

MENTAL HEALTH



AWARENESS Challenge

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and we would like to invite you to participate in our Mental Health Awareness Challenge. It is our hope that as you read through and participate in the activities that are provided each day you will not only learn something about yourself and/or your friend/family, but you will walk away with tools that will help you feel more comfortable in your own skin.

The challenge is 21 days long. Each business day, read the information provided. We generally start with a quote or a scripture followed by a question to consider, a recommendation to listen to a podcast, read a book or watch a TEDtalk. The next phase is to connect the day to a dimension of self-care followed by a physical activity related to your fitness color (if you aren't sure of your fitness color, see one of our Fitness staff who will gladly assist you. You can also take the 8 Colors of Fitness by clicking [here](#).)

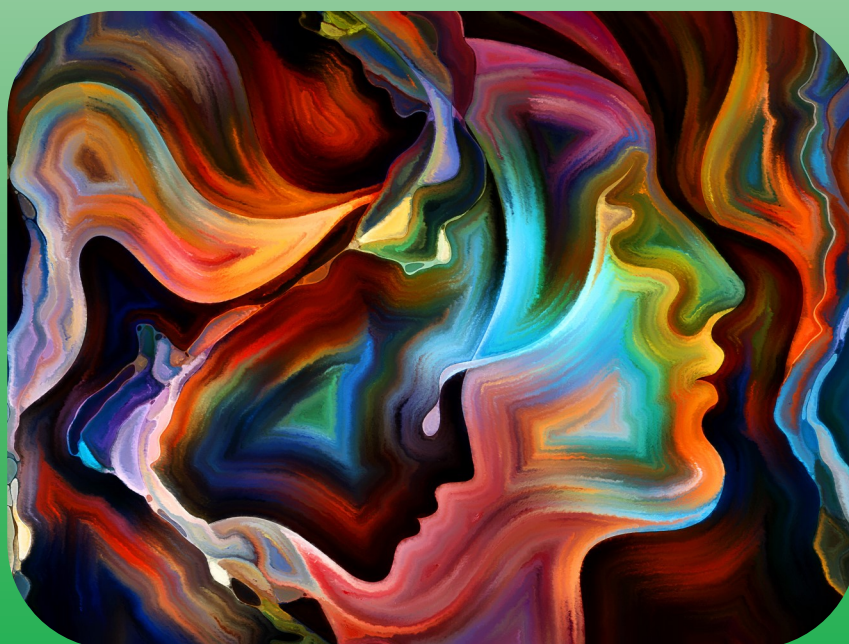
Give yourself time every weekday to digest the information that is provided. On the weekends, share what you have learned with your friends and family and invite them to participate in one of your favorite activities.

On the last day in May, we will offer a virtual session for you to share your experience.

"You don't have to
struggle in silence."

You can be **un-silent**. You can live well with a mental health condition, as long as you open up to somebody about it."

Demi Lovato





Welcome to the first day of the 21 Day Mental Health Awareness Challenge! Each weekday throughout May, you'll receive an email with an opening thought, a question to consider, an educational element (such as an article to read or TED talk to watch), and encouragement to participate in activities connected to self-care and physical movement. As part of the challenge, you're encouraged to take a moment to process the information by journaling in notebook, on your phone or using [online resources](#).

DAY ONE

*"Mental health problems don't define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain and you feel the rain, but you are not the rain."
– Matt Haig*

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What has been your experience with mental health matters? What are your thoughts about mental health matters? How have you been made to feel about mental health matters?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – Destigmatizing Mental Illness (Jason Pointer) – [click to view](#).

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a look at the [8 Dimensions of Self-Care Wheel](#). Today, consider tapping into the spiritual aspect of self-care by spending time in a quiet space and contemplating your thoughts about mental health matters and how you came to believe what you believe.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Take the [8 Colors of Fitness test](#) to determine your fitness color, then find an activity that you would enjoy. Participate in that physical activity for 20 minutes today.



DAY TWO

How common are mental illnesses in the U.S.?

- More than 50% of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime.
- 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year.
- 1 in 5 children, either currently or at some point during their life, have had a seriously debilitating mental illness.
- 1 in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disease, or major depression.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Journal opportunity: Ask yourself – what are my thoughts about the statistics above about the impact of mental illnesses in the U.S.? How has mental illness affected my life and the lives of my loved ones?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – There’s no shame in taking care of your mental health (Sangu Delle) – [click to view](#).

