

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

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Since 1949, Mental Health America (MHA) has used a number of different avenues to reach millions of people across the country to spread the word that mental health is something everyone should know and care about. This year's theme is an expansion of last years, "#4Mind4Body" theme that focuses on health as being all-encompassing – "our mind and body act as one and therefore it is important to care for both our emotional and mental well being as well as our physical well being."



There are over 43 million Americans experiencing mental health problems in any given year, with one in five youth aged 13-18 experience a severe mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime. Mental health disorders are not discriminatory. They affect both men and women of all ages, races and social classes. Unfortunately, "suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., the 3rd leading cause of death for people aged 10-24 and the 2nd cause of death for people aged 15-24." According to the American Psychiatric Association, mental illness is defined as any "health condition involving changes in thinking, emotion or behavior (or a combination of these).

What are Mental Illnesses?

Mental illnesses are associated with "distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities" and includes but not limited to, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorders, any type of attention deficit disorder and the various forms of schizophrenia. According to data collected from more than 40 million Blue Cross Blue Shield members, "depression, anxiety and mood disorders, collectively, have the greatest impact on American's health than any other condition." Studies have shown that individuals who have chronic medical illnesses also have a higher likelihood of having symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.

Unlike other medical conditions, there is no medical test available that can accurately diagnose a mental illness. Many people will go to their Primary Care Physician (PCP) to discuss their symptoms. Most doctors will include a mental health screening as part of the visit. The PCP may refer the person to a psychiatrist or another mental health professional. The plan for treatment will vary depending on the individual, the diagnosis and the level of symptoms but may include medication, therapy, good nutrition, exercise and or alternative treatments such as acupuncture or massage therapy. Usually a combination of treatments is recommended to help the person return to a healthy state of well being.

Health is on a continuum and no one is perfectly healthy in every aspect of their life. It is important that we, as individuals, take our health seriously and make changes that can promote well being. Changing our health means changing our habits. If we focus on the following healthy aspects of our daily lives, these areas will help promote well being:

- Maintain uninterrupted sleep for 8 hours each night
- Maintain a healthy nutritional diet (decrease sugar intake, greasy foods, salts, processed foods and saturated fats)

- Eat 2-3 well-balanced meals per day
- Drink at least 3 liters of water per day
- Engage in positive thoughts and conversations
- Practice mindfulness or meditation on a daily basis
- Learn how to manage your stress
- Stay present in your daily relationships
- Avoid “screen time” and engage in more “in-person time”
- Visit your doctor for preventative health and cancer screenings
- Take time for yourself every day

Those who struggle with mental illness are not any different from those who struggle with physical illness. Everyone deserves to be treated with compassion and understanding. If you or someone you know is struggling—reach out, connect and offer to help.

If you haven’t already began, Mental Health Month is a good time to start new habits with taking better care of yourself and for educating yourself about mental health. Contact your Primary Care Physician and schedule a full medical check-up. Visit websites that offer a number of different screening tools that you can administer on your own.

Resources

- <https://www.americanmentalwellness.org/>
- <https://screening.mentalhealthamerica.net/screening-tools>
- <http://www.nami.org>
- Contact VITAL WorkLife any time, day or night, for support that you and your family need: 800.383.1908

We Can Help

Are mental health issues impacting you or any of your loved ones? To access your EAP, contact us at **800.383.1908** to get the help you need. You do not need to suffer alone, and help is available to you as part of your EAP benefit.