

## **Mental Health Matters**

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Mental health includes your emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how you think, feel, act, and cope with life. It plays a big role in your ability to maintain good physical health. Stress, anxiety, and depression/sadness may result in:

- Changes in sleep habits- sleeping more or less than usual
- Decrease in energy level- feeling tired more often
- Changes in appetite- eating less/more resulting in weight loss/gain
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or remembering things
- Achy muscles or joints or headaches
- Temporary spikes in blood pressure (related to stress and anxiety)

Symptoms of mental health can be chronic or may be related to changes in your life. For example, during the COVID pandemic, you and your loved ones may have experienced uncertainty, isolation or limited socialization, changes in routine, sickness, loss, or other stressful situations. Regardless of your situation or symptoms, there are many things you can do to improve your mental health and cope with stress in a healthy way.

So, take a deep breath. Literally! Here are some helpful tips:

- Do deep breathing/relaxed breathing- slowly breath in through nose and out through your mouth
- Mindfulness – This can be very calming and an effective way to reduce stress. Focus only on what is happening right now. Be present in the moment and accept the moment as it is. Avoid starting sentences with “what if”.
- Incorporate meditation, yoga, stretching or prayer into your daily routine
- Make time to unwind- listening to relaxing music, go for a drive, or watch something that makes you laugh
- Take breaks from news stories, including those on social media. Consider disconnecting from your phone, TV, and computer screens for a while.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Take care of yourself, including a consistent sleep and wake times, eating a balanced diet and getting exercise on a daily basis.
- Limit alcohol intake and avoid drugs or using prescription drugs in ways other than prescribed.
- Avoid smoking and the use of other tobacco products.
- Attend regular health appointments and stay up to date on vaccinations.

Coping techniques for children:

- Hot Cocoa-Pretend you are holding a mug of hot cocoa between both of your hands. Take a small breath in to smell the hot cocoa, then slowly breathe out and on your hot cocoa to cool it down. Repeat.
- 7/11 - Breathe in for a count of 7...Breathe out for a count of 11.

Making time for your mental health should always be a priority. Take care of yourself. Your mental health matters!