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a look at the [8 Dimensions of Self-Care Wheel](#). Today, consider the community section of the eight dimensions of self-care. Who do you have in your circle that you are able to share your mental health struggles with, and how have they helped you through challenges in the past?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Find a workout today that taps into your [fitness color](#). If you like working out in groups, take a group exercise class that challenges you to strength train, or gives you the opportunity to dance. If you prefer solo workouts, try something new that challenges you!



DAY THREE

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
John 14:27 (NKJV)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Sometimes we are taught that there is something wrong with us if we can't self-soothe. What are some things you have been taught about mental health matters?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – Breaking the Stigma and Shame of Mental Illness (Kitty Westin) – [click to view](#).

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a look at the [8 Dimensions of Self-Care Wheel](#). Consider occupational self-care, and the concept of life/work harmony. How are you balancing the two? What changes do you need to make to create more life/work harmony?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If your [fitness color](#) is white, a barrier that you may need to overcome is not starting until the plan is fully in place. So today, begin even if everything isn't where it should be. Start today and move your body!



DAY FOUR

"There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds" – Laurell K. Hamilton

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What is something you can do today to address the trauma you may have experienced in your life? If you need resources, please see the information below.

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

Article: [When You're Emotionally Affected by Trauma](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a look at the [8 Dimensions of Self-Care Wheel](#). Environmental self-care provides an outlet for you to create a garden either at your residence, or in the community. Consider gardening or becoming a plant owner.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If your [fitness color](#) is silver, you may be inclined to ignore your body's signals that exercise is needed. Don't wait for the perfect opportunity, create it! Move your body today!



DAY FIVE

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed.
Psalm 34:18,
Forgiveness is giving up the hope that the past could have been any different.
Oprah Winfrey*

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How often do you share the things that hurt you? If you don't, what benefit have you gained from that? If you do share things that hurt, what benefit do you get from that?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – Breaking the Silence of Pregnancy Loss (Tanika Dillard) – [click to view](#).

We understand that certain holidays can be difficult. We dearly care about all those who grieve and mourn on Mother's Day because of loss or other trauma. If that is you, we want you to know that we are praying for you. You have friends at the Y, and you also have a friend in Jesus. Resources are also available at <https://www.calebministries.org/>.

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a look at the [8 Dimensions of Self-Care Wheel](#). Community self-care is geared toward turning toward a friend, partner or family member when you feel overwhelmed. Consider sharing some of what burdens you with a friend.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If your [fitness color](#) is blue, do yourself a favor by scheduling your physical activity. Create space in your schedule to get what you need!

Weekend homework: Consider the things you have learned regarding mental health matters. Share with your family and/or friends some of the things you have learned.

Breathing exercise: 4-7-8 – inhale to a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7, exhale for a count of 8. Repeat 3-6 times for a wonderful calming effect.



DAY SIX

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. –Judith Lewis Herman

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How has the trauma in your life impacted you? Consider spending some time journaling your experiences and thoughts.

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – The Psychology of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Joelle Rabow Maletis) – [click to view](#).

Book: [Trauma and Recovery](#) by Judith Lewis Herman

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a look at the [8 Dimensions of Self-Care Wheel](#). Emotional spending can come from trauma. Consider using the financial self-care step to review your spending and reasons for purchases in an effort to cut back or limit any spending related to your feelings.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A barrier for those who identify with the [fitness color](#) purple is not fitting exercise into your lifestyle. Consider walking or hiking with friends instead of choosing a sedentary activity. You will be able to get some movement in and catch up with your friends.



DAY SEVEN

It is easier to build up a child than it is to repair an adult. –Unknown

According to the American Psychological Association, trauma is defined as an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, assault or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions.

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

If there is a child in your life, what are some ways you can help him/her be healthy physically and emotionally? Maybe you were once that child that needed help being healthy. What do you need now?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – Want Kids to Learn Well? Feed Them Well. (Sam Kass) – [click to view](#).

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a mindfulness moment: What are two to three things you see, hear, taste, touch and feel?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Try a yoga or meditation class today. The time that you spend being still will help you learn how to quiet your mind and find peace.



DAY EIGHT

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 18:21

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

The childhood saying 'sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me' is such a fallacy! Words are so powerful! What words do you allow to take up space in your mind and thoughts? How many of those words are beneficial? Consider journaling those words that are hurtful that take up residence in your mind, and create a positive response to refute them.

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – It's Time to Talk about Psychological and Verbal Abuse (Lizzy Glazer) – [click to view](#).

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Evaluate your friends and community. Do the people in your circle benefit your mental health?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Water workouts are great for low impact on the joints. Schedule a class into your day and enjoy the tranquil buoyancy of the water.



