



Mental Health Awareness

Mental Health is a growing concern in the US. According to [NAMI](#) (National Alliance on Mental Illness) each year 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness along with 1 in 6 youth ages 6-17. Suicide has become the 2nd leading cause of death among ages 10-14. Spotting and diagnosing mental illness can be challenging and often missed due to the stigma associated with mental and emotional concerns. Many of us understand the importance of seeking medical help for physical illnesses and injuries, however we are not always ready or understand how to get help for emotional challenges. The Chatham Mayors Wellness Campaign Advisory Committee would like to remind you that mental health **is** physical health.

Specific symptoms and criteria used by professionals for mental health diagnoses can be found in the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition). Not everyone presents the same, however there are some key red flags to be aware of. These are: changes in personality, uncharacteristic emotional changes (excessive anger or anxiety), increase in isolation or avoidance of friends and family, absence of self-care, and feelings of hopelessness and despair. If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms it is important to reach out for professional support from a physician, psychiatrist, or therapist.

To learn more about this topic please join us for a [Mental Health: Anxiety, Depression, and Wellness](#) seminar on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, from 7-8 pm at the Library of the Chathams, 214 Main Street, Chatham provided by the Community Health & Outreach Department at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center.

National helplines are available and can guide you in the event of a crisis. They are: [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#), [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#), [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Helpline](#). If you are looking for a therapist to get started, [Psychologytoday.com](#) is also a great resource.

In today's high stress and fast-paced world, it is important to take care of your mental health before it becomes a problem. Here are a few resiliency building habits that can help you to improve your overall emotional and mental wellbeing.

- Healthy diet and regular exercise are key! Exercise can contribute to improved immune system, improve stress and hormone levels and boost mood. Limiting sugar and high processed foods can also maintain overall health and wellness.
- Staying social and making time for “play” is often something we tend to deprioritize and yet it has been shown to have a [significant positive affect on overall health and](#)

wellbeing (1). Being isolated has a negative effect on health and relationships with others.

- Get adequate sleep. Poor sleep habits can increase mental health symptoms and can play a huge factor in overall mood and functioning.
- Meditate regularly. Making mindfulness and /or meditation a regular part of your routine. Mindfulness is simply paying attention to your own thoughts and feelings in the present moment and has been shown to improve overall mental wellbeing (2).
- Be kind to yourself! Notice your inner voice. Is it kind, is it helpful? How we talk to ourselves has a huge impact on how we feel. Practice softening your inner voice by talking to yourself the way you would talk to someone you love. Try using self-compassion by Dr. Kristin Neff (3) to improve your inner dialogue and see how you feel.
- Practice gratitude. Humans have an evolutionary negativity bias (4) which makes us put more weight on what is going wrong than what is going right. By spending a bit of time redirecting our thoughts towards what we are grateful for we can increase our mood. Try starting a gratitude journal (5) and see how it makes you feel.

On behalf of the Mayors Wellness Campaign Advisory Committee of the Chathams, we hope you find some of these resiliency tips helpful. Cara Maksimow, LCSW

Resource links:

- 988 Lifeline: <https://988lifeline.org/>
- SAMSA Hotline: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <https://naminj.org/>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- Psychology Today: Therapist Finder link www.psychologytoday.com

References:

- (1) The Good Life: Lessons from the Longest Scientific Study of Happiness by Robert Waldinger, MD and Mark Schultz PhD <https://the-good-life-book.com/>
- (2) WebMD <https://www.webmd.com/balance/what-to-know-about-mindfulness-and-mental-health>
- (3) Self- Compassion by Kristin Neff, PhD, www.selfcompassion.org
- (4) Negativity Bias <https://positivepsychology.com/3-steps-negativity-bias/>
- (5) Gratitude Journal from Greater Good in Action
<https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/three-good-things>