



American Heart Association

Hard Hats with Heart™

NEWSLETTER CONTENT

MENTAL WELL-BEING

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JANUARY

Topic: Sleep

Research shows that lack of sleep increases the risk of obesity, heart disease and infections. Throughout the night, your heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure rise and fall, a process that may be important for cardiovascular health. Your body releases hormones during sleep that help repair cells and control the body's use of energy. These hormone changes can affect your body weight.

Is your phone keeping you up at night? With a few tweaks to your tech habits, you can wake up more refreshed and ready to face the day.

1. Move it.
Charge your device as far away from your bed as possible. The distance may help you feel less overwhelmed in general.
2. Dim it.
Dim your screen or use a red filter app at night. The bright blue light of most devices can mess with your circadian rhythm and melatonin production.
3. Set it.
Alarms aren't just for waking up – set a bedtime alarm to remind you that it's time to wrap it up for the night.
4. Lock it.
If you've got a scrolling habit you need to kick, try an app-blocking app that makes it impossible to get lost in after-hours emails, social media, or gaming.
5. Block it.
Tell notifications to buzz off if they're waking you up at night. Put your phone on "do not disturb" mode to block it all out when you're trying to sleep.

Reflection Question: Do you have difficulty sleeping? How many hours do you get?

Resources For Support: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/sleep>

FEBRUARY

Topic: Depression (Heart Month)

If you're struggling with depression, stress, or anxiety, taking three key steps can help.

1. Identify the cause of your depression, stress or anxiety and address it. Seek therapy if necessary.

At times you may feel down for a couple of days, but if it goes on for two weeks or more, you may need to seek help. Depression is a problem when it causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home.

2. Choose healthy habits and don't rush it. If you aren't in the habit of exercising, start gradually.

Something as simple as taking a walk, 30 minutes a day, even if you do only 10 minutes at a time, can help your heart. Physical activity improves your mood while you're doing it, but regular physical activity can also improve your mental well-being, lower the risk of depression, and improve your overall quality of life.

3. Incorporate other healthy lifestyles that change one at a time. Don't try to "fix" everything at once. That's especially true if one of the habits you want to break is smoking.

Quitting smoking can be difficult. If you smoke, talk with your healthcare professional to determine if you need medications or other help to quit. Therapies may include nicotine replacement or prescription medicines. You could also ask for a referral for a smoking cessation program.

Ultimately, you must take care of yourself to break the cycle of feeling down. That could be doing something structured, such as a yoga class or tai chi practice, or something you can do anywhere, such as meditating, listening to music, or reading a book.

Reflection Question: Do you feel a little down right now? How can we help?

Resources For Support: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/mental-health-and-wellbeing>

MARCH

Topic: Eat Smart (Nutrition Month)

It's normal to reach for unhealthy snacks when stressed or depressed but did you know that food and mood are connected? Eating healthier can help you stay happier and improve stress and depression.

The next time you're feeling down or having a tough day, try these three foods to boost your mood.

1. **Fruits and Vegetables:** Fruits and veggies have been linked to higher levels of happiness and they are good for your heart.
2. **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Low omega-3 fatty acids have been correlated to depression and impulsivity. To give your body more, try eating foods like fish, vegetable oils, nuts, flaxseed, and leafy vegetables.
3. **Chocolate:** As a special treat, chocolate may have properties that improve mood and even reduce tension. The key is to choose real chocolate - dark is best - and eat it in moderation.

Your mental health is an important piece of your overall health and well-being. The next time a craving or bad mood hits, reach for one of these mood-boosting choices.

Discussion Question: Do you feel a little down right now? How can we help?

Resources For Support: [Hard Hats with Heart Sacramento Valley - Nutrition Resources | American Heart Association](#)

APRIL

Topic: Stress/mental wellness

Doing things, you enjoy is a natural way to relieve stress and find a happy place. Even when you're down, you may find pleasure in simple things like going for a walk, catching up with a friend or reading a good book.

When stress makes you feel bad, do something that makes you feel good – even if only for 10 or 15 minutes.

Some of these stress-relieving activities may work for you:

- Play with your kids or pets – outdoors, if possible.
- Take a walk-in nature.
- Meditate or Practice yoga.
- Work in the garden or do a home improvement project.
- Go for a walk, run, or bike ride to clear your head.
- Read a book, short story, or magazine.
- Meet a friend for coffee or a meal.

The key is to find your groove and make it a practice. You'll be amazed at how quickly you may start to feel better once you disrupt the cycle of stress.

Reflection: What do you do to relieve stress? Share your ideas so others can try them, too.

Resources for Support: [Fitness | American Heart Association](#)

MAY

Topic: Unhappiness

Title: How to be more positive.