DAY NINE

Never, never, never give up
Winston Churchill

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How are you coping with what's been happening in your life?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED talk – Break the Silence for Suicide Attempt Survivors (JD Schramm) – [click to view](#)

Article – The Five Signs of Suffering (CVS Health) – [click to read](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Spending time with people that make you feel good about yourself is an excellent way to utilize the community self-care dimension. Today is a good day to connect with someone who makes you feel good about you!

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Weight-bearing workouts, including push-ups, squats, pull-ups and deadlifts, are excellent ways to get your adrenaline pumping and stirring up those feel-good hormones. Try one today!



DAY TEN

There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn't.
John Green

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What are some healthy things you tell yourself about your life experiences?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

- Book – Blue Genes: Breaking Free from the Chemical Imbalances That Affect Your Moods, Your Mind, Your Life, and Your Love Ones – [click to view](#)
- National Institute of Mental Health – Statistics on the prevalence and treatment of mental illnesses among the U.S. population – [click to view](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Listening to some of your favorite songs might be a nice departure from the stress of the day!

WEEKEND HOMEWORK

Consider the things you have learned regarding mental health matters. Share with your family and/or friends some of the things you have learned.



DAY ELEVEN

Worrying doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrows; it empties today of its strengths.
Corrie Ten Boom

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Anxiety can be quite a burden. What are some ways you work to relieve anxious thoughts? Consider journaling about the things that are working and the things that are not working. Discard the things that are not working, even if you have been doing those things for years.

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED Talk – How to Replace Anxiety with Purpose (Jake Heilbrunn) – [click to view](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Take a moment to breathe. Practice 4-7-8 breathing: inhale to a count of four, hold your breath for a count of seven and exhale to a count of eight.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If your [fitness color](#) is green, you enjoy being outside, so consider taking a walk or hike. Spending time connecting with nature is beneficial to us all, so whether your fitness color is green or not, try it and find your connection.



DAY TWELVE

Every man has his secret sorrows which the world knows not; and often times we call a man cold when he is only sad.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How do your heavy thoughts impact your personality? Have you experienced thoughts of depression that prevented you from enjoying life? How have you dealt with it in the past? Who would you reach out to if you experienced feelings of depression?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED Talk – How I overcame depression by just sitting around (Jonathan Schoenmaker) – [click to view](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Community is one of the eight dimensions of self-care. Who is in your community? Connect with a friend today and share with them what they mean to you.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Studies have shown that yoga, running and hiking are very effective tools for combating depression. Schedule one of these activities and notice your mood both before and after. Journal about your experience.



DAY FOURTEEN

To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable, to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength.

Criss Jami

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What have you been taught about being vulnerable?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

- TED Talk – Vulnerability Saves (Terrell Huntley) – [click to view](#)
- TED Talk – The Power of Vulnerability (Brené Brown) – [click to view](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

The intellectual dimension of self-care is one that can be used to read books that educate, entertain or help you relax. Consider reading a book today.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Strength training helps maintain muscle mass, burns fat and maintains bone density. Remember what is appealing to you based on your fitness color and try a strength training class or work with a personal trainer today.



DAY FIFTEEN

But Jesus said, Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.
Matthew 19:14 (NLT)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How can you encourage one or some of the children in your community?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED Talk – Tales from a Teenage Mental Health Advocate (Amanda Southworth) – [click to view](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

The spiritual dimension of self-care encourages utilizing a space for solitude and contemplation. Take a moment today to sit and be.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Jump rope with a younger person in your family or community. You never know how much fun you may experience!

WEEKEND HOMEWORK: This weekend, your homework, should you accept, is to create a Calm Jar with your family or friends. Choose a small jar or something similar, fill with warm water and glitter. Seal the top with glue so that it does not leak. When you shake the jar, the glitter floats. Spend time breathing and watching the glitter float this weekend. Mindfulness at its best!



DAY SIXTEEN

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NLT)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How difficult is it for you to ask for help? What does it mean to need help? How did you come to believe those things?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

TED Talk – What Kids Can Teach Adults About Asking For Help (YeYoon Kim) – [click to view](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

The community dimension of self-care suggests asking for help when you feel overwhelmed. Reach out and connect to your community today.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Fitness color Reds are competitive and Silvers enjoy group activities to distract. If you identify with one of these colors, try taking a class that taps into your competitive side or group inclusive nature.



DAY SEVENTEEN

Trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering.

