

# 10 tips for better mental health that you can start doing today

Every day is a good day to think about maintaining your mental health. It doesn't have to be complicated. Small steps and thoughtful approaches to your lifestyle can make a big difference to your state of mind.

Keeping your mind healthy is a daily balance. We all have stress, be it from work, relationships, money or lately, the changes brought on by the pandemic.

The good news? There are steps we can take to manage that stress and offset it with positive experiences.

We've gathered expert advice and evidence from research for these 10 tips to care for your mental health. Check them out and see how you can work them into your daily routines.

## 1. Get moving

Exercise reduces anxiety and depression. Whether you run, ski or garden, moving your body is a good way to relax your mind. Maybe you used to go to the gym, but haven't recently due to COVID. Consider trying videos and apps to help you get moving without leaving your living

room. You could also try adding a morning walk to your daily routine.

## 2. Limit your caffeine and alcohol

Eating well helps your body and your mind. In particular, avoid having too much caffeine. It can affect your sleep and worsen anxiety, according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). Drink alcohol in moderation too – it's a well-known depressant. If you drink a lot of alcohol, there are effective ways to cut down on your drinking.

## 3. Take charge of your work stress

Work stress can pile up. Finding ways to keep your work life balanced and your stress in check can help you avoid burnout. Prevention can take many forms. For example, find a friendly colleague you can talk to or take up a hobby. You can also focus on the aspects of the job you find the most meaningful. For some, trying to find balance while juggling work and personal life under one roof may become particularly important. If you're struggling, you can try talking to your boss about adjusting your work.

## 4. Give your time to a worthy cause

People who volunteer report better mental health. The effects of giving your time are especially big when you do

it for selfless reasons, according to a BioMed Central Public Health study. Participants who were motivated to volunteer to help others had higher life satisfaction and less depression. Volunteer Canada's website may be a great place to start. On it, you can research COVID-19 related volunteer opportunities. You can also find opportunities for virtual volunteering.

## 5. Stay connected with family and friends

Studies have shown that friendships can help you live longer. Throughout our lives, connections with others influence our health in different ways. At any age, we benefit from having friends with whom we can share our problems. After about 50, having a larger friend circle even seems to protect against high blood pressure and inflammation . While it may not be possible to get together in person right now, virtual connections still count. From group chats to online trivia, there are several ways to stay socially connected while apart.

## 6. Let your mind slow down

When life is busy, your brain gets busy too. Slowing down to focus on the present can reduce stress and anxiety. Building time into your day to meditate is one way to teach your mind to focus on the present. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) also recommends cutting down on distractions. For example, put your phone away

for a conversation and really focus on what you see and hear.

## 7. Make time for fun

While you're setting goals, doing chores and carrying on with the business of life, you may forget to build in some time for fun. But there's good reason to. Laughter has real health benefits for your immune system, pain and mental health, according to the CMHA.

## 8. Get some sleep

If you're feeling grouchy, your sleep habits may be part of the problem. Good sleep can help you be alert, productive, focused and happy. It's also good for your immune system. To get the best sleep possible, follow simple sleep guidelines like setting a schedule and limiting your screen time. If you're lying in bed awake, get up and do something else for a while. If nothing is working, talk with your doctor or consider options like cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia.

## 9. Practise self-compassion

If today isn't going your way, remember that's okay. Haven't gotten as much done as you wanted? Don't sweat it. It's easy to become swept up in negative self-talk, especially in a world that places so much emphasis on

productivity and the highlight reel of social media. But it's worth pausing for a moment and remembering to be less harsh on yourself. Practice self-compassion. Talk to yourself the way you'd treat a friend.

## 10. Reach out for help when you need it

If you notice significant changes in your behaviour or your mood, it may be time to consider seeing a therapist. Reach out for help sooner than later if you feel you need to.

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