

HOW IS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

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**“My dark
days made
me strong.
Or maybe I
was already
strong and
they made
me prove it.”**

Emery Lord

What is Mental Health?

'Mental health' is a sense of wellbeing, confidence, feeling good and being in control of your life. The U.S. Surgeon General describes mental wellbeing as 'the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity'. If you start to feel frayed around the edges, swamped with work and responsibilities, or emotionally flat and uninterested in the world around you, your mental health may be suffering.

Humans are complex beings, with a variety of emotional, physical and spiritual capacities and needs. The pressures and stresses of life often make it difficult to maintain our balance by nurturing each of these areas. As a result, we may neglect important parts of ourselves, such as our feelings, our bodies, or our minds. However, each one of us needs to be aware of and take responsibility for our mental health.

Various factors either contribute to or challenge our ability to look after our 'whole person'. These include our degree of self-discipline, how aware we are of our feelings and thoughts and how well we know ourselves. External factors such as the nature of our home and work environment, our financial situation, and the current state of our relationships with important people in our lives, also play an important part.

Working through life's difficulties can help us to grow and prepare for future challenges, but at times the pressure can become too much for us to cope with. We may then find that we are unable to carry on in the usual way and need to ask for help or support. Many people live with disability, including physical illness or long-term mental illness, and cope in a healthy way. The challenge for all of us is to search out new ways to manage.

Try this quiz about your mental health!

How many of the following do you experience in your life at the moment?

- The ability to love and be loved
- A feeling of security and belonging
- Spontaneity and a range of emotional responses
- The ability to trust
- The ability to take responsibility for your own feelings and behaviour
- The ability to accept criticism
- The ability to feel inspired and use your imagination and creativity
- A degree of self knowledge to enable resilience and recovery from harm
- The ability to learn from experience
- The ability to express thoughts and feelings
- A feeling of comfort with your sexuality
- A sense of humour to help savour the joys and the absurdities of life.

Although the essence of mental health is hard to define as it involves so many individual aspects, healthy people generally have a number of the qualities listed above.

Happiness and Resilience

In recent years, there has been a shift in thinking towards the development of 'positive psychology'. Rather than looking at what is 'wrong' with people some psychologists have become interested in exploring what is 'right'.

Aaron Beck and Martin Seligman have studied three major areas of 'positive psychology':

- subjective happiness - positive emotions and mood
- human excellence - positive personal strengths and virtues like optimism, wisdom, courage, spirituality, love, justice and temperance
- positive institutions - democracy, family and a free press.

There has also been a growing interest in 'resilience' – the ability to cope with difficulties and 'bounce back'.



Some things you can do to maintain your mental health

Talk

Talking to friends, family or a counsellor about your thoughts and feelings can help sort out problems. It can also help relieve stress and anxiety.

Eat, sleep and exercise properly

When anxious or under stress, we often neglect ourselves; we don't eat nutritious food, don't exercise, and don't sleep properly. Paying attention to these areas of our lives can make a significant difference to our mental health.

Relax

Most of us need to learn how to relax. There are a number of techniques, so it's best to find what best suits your personality and way of life. There are plenty of books, tapes and courses available on relaxation.

Seek help

Sometimes a problem is hard to solve alone or with the help of friends and family. At these times it is important to get professional help or advice. There are many people you can turn to including your family doctor, community groups, psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists, social workers and counsellors.

Think and feel

We are bombarded daily with many demands and sometimes we don't take time to think. Some time for reflection each day helps us to get to know ourselves, to gain some perspective on life and to develop a positive outlook. It is also important to acknowledge our feelings and not be afraid of them. By acknowledging our feelings we gain a greater insight into ourselves.

Read a book

In recent years many books on personal growth have made best-seller lists. These books encourage us to learn more about ourselves and to review how we see the world and relate to others. For some, reading these books can be a life altering experience. It can be exciting to begin to really understand yourself and therefore be in a better position to take

responsibility for your own mental health. Look in the personal growth section in your favourite book store or library. You don't have to agree with everything the book says, as long as it makes you think!

Mental Health Month

Mental Health Month occurs during early October every year. In NSW it is co-ordinated by the WayAhead Mental Health Association and involves people across the state. If you're interested in knowing more about the events and activities taking place you can go to our website: www.wayahead.org.au



VISIT WWW.STRESSLESSTIPS.ORG

Where do I go for help?

The WayAhead Directory

is an online resource providing a comprehensive list of mental health related services in NSW.

www.WayAhead.org.au

Phone Lines

**WayAhead Mental Health
Information Line**

1300 794 991

Local community Mental Health
Service (in White Pages)

Mental Health Carers NSW
(ARAFMI):

(02) 9332 0700

1800 655 198

Lifeline

13 11 14

SANE Australia

1800 688 382



Translating & Interpreting Service
(TIS) 131 450

Please call the Mental Health
Information Line through the
Telephone Interpreter Service
(TIS). Free to Australian citizens or
permanent residents.

Disclaimer

This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed.

This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW.

The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.

Last reviewed by Jamie Saltoon 2016

**“ I found people who
understood exactly what I
was going through ”**



