

Still Working On Some Of Those Resolutions?

With 2019 in full swing, have you made a resolution for the new year? From weight loss goals to work priorities, new year resolutions can run the gamut. One thing you might want to add and prioritize on your 'new year' checklist– your mental health.

The topic can seem overwhelming. How do you prioritize something as broad and important as mental health? It's a large feat.

But some very basic practices can help you create and/or maintain good mental health, according to Dr. Sarah Katula, an advanced practice nurse at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital, in Downers Grove, Ill.

Katula recommends the following five tips for people focusing on their mental health this year and any year:

- **Exercise** is very important to the mind-body connection," says Katula. "There are numerous studies that show the benefits of exercise on your mind. One study even found lifestyle modifications may help in treating individuals with serious mental illness. Researchers found that exercises like running, swimming, biking, walking and even dancing reduced both anxiety and depression."
- **Gut health.** Nutrition is also linked to mental health. "A healthy microbiome is very important, as our gut is our 'second brain'," says Katula. Eating whole foods, real foods, unprocessed foods and including very minimal sugar is key to a healthy gut, she says. Why the connection? "One reason is your gut has a whole bunch of serotonin receptors, which is one of the neuro chemicals involved in mood," Katula explains.
- Getting too much or too little **sleep** can be problematic to one's mood. Adults should get seven to eight hours a night, according to Katula.
- **Mindfulness practice.** "It doesn't matter what type of practice you adopt, whether taking time to meditate, taking deep breaths throughout the day, practicing gratefulness or yoga, but practicing some sort of mindfulness can help boost your mental health in the short and long term," she says.
- **Social connectedness.** "We are social beings, so staying connected to friends or family will also help boost your mood," explains Katula. "It's important to note that social connectedness does not refer to social media. Our smart phones can actually cause more anxiety and depression. We need to be with people, talk face to face, give hugs and have eye contact to really connect with someone."

Another important factor when it comes to one's mental health – having constants in your life.

"Life can be hard, and the vicissitudes of life are challenging, which is why we need structure in our lives to stay steady," says Katula. "The five tips listed above can help in this respect, but you can also individualize your constants. Things like making your bed every day, greeting the day with intention and even just going to bed with a grateful mindset are all practices that can keep you steady. Create a structure in your life that doesn't waver, and if your current structure needs to change, create a new one."

By Jackie Hughes, Advocate Health eNews, 1/18/19

Wishing you joy and good health,
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