Let's be honest, we all talk to ourselves! Sometimes we talk out loud, but usually we do it in our heads. Self-talk can be positive ("I can do this" or "everything will be OK") or negative ("I'll never get better" or "I'm so stupid"). Negative self-talk increases stress. Positive self-talk can help you calm down and manage stress. With practice, you can learn to shift negative thoughts to positive ones. For example:

Negative to Positive

- Instead of saying, "I can't do this," say, "I'll do the best I can. I got this."
- Instead of saying, "I hate it when this happens," say, "I know how to deal with this – I've done it before."
- Instead of saying, "I feel helpless and alone," say, "I can reach out and get help if I need it."
- Instead of saying, "I can't believe I screwed up," say, "I'm human, and we all make mistakes. I can fix it."

To really make it work, practice positive self-talk every day – in the car, at your desk, before you go to bed or whenever you notice negative thoughts. It's great practice to teach kids, too!

Reflection: Do you find yourself thinking negatively? How do you get out of it?

Resources For Support:

JUNE

Topic: Bedtime Routine

Title: How to sleep better with a Bedtime Routine

According to the National Institutes of Health, poor sleep can also increase the risk of slowed reaction times, irritability, anxiety, obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes. In Order to prevent these from happening, having an effective nightly routine is essential.

Scheduling the Sandman

Sleeping is something you've done all your life, but the older you get, the harder it can be to sleep like a baby. Busy schedules, the stresses of work or school, and a hundred other distractions can keep you wide awake.

There are steps you can take to put yourself in the best state of mind for 7-9 hours of deep sleep. Here are some ways to plan your bedtime routine so you wake up feeling well rested and ready for the next day.

First, set an alarm.

Not to wake up, but to go to sleep. Even for adults, the best sleep requires a set bedtime.¹ It's easy to forget about the clock while streaming another episode of your favorite show, so set a nighttime alarm as a reminder

Spend 15 minutes to prep for tomorrow.

A restless mind is not a restful mind. Dwelling on the minutiae of the morning could keep you awake.² Knock out a few chores the night before.

Next, address that stress.

Practicing mindfulness has proven to reduce anxiety, improve sleep quality and can even help with insomnia.⁴ Meditation puts you in the perfect mindset to drift off to dreamland. There are many videos available in apps or online.

Reflection Question: Do you have difficulty sleeping? How many hours do you get?

Resources For Support:

JULY

Topic: Redefining Failure

Title: How to overcome Setbacks for a more positive Life

Setbacks in life are inevitable, but you can choose to see them as positive lessons instead of demoralizing failures. Learn ways to deal with setbacks and obstacles so you can move forward and achieve your goals.

Here are some dos and don'ts to get over failure:

Do's:

Do focus on future goals

Do be a seeker

Do Adjust Quickly

Don'ts:

Don't be an Avoider

Don't Dwell on past Mistakes

Don't Stick with it Stubbornly

See your life as a laboratory, where you don't have failures, but setbacks that teach you what not to do so you can regroup and try again.

Reflection Question: Has there been any time you faced a setback? What did you do?

Resources For Support:

AUGUST

Topic: Loving-kindness Meditation

Title: How practicing loving-kindness Meditation can help your Mental well Being

Loving-kindness meditation is a way to practice feeling unconditional compassion for ourselves and all beings. Some studies suggest it can help boost your empathy and feelings of connection and reduce bias, anger, depression, and anxiety.

How does it work?

Sit quietly and direct kindness and love to yourself, then expand in circles of compassion outward to others.

1. Yourself: Direct kindness and compassion to yourself by repeating a thought like, "May I be happy."
2. Family and friends: Direct your kindness to someone you love or care about by repeating, "May _____ be happy."
3. Someone neutral: Think about someone you feel neutral about, like a coworker, neighbor or acquaintance and direct your compassion to this person by name.
4. Someone difficult: Think about someone you dislike or have a tough time being around. Direct your kindness to this person by name.
5. Group: Think about all these people together and equally direct your kindness to all of them, "May they be happy."
6. Everyone: Finally, direct your kindness everywhere. "May all beings everywhere be happy."

You can change the thought or phrase or combine words, such as:

- May I be at peace
- May I be loved
- May I be healthy and strong.

Start with just a few minutes and gradually extend your time. Try it today and see if loving-kindness meditation can bring more happiness and well-being to your life.

Reflection Question: Have you ever tried meditation or a breathing technique? What did you think?

Resources for Support:

SEPTEMBER

Topic: Get Active (Heart Walk Month)

Title: Moving More Can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression

Regular physical activity, such as brisk Walking, can improve your quality of life and relieve stress, tension, anxiety, and depression. You may notice a “feel good” sensation immediately following your workout and see an improvement in overall well-being over time as physical activity becomes a regular part of your life.

Moving more can:

- release stress and calm you
- improve your mood and help you think clearly
- keep your mind off cigarettes if you’re trying to quit
- help control your appetite
- help you lose weight if you’re overweight, or stay at a healthy weight
- give you more energy and stamina
- lower your blood pressure
- increase your “good” HDL cholesterol level
- reduce your risk of developing heart disease and stroke
- help control blood sugar by improving how your body uses insulin
- Improve your quality of sleep
- help you feel better about how you look.

