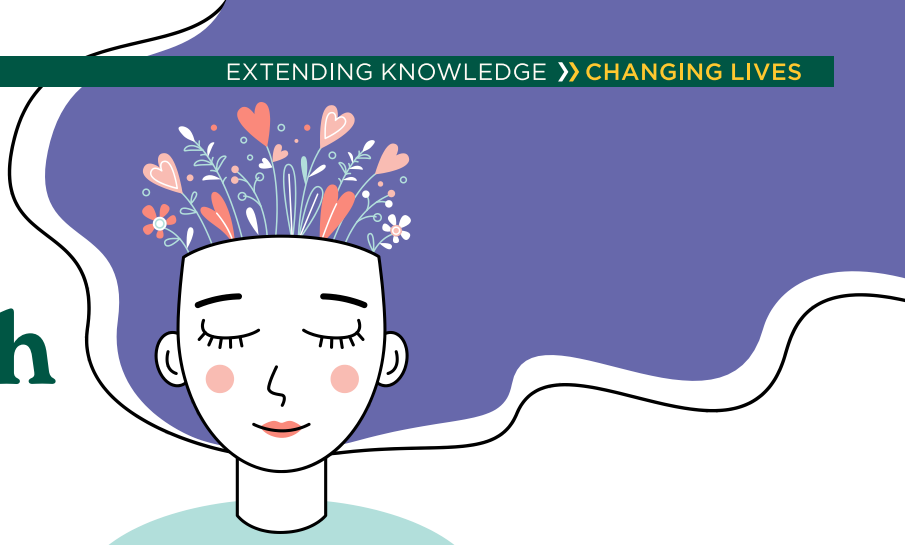


Nourish Your Mental Health

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Have you thought about your mental health lately?

Our mental health is the combination of our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It impacts how we think, feel, act and respond to environmental stimuli.

Neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) and hormones in our bodies regulate our emotions and behaviors, such as hunger. Three important neurotransmitters are serotonin (SERR-uh-TOE-nin), dopamine (DOH-puh-meen) and norepinephrine (NOR-ep-in-EFF-rin).

These neurotransmitters are derived from the amino acids (protein building blocks such as tryptophan and tyrosine). Tryptophan is an essential amino acid, meaning we cannot make it in our bodies and need to get it from the food we eat. When we have imbalances in our neurotransmitters and hormones, we can start to feel “off.”

- **Serotonin:** Responsible for regulating our emotions, sleep patterns and appetite. We may notice appetite changes when we experience strong emotions.
- **Dopamine:** Responsible for our motor control and motivation. It makes us feel good when we experience something enjoyable, such as eating delicious food.
- **Norepinephrine:** Responsible for regulating our attention and alertness. It is also related to our “fight or flight” response.

Mini Self Check-in

- On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, what is your energy level today?
- When did you last eat a balanced meal, consisting of fruit and/or vegetables, protein, grains and healthy fats?
- How well did you sleep last night, and did you wake up feeling rested?
- Are you feeling more introverted (reserved and wanting to spend time alone) or extroverted (outgoing and having high energy) today?

Did you know?

- One in five adults in the United States lives with a mental illness.
- Approximately 36% of adults aged 18-25, the highest prevalence of any age group, are diagnosed with a mental illness.

Test Your Knowledge

Circle habits and nutrients that have a positive impact on your mental health.

Avoiding socialization	Breathing techniques		
Vitamin D	Exercising	Vitamin B6	Stress
Smoking	Antibiotics	Paired muscle relaxation	



Answers: Breathing techniques, Vitamin D, Exercising, Vitamin B6, Paired muscle relaxation

Definitions

- **Anxiety:** an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear
- **Depression:** feeling of sadness, despair or loneliness, often causing social withdrawal and feelings of guilt and/or hopelessness
- **Eating Disorders:** severe disturbances in eating behaviors impacted by thoughts and emotions centered around food (anorexia, bulimia and binge eating)

What can you do to support your mental health?

■ Eat a balanced and varied diet

To support your mental health, focus on consuming a variety of vegetables, fruits, grains — including whole grains — healthy fats, legumes, nuts, seeds and lean protein sources. For more information, refer to the “Nourish Your Brain” module and handouts.

