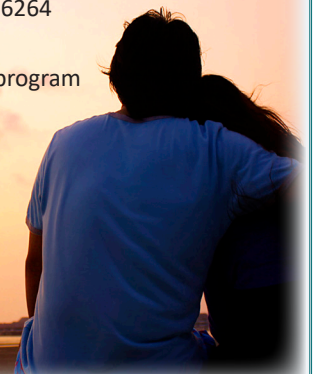
Boost your mental wellness by forming healthy lifestyle habits:

- ▶ **Physical activity** is a great way to keep your body healthy and directly correlates with mental wellness. If you're feeling down, you may find that even a short walk outside can help rejuvenate your energy and mood.
- ▶ **Nutrition** is one of the biggest factors that influences the way we feel. Keeping a healthy diet can aid in the development, management, and prevention of numerous mental health conditions.
- ▶ **Smoking** has a negative impact both on mental and physical health. Many with mental health problems believe that smoking relieves symptoms, but these effects are only short-term.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS IN NEED OF SUPPORT OR GUIDANCE, PLEASE UTILIZE THESE WAYS TO SEEK HELP.

- ✓ Talk with a healthcare professional
- ✓ Call the NAMI Helpline at 800-950-6264
- ✓ Connect with family and friends
- ✓ Contact your employee assistance program
- ✓ Join a support group



Q: *I love the holiday season, but every year about this time, I can feel my anxiety increasing and struggle to sleep. Do you have any advice for me?*



For many, the holidays are a time of joy and celebration; but for others, the added stress can seem overwhelming. Worry about increased responsibilities and heightened expectations can be pushed aside during the day only to swirl in our heads at night, impeding our much needed sleep.

I would recommend that you start a bedtime routine. Whether it's enjoying a warm bath, slipping into luxurious pj's, or cozying up with a good book, this routine acts as a signal to your body that it's time to start winding down.

If you still find yourself tossing and turning, worrying about your ever-growing to-do list, keep a notepad by your bed and empty your thoughts onto it. This will help you to release that worry while allowing yourself the comfort that it will not be forgotten. Check out the Holiday Stress Relief article below for additional helpful tips.



Did You Know?

Studies show that petting and playing with animals reduces stress-related hormones just 5 minutes after interacting with a pet.



NUTRITIONAL SPOTLIGHT OMEGA-3 FISH OIL

Omega-3 fatty acids are nutritionally beneficial year-round, helping us to maintain a healthy body. In addition to supporting cell structure, they are an energy source, helping to keep your heart, lungs, blood vessels and immune system working properly.

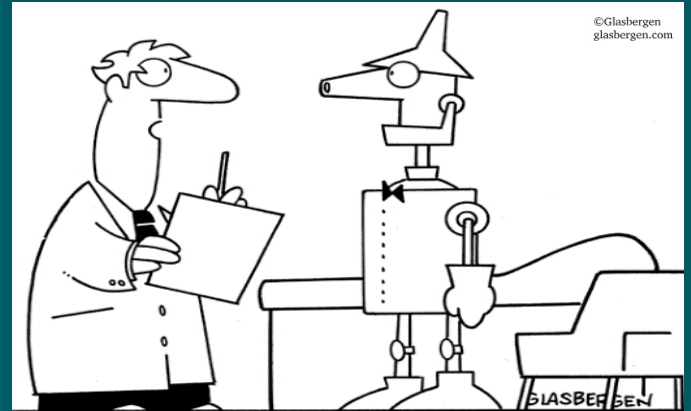
During the winter months Omega-3 oils can be especially helpful for the following conditions:

Arthritis Pain: Joint and muscle pain usually increases during cold, winter months. Studies show Omega-3 can help to reduce arthritis pain.

Seasonal Depression: Winter blues is a commonly used term referring to depression brought on by shorter, darker days. Studies suggest Omega-3 may help reduce the risk of depression and support mental health.

Skin: Omega-3 supports healthy skin by reducing dryness and inflammation—particularly caused by UV light.

Food Sources Include: Omega-3 can be found in oily fish (sardines, tuna, shrimp), eggs, flaxseed oil, chia seeds, walnuts, and kidney beans.



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"I want you to switch from motor oil to Omega-3 fish oil"

Fit Tip: HOLIDAY STRESS RELIEF

1

ACCEPT IMPERFECTION

Even with the best intentions in mind, whether it is a magical Christmas morning for our children, a delish meal with loved ones or a picture perfect home strewn with lights, setting the bar unrealistically high can cause us to feel disappointed when these things don't live up to our expectations. Remember...it's okay if things turn out differently than planned. Take a deep breath and enjoy the moment.

2

LESS IS MORE

Holiday commitments can become quite a long list. From work parties and ugly sweater competitions to school plays and concerts, it's important not to overcommit. Choose which items are most important to you, slow down and enjoy them! If the activity or tradition causes you to feel overwhelmed and stressed, it's okay to opt out or modify based on your needs this year.

3

STAY FOCUSED ON WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Keep in mind what brings you joy this season and place that at the center of every decision you make. As you navigate this holiday season, allocating time, energy and finances to different things, keep your reason in the forefront of your mind as a guiding light.

Embrace ALL of Your Emotions

Think of your emotions as a signal; they represent information. You do not want to ignore the data; it could put you in peril or create missed opportunities. Those feelings are manifestations of the information you may or may not be aware you know on a deep level. For example, your previous experience leads to the feeling you should not trust someone. Equally, when you feel something is the right choice, it's because of a wealth of conscious and unconscious information - intuition. These two situations do not mean the interpretation is accurate; it is just information to observe with a curious mind.

How many emotions do you feel - five, ten, or hundreds? Some people go through life in the narrow range of happy, sad, or angry. However, others recognize the broad spectrum from astonished to worthless. How you respond to being dismissed or betrayed may be different - although they are both forms of angry. Conversely, inspired and respected invoke another type of happiness. However, how often do you clump various emotions in broad categories without giving them their chance to shine? More importantly, how often do you not allow them to serve their purpose? When you are sad, recognizing the difference between being isolated and powerless presents different paths of healing. Interestingly, awe and perplexed are various forms of surprise, and each has its place to make a life worth living.

Accepting your emotions can be uncomfortable. Although it may seem like staying in our comfort zone keeps us safe, we may fail to recognize that our feelings (insignificant, courageous, remorseful, creative, numb, energetic, etc.) create motivation in a world full of opportunities. We need all of our emotions, so embrace them.

Conversely, will you go to places and be treated with kindness, respect, and generosity? Those are lessons too. Let's be clear; the point is not to be foolish.

Protect yourself by recognizing you can be humble, benevolent, empathetic, and safe. They should not be opposing ideas.



FALL 2022
WELLNESS CAMPAIGN



TAKE HEART

Wellness Coordinator Awards

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

Kari Gunsalus | Topock ESD
Alexa Benedict | Wellton ESD
Eve Elias | West MEC

VIVACIOUS VOCALIST

Anna Carreon | Central AZ Valley Institute
of Technology – CAVIT

Fitbit® Challenge Winners

AUGUST

Kristen King
Naco ESD

SEPTEMBER

Cassie Kent
Pima USD

OCTOBER

Juanita Funcannon
Saddle Mountain USD

