

Being in good health means more than feeling physically well; it also means feeling mentally well.

Today, we are more aware of how our mental and physical health affect each other. Setting aside time to focus on mental health is important – to you and those who care about you. By practicing mind and body fitness, you can nurture your mind, body and spirit in a positive and enjoyable way.

Life is full of change, risks and challenges. Good mental or emotional health helps us find our balance and stay in control, even during turbulent times. But how do we know if we are mentally healthy enough to deal with life's ups and downs?

Get Mentally Fit

A range of options is available, to help you improve your mental fitness, including self-help books, support groups, relaxation therapy, meditation, and talk or behavioural therapy. Talking to a mental health professional, or other health care provider, can help you identify what type of support you will benefit from most.

For more information, contact the Canadian Mental Health Association.

- Visit our web site at www.cmha.ca
- Call our National office at 416.484.7750, or the CMHA office nearest you

Mentally healthy people in a healthy society.



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The Meaning of Mental Health

Definitions of mental health are changing. It used to be that good mental health meant you had no diagnosable mental illness. Now, more mental health professionals are taking a "positive psychology" approach and recognizing that mental health is more than an absence of illness, it is a state of health.

Consider these key characteristics when assessing your own mental health:

Ability to enjoy life – Can you live in the moment and appreciate the "now"? Are you able to learn from the past and plan for the future without dwelling on things you can't change or predict?

Resilience – Are you able to bounce back from hard times? Can you manage the stress of a serious life event without losing your optimism and a sense of perspective?

Balance – Are you able to juggle the many aspects of your life? Can you recognize when you might be devoting too much time to one aspect, at the expense of others? Are you able to make changes to restore balance when necessary?

Self-actualization – Do you recognize and develop your strengths so that you can reach your full potential?

Flexibility – Do you feel, and express, a range of emotions? When problems arise, can you change your expectations – of life, others, yourself – to solve the problem and feel better?

You can gauge your mental health by thinking about how you coped with a recent difficulty. Did you feel there was no way out of the problem and that life would never be normal again? Were you unable to carry on with work or school? With time, were you able to enjoy your life, family and friendships? Were you able to regain your balance and look forward to the future?

Taking the pulse of mental health brings different results for everyone; it's unique to the individual. By reflecting on these characteristics, you can recognize your strengths, and identify areas where your level of mental fitness could be improved.

Benefits of Good Mental Health

Just as physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong, mental fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a state of good mental health.

When we are mentally healthy, we enjoy our life and environment, and the people in it. We can be creative, learn, try new things, and take risks. We are better able to cope with difficult times in our personal and professional lives. We feel the sadness and anger that can come with the death of a loved one, a job loss or relationship problems and other difficult events, but in time, we are able to get on with and enjoy our lives once again.

Nurturing our mental health can also help us combat or prevent the mental health problems that are sometimes associated with a chronic physical illness. In some cases, it can prevent the onset or relapse of a physical or mental illness. Managing stress well, for instance, can have a positive impact on heart disease.

Chances are, you are already taking steps to sustain your mental health, as well as your physical health – you just might not realize it.

Ways to Build Your Mental Fitness

Get physical Evidence is growing that physical activity is an effective way to take care of your mental health, and even prevent problems. Regular exercise can:

- reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and panic disorder
- ease tension and stress
- improve mood and instill a positive outlook
- enhance self-esteem

Eat right A recent British study linked poor diet with an increase in mental health problems. A healthy diet:

- provides our bodies with essential vitamins and amino acids
- can improve mood and energy levels
- can help our bodies cope with possible side effects of medication used to treat mental illnesses

Take Control of Stress Being mentally fit can help us to more effectively manage stressful situations, so we can:

- consider how we are managing
- decide what kind of help we need
- deal with our emotions

Read more about what makes up good mental health and how to achieve it at

www.cmha.ca