■ Have a healthy gut microbiome

- Our gut microbiome is the combination of trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi that live in the human gut (stomach, small intestine and large intestine). To properly digest food, we need a variety and abundance of “good” bacteria in our gut, which is impacted by the food choices that we make every day.

- To support a healthy gut microbiome, consume a diet rich in fiber, prebiotics and probiotics. Probiotics are live bacteria and yeast that help with digestion. Prebiotics are nutrients found in nondigestible fiber that are used as food (fermented) for gut bacteria.
 - Reliable sources of **fiber**: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds and beans.
 - **Prebiotics**: found in legumes, fruits (e.g., apples and peaches) and vegetables (e.g., garlic and onions).
 - **Probiotics**: found in fermented foods such as yogurt, kimchi, sauerkraut and pickles.
 - Note: the canning process kills the healthy probiotics in food, so buy pickles and sauerkraut from the refrigerator section that contains the “live” healthy probiotics.
- Behaviors that can hinder the variety and abundance of our gut microbes:
 - The use of **antibiotics** not only kills the “bad” bacteria making us sick, but also the “good” bacteria in our gut.
 - Diets rich in **refined sugar and saturated fats** promote inflammation in the body. Prolonged inflammation negatively impacts our overall health.
 - **Stress** can cause changes to our speed of digestion due to an increase in hormones, leading to constipation, diarrhea, bloating or increased gas.

■ Vitamins in my diet that may impact mental health

B12 Sources: Animal products: chicken breast, dairy milk or dairy milk products and eggs

B9 Sources: Dark leafy greens, beets, eggs and beans

B1 Sources: Lentils, fortified rice, nuts and seeds and lean pork

B6 Sources: Chicken, sweet potatoes, yellowfin tuna, salmon, turkey, starchy vegetables (sweet potatoes) and noncitrus fruits (bananas)

B2 Sources: Dairy milk or dairy milk products, fortified cereals and breads, eggs, meats, salmon and spinach

D Sources: Salmon, egg yolks, fortified milk and fortified orange juice

Note: An average of 15 to 20 minutes/day in the sun provides 50%–90% of our vitamin D needs (only during peak summer months), depending on location, time of year and genetics.



■ Be physically active

Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week to maintain a healthy body weight. Exercise outside to reap the benefits of both movement and receiving vitamin D from the action of sun on our skin. Physical activity also promotes regular bowel movements, thus positively impacting our gut microbiome.

■ Manage stress

• Breathing techniques

- Use breathing exercises to help calm and ground yourself when you start to feel anxious or stressed.
- 4-7-8 Breathing
Inhale through your nose for four seconds, hold for seven seconds and then exhale through your mouth for eight counts.
- Physiological Sigh
Take one quick, deep inhale through your nose, then a quick, shorter one followed by a single long exhale out through your mouth.

• Paired Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

- A PMR is conducted by consciously tensing or squeezing your muscles together on an inhale, then consciously relaxing those muscles on an exhale.

• Self-care

- Aftercare plans are designed to plan ahead for what “future you” may need to relax, recharge and destress after an event or gathering.
 - For more information about the importance of sleep, refer to the “Nourish Your Body with Sleep” module and handouts
 - Buy your favorite bubble bath for a relaxing bath when you get home.
- Other stress management techniques can include practicing a hobby, such as coloring, crocheting or golfing, and performing an activity that requires brain power, such as sudoku, crossword puzzles and jigsaw puzzles.

■ Change your mindset

Work on changing negative thoughts into positive thinking. Spend time each day thinking about what you are thankful for and what you DO have the power to change. This can be done by changing thoughts of “I have to...” into “I get to...” or thinking of a daily positive mantra such as “make the best of today.”

More information?

www.MyPlate.gov – The USDA website has information about nutrition, physical activity and tools to help achieve health goals.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/caring/index.html> – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website contains resources for support groups and contact with licensed mental health providers.

<https://www.hhs.nd.gov/behavioral-health> – North Dakota’s home page for mental health and addiction includes community and clinical resources, such as a search engine for North Dakota mental health providers.

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