



Understanding Mental Health

Mental health is the state of our psychological and emotional well-being. It encompasses our emotions, feelings of connection, thoughts, and the ability to manage life's highs and lows. Throughout our lives, we will all experience periods of positive and negative mental health.

FACT >

Everyone has mental health.

Mental health and mental illness are often used interchangeably, but it's important to note that they are not the same. Mental health is always there and may be positive or negative. Mental illness and substance use disorders, however, affect a person's ability to function over a long period of time.¹ Remember, someone without a mental illness could experience poor mental health, just as a person living with a mental illness could experience excellent mental health.

FACT >

Everyone deserves to have the right supports and resources available to foster good mental health.

Mental illnesses and substance use disorders are caused by a complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors.² They are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning.

FACT >

The presence or absence of a mental illness is not a predictor of good mental health.

Mental health is part of every one of us and in all areas of our lives. We bring it with us to our workplaces, schools, our hobbies and recreational activities, and our places of worship – everywhere we go in our communities our mental health is with us.

FACT >

One-third of people in Canada will experience a mental illness or substance use disorder in their lifetime.

With the right support, people with mental illnesses or substance use disorders can and do thrive. Just as we take care of our physical health, there are many ways we can help take care of our mental health.

¹ Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. (2023, January 10). *The difference between mental health and mental illness*. The Difference Between Mental Health and Mental Illness | Wellbeing.gov.bc.ca. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://wellbeing.gov.bc.ca/understandingmentalhealth>

² Canada, P. H. A. of. (2022, June 3). *Government of Canada*. Canada.ca. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness.html>



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> We can look after our mental health by:



Building and nurturing support networks

Feeling connected to others and to our community not only provides us with a sense of belonging but ensures we have people to lean on when we need to. In fact, humans are inherently social beings and we're designed to connect. This can take form with friendships, family members, co-workers, neighbours, romantic relationships and more.



Identifying and feeling our emotions

Having good mental health doesn't mean feeling happy all the time. It means being able to identify and experience the wide range of emotions that all humans go through and managing them in a way that is respectful to you and others around you.



Moving our bodies

Move your body in a way that feels good for you. This can include walking, dancing, running, swimming, stretching, playing with your kids or animals. In fact, moving your body 20 minutes per day has been proven to decrease tension levels and improve anxiety, depression, dementia, cognition and quality of life.³



Trying a new hobby or sport

Inviting fun and creativity into our routines can help minimize stress and reduce anxiety and depression. Make time for the things that bring you meaning and joy! Whether it's knitting, reading, bike riding or baking, there are endless possibilities and activities to get involved in.



Practicing mindfulness

Mindfulness is purposely bringing one's attention to the present moment. When our minds are cluttered, it can be difficult to notice your own feelings and the feelings of others. Practicing mindfulness can help calm your mind, become more aware, and create better connections with yourself and others. Trying mindfulness meditation and simple breathing exercises can also bring many health benefits, such as reduced stress.



Being kind to ourselves

While we can't stop our minds from thinking – it's simply impossible – we can change how we talk to ourselves. Take a moment and listen to your inner voice. What's it telling you? Sometimes we don't realize the amount of negative self-talk we engage in until we stop and listen. We could all benefit from growing our compassionate voice which might sound like how we speak to our loved ones.



Remember: we don't need to be busy to be productive - rest is also productive for our mental health.



³ Canada, P. H. A. of. (2018, October 1). *Government of Canada*. Canada.ca. Retrieved April 12, 2023, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/physical-activity-tips-adults-18-64-years.html>

Sources

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