

Faith Community Nursing – May 2018

Mental Health of America is focused on helping Americans live physically and mentally healthy lives. Considering May is Mental Health Month, they have released special tools, materials, and factsheets about mental health. There are many components to mental health, many of which are tied to physical health as well. All parts of a healthy lifestyle improve the health of the *whole* person. Below is an outline of Mental Health America's focus points for achieving a fit mind and body as well as some information about them.

- **Have a healthy diet.** – Individuals who have diets rich in fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, legumes, fish, and unsaturated fats are less likely to develop depression than those who consume less of those foods and more processed, fried, and sugary foods. In recent studies, one third of participants with depression experienced full relief of their symptoms after improving their diet. Omega-3 fatty acids, B group vitamins, and vitamin D are all important nutrients for healthy brain functioning.
- **Exercise regularly.** – Exercising can increase many hormones and neurotransmitters that can aid brain function and benefit mental health. Endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine are all released when exercising that increase pleasure, relieve pain, and boost mood. Just 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week will get you to the recommended amount of exercise and boost your mental health as a consequence.
- **Get enough sleep.** – The amount of rest you get impacts your mood, ability to learn and make memories, organ health, immune system strength, appetite, metabolism, and hormone release. Sleep is crucial for mental health as it increases the amount of space between brain cells to allow fluid flow to clear away toxins. Not getting enough sleep or having restless sleep can increase your risk of health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and obesity, as well as your risk of mental health problems. Try to get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep every night to have better sleep hygiene and overall better health.
- **Take care of gut health.** – The gut includes the esophagus, stomach, small and large intestines, gallbladder, liver, and pancreas: everything included in digesting food and turning it to waste. The gut and brain affect one another; changes in the gut microbiome (the bacteria, viruses, and fungi that live there and aid you) can impact your brain, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression can cause issues with your gut microbiome, even causing heart burn, indigestion, acid reflux, bloating, pain, constipation, or diarrhea. You can help your digestive system by eating healthy foods (rich in whole grains, lean meats, fish, fruits, and vegetables), consuming prebiotics that feed the good bacteria in your gut, and consuming probiotics that are live bacteria in foods such as yogurt to build up your gut microbiome.
- **Manage stress.** – Stress is a normal part of life, but chronic stress can negatively impact your immune system, digestive health, appetite, weight, muscle tensions, and also your mental health. Try to practice self-care through being realistic in your responsibilities and expectations for yourself, not being overly critical of yourself or others, taking time to meditate, visualize the best outcomes in stressful situations, exercising, having a social

support system, and spending time doing relaxing hobbies. All of these actions can help your anxiety level, stress level, and happiness level.

Other considerations for your mental and physical health

- Living a healthy lifestyle prevents disease or the progression of disease. Being proactive in your physical and mental health will save you time, energy, and pain from conditions that would progress otherwise.
- Gradual, small steps are important steps. They are positive actions that you can be proud of and build upon to move toward living a healthy life.
- From MHA: If you are taking steps to live a healthy lifestyle but still feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit www.mhascreening.org to check your symptoms. It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, Mental Health America now gives you customized information especially for you, to help you find tools and resources to feel better.

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