Peter Levine

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What are some healthy ways to work through trauma?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

- TED Talk – How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime (Nadine Burke Harris) – [click to view](#)
- Book - [The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity](#)

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If you identify with the color purple, then routines work for you, but you're also open to trying new classes. What new fun and exciting class will you try today?



DAY EIGHTEEN

Don't let the past steal your present.
Terri Guillemets

Don't keep delaying the act of asking for help. Finding the courage to speak with an addiction professional may be the first most significant step on your journey to recovery.
Unknown

Believe you can and you are halfway there.
Theodore Roosevelt

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

How have addictions (in your family, with your friends or yourself) impacted your life?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

- TED Talk – Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong (Johann Hari) – [click to view](#)
- Podcast - [The Brain Warrior's Way](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

Balance between work and home can be challenging at times. Notice your habits and make healthy adjustments to create life/work harmony.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If your fitness color is Gold, you prefer traditional workout methods that have stood the test of time. Align yourself with a personal trainer who acknowledges this.



DAY NINETEEN

You can't always control what goes on outside, but you can always control what goes on inside.

Wayne Dyer

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

What do you need on a daily basis and how do you communicate that need?

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

- TED Talk – The cost of work stress – and how to reduce it (Rob Cooke) – [click to view](#)
- Article – [Five Easy Ways To Help You Deal With Stress](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

The Spiritual dimension of self-care offers time to meditate and contemplate. Sometimes sitting and contemplating your thoughts will help you to better understand what you are feeling and why. Carve some time into your day to allow for a moment to yourself.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

If your fitness color is Saffron, you can be internally demanding. Make sure that your workouts are consistent, goal oriented and provide you the outcome you want.



DAY TWENTY

Just because you don't understand it doesn't mean it isn't so.
Lemony Snicket

Sometimes the people around you won't understand your journey. They don't need to, it's not for them.
Joubert Botha

One small crack does not mean that you are broken, it means that you were put to the test and you didn't fall apart.
Linda Poindexter

DAILY AFFIRMATION

I am loved.
Healing is possible for me.
I am not my diagnosis.
I am enough.
I love myself for who I am.

EDUCATIONAL ELEMENT

- TED Talk – What is bipolar disorder (Helen M. Farrell) – [click to view](#)
- Book – [Loving Someone with Bipolar Disorder](#)

8 DIMENSIONS OF SELF CARE

The Emotional dimension of self-care is a great tool to use to take a moment of mindfulness. Sit outside and listen to the birds sing, the leaves on the trees dance or the wind blowing.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Understanding your fitness color will help you choose workouts that will keep you coming back for more. As you consider your fitness color today, choose an activity that you can sustain for 30 minutes. Ready, set, GO!

Weekend Homework: Review the lessons you have learned and share them with your family and friends.



DAY TWENTY-ONE

Thank you for participating in the Mental Health Awareness Challenge this month! It is our hope that you were able to learn something beneficial and useful about the subject of mental health.

Look for more information to come, and contact us at YOGCMentalHealthActionTeam@ymcacharlotte.org should you have questions or suggestions.

Please take a few minutes to share your feedback about your experience – [click here to take a brief survey.](#)



MENTAL
HEALTH



iStock™
Credit: melitas

MENTAL HEALTH @ THE Y

For 150 years the YMCA has operated with the mission that put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all. Exercise plays a significant impact on our mental health. We are excited to introduce additional tools that will assist you with understanding the awesome outcome of boosting your knowledge about mental health!

Facts about mental health:

1. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act, and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices (<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health>)
2. Everyone has mental health
3. One in 5 adults experienced a mental health condition in a given year
4. One in 6 young people have experienced a major depressive disorder
5. One in 20 Americans have lived with a serious mental condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disease or major depression (<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/myths-and-facts>)
6. Suicide is the leading cause of death in America and the 2nd cause of death for people ages 10-24
7. Suicide accounted for more than 45,979 American lives lost in 2020

Take a visit through the pages and challenge yourself to participate in our challenges, breathing exercises and mindfulness tips and tools. Always remember, you are not alone, you are here for a purpose and you have purpose!

I would like a banner graphic related to mental health and sleep at the top of the page

MENTAL HEALTH & SLEEP

SLEEP & MENTAL HEALTH

What in the world does sleep have to do with your mental health? Surprisingly more than we may have realized! The sleep habits you create are long lasting so take a moment to check in with the amount of sleep you get each night and what you do before bed. Even working out too close to your bed time or watching an action movie can affect your body's ability to relax and prepare for rest. Of course when you're younger you may not feel the impact as much as when you're older, but the impact is there whether you feel it or not.

