

# MENTAL HEALTH

*Most people travel through life without giving mental health a second thought. While making annual visits to a physician's office for a check-up or to a dentist to maintain healthy teeth is routine, what can be done to maintain good mental health?*

*Mental health depends on several factors, some of them beyond a person's control. But there is a lot that can be done to remain mentally healthy.*

### ▼Self-esteem.

How people look at themselves has a lot to do with how they think, feel, and act. If a person's self image is positive, then he or she feels confident in the ability to achieve set goals and to deal with life's occasional problems. There is satisfaction in achieving those goals, which helps to improve performance and to form healthy and lasting relationships with other people.

Building positive self-esteem cannot be accomplished overnight, but can begin immediately.

- Be honest by recognizing both strengths and faults.
- Be willing to try to improve by believing that faults can be overcome and strengths can be developed.
- Strive to make the most of abilities while avoiding the pressure brought on by not recognizing limitations.
- Set goals. Avoid being compared with others.

### ▼Stress.

Some stress in life is not only natural, but necessary. It helps the mind and body prepare for and meet challenges. Stress increases the heart rate and breathing, rushes adrenalin to the muscles, and enhances mental alertness. But too much stress can be harmful, especially if it remains after the challenge has subsided. It can lead to ulcers, heart disease, depression, and anxiety. Remaining mentally healthy requires learning to cope with stress.

- Learn to avoid unnecessary stress by avoiding situations that cause it.
- Organize available time to do what needs to be done.
- Talk with other people and don't keep problems and anger bottled up inside.
- Learn to relax.

### ▼Physical health.

The old saying, a healthy mind depends on a healthy body, is true. Feeling good about oneself is easier when physically fit.

- Don't abuse alcohol or other drugs.
- Stop smoking.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Control weight.

### ▼Growing older.

Older people are more susceptible to situations that can lead to mental illness. These include loss of friends or loved ones, loss of income or livelihood and the independence that went with it, and loss of physical health and dignity. Some of these losses are unavoidable, but there are things that can be done to remain mentally healthy in the later years.

- Set new goals.
- Adapt to changes in your lifestyle, in society, and among friends.
- Find something enjoyable to do and do it.
- Don't neglect physical health.
- Make the necessary changes.
- Be realistic and acknowledge that everyone grows old.

### ▼If mental illness occurs.

Despite the best efforts to prevent mental illness, it still occurs. The causes may be physical changes in the brain, genetic factors present since birth, or outside factors beyond anyone's control. Fortunately, most mental illnesses can be treated successfully and the person returned to a full and productive life.

Learn about mental illness and its warning signs. Prompt treatment can avert more serious problems.

### ▼What else to do.

People with a mental illness often face the stigma attached by society to mental illness. This stigma causes discrimination against people with a mental illness in employment, housing, health care, and an ability to buy health insurance. By learning more about mental illness and the effectiveness of treatment, this discrimination can end, removing the stigma that acts as a barrier to successful treatment.

For more information,  
please contact the  
Missouri Department of  
Mental Health,  
Division of Behavioral  
Health (DBH)  
P.O. Box 687  
1706 East Elm, Jefferson  
City, MO 65101.  
573-751-8017  
[www.dmh.mo.gov](http://www.dmh.mo.gov)