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Living/Health

Seven ways to improve your mental health

By Robert Boxley, Ph.D.

Use it or lose it

The more you use your brain, the better you will think in the future. However, use it in new, challenging and mentally-stretching ways, rather than just wondering what Honey Boo Boo is doing next. Think about Sudoku puzzles or crosswords that are one step above your comfort zone. Challenge yourself to learn something totally new such as foreign languages, ballroom dancing, archery, geocaching, origami, soap making, etc. Or do something familiar in an unfamiliar way such as take a totally different way to work or use only your non-dominant hand all day.

Do unto others

People are very social and we get a lot of self-satisfaction from helping others. This giving away of your time actually makes your own mind more able to solve your own challenges. Everybody wins. So look for opportunities at your place of worship or at your local nonprofit to volunteer.

Safety in numbers

The more time you spend with your friends, the more healthy you will be mentally. However, this only works if your friends are good for you and are not influencing you to be unhealthy. So feel free to unfriend those who are not adding to your life and spend more time with those who are. It's the digital age, so text, Skype, or phone your friends when you can't connect by sitting down together at the local coffee bar.

Relax

Stress is an import motivator but, over time, it can start to seriously impact our mental health. Concentration, problem-solving, decision-making and alertness to important details are all impaired if stress is in your life too long. So be sure to schedule yourself for time to do things you find relaxing. Not everyone finds the same things relaxing: some may find yoga or fishing or reading relaxing, while others get stressed just thinking about these things. Pick your own relaxation method and do it often.

Everybody have fun tonight

Pleasure is very important to your mental health. If you do not have enough pleasure in your life, then do more of it (provided that it is not illegal or with bad long-term consequences). Smiling, laughing, enjoying beauty or just being amused is great for your brain.

So hit up a comedy club this weekend. Take your sweetie on a weekend getaway. Go see that band you've wanted to see. Enjoy.

Be here now

We all live in a society that is very future and past focused. However, spending time in the present is very good for your mental health. Try siting for a few minutes in your home and being aware of all the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings that you are experiencing. Do this often to re-center yourself. You will find yourself clearer-thinking afterwards.

Balancing act

All of the above suggestions must be balanced and not used excessively or they can impair your mental health. Moderation is healthiest strategy of all.

Dr. Boxley, the supervising psychologist for Manatee Glens, has more than 25 years of clinical experience in individual, couple, family and group therapy with specialization in psychological testing, depression/anxiety, autism spectrum disorders, child/adolescent counseling and substance abuse.