Creating healthy sleep habits are beneficial for people of all ages. Today is a great day to evaluate your sleep habits and start to make whatever adjustments you may need to make.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T SLEEP

Reduced brain function.
Headaches. Irritability.
-Brain removes waste & plaque during sleep.

Higher Anxiety Levels:
Raises brain's anticipatory reactions & reduces stress response.

Weight Gain: Sleep balances hormones that make you feel hungry or full. Elevates hunger hormone ghrelin.

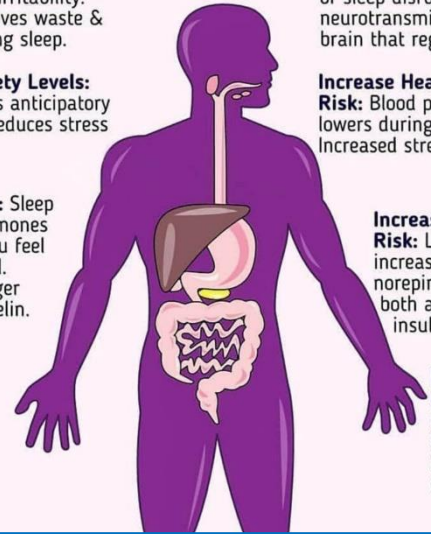
Weakened Immunity:
Weakens body's immune response.

Mood Imbalances. Lack of sleep disrupts neurotransmitters to brain that regulate mood.

Increase Heart Disease Risk: Blood pressure lowers during sleep. Increased stress raises BP.

Increased Diabetes Risk: Lack of sleep increases cortisol & norepinephrine - both associated with insulin resistance.

Poor coordination: Reduces balance & increases risk of accidents.



TIPS FOR HEALTHY SLEEP



DON'T



CAFFEINE



ALCOHOL



GADGETS



HEAVY FOOD



DO



EASY READING



MEDITATION



COOL ROOM



GET UP AT THE SAME TIME

iStock
Credit: Blueastro

Facts About Your Circadian Rhythm:

Circadian rhythm is the natural cycle of mental, physical and behavior changes that the body experiences in a 24 hour period of time.

1. Circadian rhythms are affected by light and darkness
2. Your circadian rhythm is controlled by a small area in the middle of the brain that is located inside of the hypothalamus
3. Circadian rhythms can affect sleep, body temperature, hormones and appetite
4. Abnormal circadian rhythms may be linked to obesity, diabetes, depression, bipolar disorder and seasonal affective disorder



iStock™
Credit: sturti

MENTAL HEALTH & EXERCISE

Why is exercise impactful on your mental health? Mental Health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Exercise is activity requiring physical effort, carried out to sustain or improve health and fitness. When you exercise by lifting weights, running, walking, cycling, hiking or anything that causes the heart rate to elevate, you are working to create a healthy body.



iStock
Credit: PeopleImages



iStock
Credit: Jacob Wackerhausen

Top 10 Ways Exercise Impacts Your Mental Health:

1. Reduces stress
2. Boosts happy chemicals
3. Improves self-confidence
4. Increases exposure to Vitamin D
5. Prevents cognitive decline
6. Reduces anxiety
7. Helps improve sleep quality
8. Helps increase productivity
9. Keeps bones strong
10. Reduces fall risk



MENTAL HEALTH TOOL KIT

BOX BREATHING

HOLD **EXHALE**

4 SECONDS EACH

INHALE **HOLD**

START HERE

KATIE SAMMA PSYCHOTHERAPIST

How to Do Diaphragmatic Breathing (Deep Breathing)

- 1: Start with your hand over your heart and the other over your stomach
- 2: Breathe in through your nose and let the air fill your belly and notice how the hand on your belly moves while the one on your heart should stay still
- 3: Draw your belly button in towards your spine as you exhale through your mouth
- 4: Feel as the hand on your stomach retreats back
- 5: Repeat this three to five times to start

trywell

5 Finger Breathing

TRY A BUTTERFLY HUG to Calm Your Nervous System

- ~ cross arms over your chest
- ~ interlock your thumbs in the shape of a butterfly
- ~ soften or close your eyes
- ~ slowly alternate tapping one hand, then the other like butterfly "wings"
- ~ continue 1-3 minutes until you feel calm

WILD PEACE FOR PAIN

Inhale	Hold	Exhale
4	7	8
seconds	seconds	seconds



The YMCA of Greater Charlotte partners with the National Alliance on Mental Illness to provide beneficial programming that will inform, educate and help to destigmatize the mental health conversation. Each month you will find a NAMI workshop at a YMCA center