

The Relationship Between Resilience and Mental Health

Our mental health affects how we think, feel and act. It also influences our ability to cope with stress, challenges, interact with others and handle life's setbacks and hardships.

Good mental health is not only the absence of mental health problems. Being mentally and emotionally healthy is more than not experiencing depression, anxiety or other psychological issues. In *"Building Better Mental Health"* Melinda Smith and Jeanne Segal state good mental health reflects the presence of positive characteristics that allow us to deal with the ups and downs of daily life.

People who are mentally healthy have the following: contentment, a zest for life, the ability to laugh and have fun, meaning and purpose in activities and relationships, self-confidence and high self-esteem, fulfilling relationships, the ability to deal with stress and bounce back from adversity, and a balance of work and play, rest and activity in their lives.

If you are looking to cope with a specific mental health problem, deal with your emotions, or to feel more positive and energetic, there are things you can do to feel more control over your mental health. Having good mental health does not mean you will not go through bad times or experience negative emotions. We all experience loss, change and disappointment as a part of life. These difficulties can cause sadness, stress and anxiety. Just as physically healthy people are more apt to recover from illness and injury, people with sound mental health are better able to recover from adversity, trauma, and stress. This ability is called resilience.

Those who are emotionally and mentally resilient, have tools to cope with difficult situations while maintaining a positive outlook. They remain focused, flexible and productive in bad times as well as good times. Even if they do not know how a challenge will be resolved, they are confident a solution will be found.

One in five Americans will have a diagnosable mental or emotional disorder. Despite the prevalence of mental health problems, we often ignore signs that something is wrong and try to tough it out by self-medicating with alcohol, drugs or self-destructive behavior. We hope others won't notice and our situation will magically improve.

The good news is there are practices we can adopt to elevate our mood, become more resilient, and ultimately enjoy our lives more. These keys to good mental health include: **Social Connections** are critical to our mental and emotional health. We need the company of others to feel and function at our best. Telephone calls and social media offer some support but nothing comes close to the stress-busting, mood-boosting power of quality face-to-face interaction with other people. **Staying Physically Active** is good for both our physical and mental health. When we improve your physical health, we experience greater mental and

emotional well-being. Physical activity releases endorphins that improve mood and increase energy, relieve stress, and improve memory. **Managing Stress Levels** is a frequent challenge in our daily lives. Stress takes a heavy toll on mental and emotional health. We can utilize these strategies to control stress: engage in face-to-face social interaction frequently, listen to music, think about something we are grateful for each day, engage in yoga, deep breathing, and meditation. Using these techniques regularly bring our mind and body back into a balanced state. **Eat a Brain-Healthy Diet.** An unhealthy diet can negatively affect our brain and mood, disrupt sleep, and weaken the immune system. Switching to a wholesome diet, low in sugar and rich in healthy fats can improve your mood and give you more energy. **Getting quality sleep** is an important component of good physical and mental health. Experts recommend adults get seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Establishing a sleep routine is effective in providing our brain time it needs to unwind at the end of the day. This routine includes turning off TV, phones, and computers an hour before bed, take a warm shower or bath, reading, listening to music and utilizing a consistent sleep schedule. **Identify what provides meaning and purpose in life.** Finding meaning and purpose in life is essential to brain health as it helps generate new cells and create new neural pathways in the brain. We seek ways to benefit others as well as ourselves. We can derive this feeling through meaningful work, important relationships with family and friends, and volunteering in the community. However you experience meaning and purpose in life, it is important to do it each day.

Anyone can suffer from mental health problems; and most of us will during our lifetime. Using these six keys to mental health can assist us in meeting the challenges we face and achieving a renewed sense of balance and control.