



# Staying Well

When you have a mental health condition



*When you have a mental health condition, you may not realize how important your overall health is to your recovery. Having poor overall health can get in the way and make recovery harder. Finding ways to take care of your health can aid your recovery and help you feel better. Here are some things you can do.*

## Connect With Others

Spending time with positive, loving people you care about and trust can ease stress, help your mood and improve the way you feel overall. They may be family members, close friends, members of a support group or a counselor at the local drop-in center. Many communities even have warm lines you can call to talk to someone.

## Advocate For Yourself

You deserve good health care. All too often, people with mental illness develop other health conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, because their health is overlooked. If your doctor is not asking about your overall health, let him know that it's important to you and essential to your recovery.

## Get the Care You Need

Get routine check-ups and visit your doctor when you're not feeling well. It may be due to your medicine or a symptom of your mental illness. But it could also be a different health problem.

## Plan Your Sleep Schedule

Sleep can affect your mood and your body and it is important to your recovery. Not getting the right amount of sleep can make day-to-day functioning and recovery harder. For tips on how to sleep better, contact the National Sleep Foundation at (202) 347-3471 or visit [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org).

## Watch What You Eat

Sometimes, medicine can cause you to gain weight. Other times, eating unhealthy foods can cause weight gain. Foods high in calories and saturated or "bad" fats can raise your blood pressure and cholesterol. This can increase your chance of gaining weight and having other health problems, like heart disease and diabetes. Here are some shortcuts you can take to healthy eating.

- ▶ If fresh vegetables are too costly, buy frozen vegetables. They can cost less and last a long time in your freezer.
- ▶ If you eat at fast food restaurants, many now offer healthy foods such as salads or grilled chicken.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor to learn more about how to have a healthy diet.

## Manage Stress

Everyone has stress. It is a normal part of life. You can feel stress in your body when you have too much to do or when you haven't slept well. You can also feel stress when you worry about your job, money, relationships, or a friend or family member who is ill or in crisis. Stress can make you feel run down. It can also cause your mind to race and make it hard to focus on the things you need to do. If you have a mental illness, lots of stress can make you feel worse and make it harder to function. If you are feeling stressed, there are steps you can take to feel better.

- ▶ If you feel like you have too much to do, make a list and work on it one task at a time.
- ▶ Let others know them too. If you're overwhelmed at home or work, or with friends, learn how to say "no." It may be hard at first, so practice saying "no" with the people you trust most.
- ▶ There are a lot of things you can do to make your life more peaceful and calm. Do something you enjoy, exercise, connect with others or meditate.
- ▶ What causes stress in your life? If you know where stress is coming from, you will be able to manage it better.
- ▶ You don't have to deal with stress on your own. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, support group or counselor can make you feel better. They also may help you figure out how to better manage stress in your life.

## Exercise

Along with a healthy diet, exercise can improve your health and well-being. Exercising regularly can increase your self-esteem and confidence; reduce your feeling of stress, anxiety and depression; improve your sleep; and help you maintain a healthy weight.

Find a type of exercise that you enjoy and talk to your doctor. You might enjoy walking, jogging or even dancing. You don't have to go to a gym or spend money to exercise.

- ▶ Check out your local community center for free, fun activities.
- ▶ Take a short walk around the block with family, friends or coworkers.
- ▶ Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Make sure the stairs are well lit.
- ▶ Turn on some music and dance.

## Do Something You Enjoy

During the week, find time- 30 minutes, a couple of hours or whatever you can fit in- to do something you enjoy. Read a book or a magazine, go for a walk or spend time with friends. Taking time for yourself to have fun and laugh can help you relax, ease stress and improve the way you feel.

If you or someone you care about needs to speak to someone or is in crisis and needs immediate help, call the **Access & Crisis Line at (888) 724-7240**. Trained and experienced counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to help you. For more information, visit **[www.Up2SD.org](http://www.Up2SD.org)**.

By reaching out, speaking up and starting a conversation, you may make all the difference in leading a loved one to recovery and perhaps even saving a life!

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