

WELLNESSMONTHLY

Taking a Mental Health Inventory | May 2022



May is Mental Health Awareness Month, an opportune time to learn more about resources that are available in the workplace and your community.

Taking a Mental Health Inventory

Once relegated to the shadows, fresh light is now being cast on mental illness.

There have been significant advances in mental health awareness, diagnosis and treatment in the past 25 years. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need to make therapeutic and medical interventions widely accessible to those experiencing mental illnesses that affect their quality of life.

These changes cannot come too soon. It is estimated about one in five Americans currently have a mental health condition, many of which are undiagnosed or not being adequately treated.

According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI), Psycom, a resource organization, and other experts in the field, significant developments include: increased access to sources of support such as smartphone apps, telemedicine and teletherapy; advances in rapid-acting antidepressants; increased use of cognitive behavioral therapy (counseling) for mood disorders and therapy rather than medication for chronic pain management; ensuring adequate pre-natal nutrition; and research on connections between the gut and the brain. (Gut bacteria produce neurochemicals that regulate certain mental processes.)

Signs and Symptoms

You may be in denial or not realize you or someone close to you could benefit from a mental health evaluation. Symptoms may make it difficult to be rational or recognize the need. Signs and symptoms include:

- Eating too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried or scared
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform routine daily tasks like childcare or working

It's advisable to get professional help if you are having trouble managing your emotions, and essential to seek emergency medical care if you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts. If you do not have access to care through an employee assistance program or insurance plan, there are many other resources available that are free (including telephone hotlines) or offered on a sliding scale depending on your income.

Awareness Month

Observing National Mental Health Awareness Month in May helps reduce the stigma surrounding psychological conditions and promotes positive solutions. Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Take care of yourself:** Life has its up and downs. You may have difficulty managing behaviors associated with a past traumatic event or adverse childhood experiences. Some mental illnesses require evaluation by a psychiatrist and can be treated with medication and therapy. Here are some self-care tips:
 - Stay connected; spend quality time with friends and family
 - Engage in activities that give you a sense of accomplishment
 - Volunteer your time to help others who have less than you
 - Eat nutritious foods, drink water, get exercise and adequate sleep
 - Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing to calm yourself

When you take good care of yourself, you are taking good care of other people in your life. When you feel stable, you are able to support and encourage others when they need it.

- 2. Be transparent:** Another way to observe Mental Health Awareness Month is by talking openly about mental health; the more it is normalized, the more likely people will feel comfortable about seeking care, the same way they do for a physical

injury or illness. Lack of education about and stigma attached to mental health disorders lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment, and they have a detrimental effect on research priorities.

- 3. Stay well at work:** A work trend survey conducted by [Microsoft](#) found that 53 percent of responding employees were more likely to prioritize health and well-being over work than they did before the pandemic. Microsoft reports that taking short breaks (less than 10 minutes) between meetings reduces stress and allows the brain to reset.

According to Microsoft's findings, over-collaborating, lack of uninterrupted focus and skipping paid time off are major drivers of decreased work-life balance. Employees who stated they were satisfied with their work-life balance were productive even though they attended fewer meetings, sent less email during and after work hours, and took more time off than their counterparts who felt off balance.

- 4. Prioritize:** To help maintain your equilibrium, establish and focus on priorities in your own life. Allocate time to the things that are most important to you and establish boundaries so you can explain them to others in a non-defensive way. If you supervise employees, be clear about your performance expectations. Set aside blocks of time for employees to work on projects without disruptions. Understand the degree to which your company is committed to maintaining a supportive workplace culture and willingness to encourage time off for employees to relax and recharge.

Remember, mental health is directly correlated with physical fitness. An active lifestyle can help you control your weight and prevent chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma and hypertension. Exercise releases endorphins, serotonin and other brain chemicals that help lift mood and promote a positive mindset. Physical play is also associated with better sleep, higher self-confidence and self-esteem, and more effective stress management skills.