

Recovery: Taking Good Care of Yourself

Now that you've made the decision to begin your journey to recovery, below are some tools to aid you in the process. Identifying tools and developing plans will help you be more prepared and empowered to take action when it comes to your recovery. Here are healthy steps to take:

Working Toward Goals. People in recovery offer the following suggestions:

- Focus on your strengths.
- Focus on solving problems.
- Focus on the future instead of reviewing hurts from the past.
- Focus on your life instead of your illness.

Care for Yourself

Taking good care of yourself is paramount to the success of your recovery process. People in recovery find that their physical, spiritual, and emotional health are all connected, and that supporting one supports the others. Taking care of all aspects of you will increase the likelihood that you stay well.

- **Live Healthy**, eat healthy foods, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, and avoid drugs and alcohol. Manage stress and go for regular medical check-ups.
- **See friends** to build your sense of belonging. Consider joining a group to make new friends.
- **Try to do something you enjoy every day.** That might mean dancing, watching a favorite TV show, working in the garden, painting or reading.
- **Find ways to relax**, like meditation, yoga, getting a massage, taking a bath or a walk.

Connect With Yourself

It is important that you check in with yourself periodically. If you do not then you may not realize that things are changing or getting out of control. Checking in with yourself allows you the opportunity to evaluate where you are in your recovery. You may find that you need to try different coping tools.

If you have had low times in the past you understand how hard it can be to get out of those places. Learning all that you can about your mental health condition will help let you know that your hard times are not your fault. Making a list of accomplishments that you have achieved is a good resource to turn back to when you are feeling low.

Another method of connecting with yourself is to become an advocate and share your story. There has been a lot of research that explores the power of storytelling as a form of therapy. Sharing your own experiences through writing or talking is an important stage of recovery. Just as you are supported by reading the thoughts and experiences of others you can also be the person that helps lift another.

Connect With Others

Spending time with positive, loving people you care about and trust can ease stress, help your mood and improve the way you feel overall. They may be family members, close friends, members of a support group or a peer counselor at the local drop-in center. Many communities even have warmlines (free hotlines run by people with mental health conditions) that you can call to talk to someone and receive peer support. Research points to the benefits of social connection:



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- **Increased happiness.** In one compelling study, a key difference between very happy people and less happy people was good relationships.
- **Better health.** Loneliness was associated with a higher risk of high blood pressure in a recent study of older people.
- **A longer life.** People with strong social and community ties were two or three times less likely to die during a 9-year study.

Connect to Your Community

A great way to feel emotionally strong and resilient in times of stress is to feel connected to a broad community. You can expand your social network by looking into a community organization that brings people together who share the same interests. For instance, many communities have local biking, hiking, or walking groups. Take a class, or join a local group. You also may find the support you need through local support groups.

Create Joy and Satisfaction

Living with a mental health condition can be taxing emotionally, physically, and mentally. Experts have found that good feelings can boost your ability to deal with stress, solve problems and even fight disease. Studies show that:

- **Laughing** decreases pain, may help your heart and lungs, promotes muscle relaxation, and can reduce anxiety.
- **Positive emotions** can decrease stress hormones and build emotional strength.
- **Leisure activities** offer a distraction from problems, a sense of competence and many other benefits.

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