Heart walk Month has always been a terrific way to get moving while socializing with friends, family, and coworkers. But it's so much more than a walk! Walking in the Heart and Stroke Walk boosts your heart health AND your mental health and helps thousands of others at the same time. September is a month dedicated to these events and registration can be done here for the Walks: Sacramentoheartwalk.org

Reflection Question: How often do you take walks, and do you think you can incorporate it in your daily activities?

Resources For Support:

OCTOBER

Topic: Managing Stress (Emotional Wellness Month)

Title: How stress can affect your mental health

October is a month dedicated to Emotional Wellness, with our hectic schedules, devices pinging us from every direction, and modern life becoming increasingly uncertain, it's more crucial than ever to maintain a sense of calm and balance. Emotional Wellness Month, observed all October, reminds us to disconnect and take time out for our brain.

Chronic stress can affect your mental and physical health.

Long-term activation of your body's stress response system, along with prolonged exposure to cortisol and other stress hormones, may put you at risk for health troubles such as:

- digestive problems
- anxiety
- headaches
- depression
- sleep problems
- weight gain
- memory and concentration issues
- high blood pressure
- heart disease and stroke

So, what can we do about stress?

Move More. Movement is good for your heart and your mind. Dance like crazy to get the funk out, try hula-hooping, briskly walk around the block, and listen to the birds, or take that hip-hop class you've always wanted to try. Bonus points if you laugh while you're moving!

Find a friend. Take a 60-second social break to message someone with a "Hello!" And hey, if it turns into a longer chat, that's fine too. Friendship is important.

Be with your breath. You've been breathing your whole life but learning to focus on your breath can trigger your body's relaxation response.

Reflection Question: Do you feel stressed right now? What causes you stress?

Resources For Support:

NOVEMBER

Topic: Gratitude

Title: How Can showing Gratitude improve your mental wellbeing

We could all use a little more positivity and encouragement, especially when starting something new. It has been Scientifically proven that showing gratitude boosts the immune system, improves mental health, improves relationships and increases optimism. Below are quick and easy ways you can jump-start your journey to becoming Healthy for Good.

- Kick off the day by writing down a hobby or special interest you've picked up this year & celebrate how far you've come. You deserve it.
- Find three things you love about yourself & write them down. Then stand in front of a mirror & read them out loud. Feels pretty good to love yourself, doesn't it?
- Beauty can be found in the most unlikely places. So today, stop, look around & capture a mental (or actual) snapshot of the beauty you see.
- If something frustrates you today, hit your pause button. Take a breath & reframe the moment by focusing on what IS going your way. A little positivity goes a long way.
- When's the last time you celebrated all the amazing things your body can do? Take two minutes to really think about it, then store those happy thoughts for a rainy day.

Reflection Question: What are you grateful for?

Resources For Support:

DECEMBER

Topic: Stress Management. (Holiday Season)

Title: How to manage stress during the holiday Season.

If the holidays sometimes leave you feeling overwhelmed and out of control, you're not alone. And if the Grinch has stolen your spirit and good intentions, try some of these tips to reclaim your ho-ho-ho and stay happy and healthy.

1. **Keep up healthy habits:** Make a pact with yourself during the holidays. For example, decide that you'll move more and do something active every day over the next three weeks. Take it a step further, and pledge to start the day with a healthy breakfast, limit the sweets and get at least seven hours of sleep each night. If you don't completely give up your healthy habits, you won't feel like you must start over once the holidays are over.
2. **Beware of seasonal sweets:** The holidays often dish up extra helpings of less-than-healthy treats. Try preparing healthy snacks that are ready to eat when the urge to snack strikes. If you're hosting a holiday party, challenge yourself to make delicious and healthier options using us recipes and cooking tips.
3. **Stay active:** Instead of beating yourself up about missing a workout, sprinkle some healthy activities into your daily routine. For example, if the weather isn't too frightful and you're working from home, ride your bike around your neighborhood during a lunch break. If dinner is going to be a feast, opt for a light lunch, then take a vigorous walk. And keep the family moving. When the kids are home from school, squeeze in some active chores and trips to the park.
4. **But not too active:** Give yourself the gift of peace. If you need some down time to recharge, declare a "me-treat" and do something that relaxes you. Try yoga, meditation or spending time in nature.
5. **Plan for the new year:** Your poinsettia's pooped and the gifts are all gone. Now what? It's a great time to reset for the new year – but don't go dashing through your to-do list too fast, or you might not stick to your plan. Lay out realistic, sustainable steps for the months ahead. For example, start a daily walking routine and sign up for a virtual Heart Walk before you set your sights on that marathon.

Reflection Question: How is your family doing and do you have the chance to spend more time with them during this season?

Resources For Support: