

The Presence of Positive: A Strengths-Based Approach to Mental Health

A Presentation with Lifetime Internal Medicine - June 2020

Goals

- Overview of common mental health conditions, how they present, and ways they can be treated
- Gain a better understanding of what it means to be “mentally healthy”
- Begin to explore your strengths and some ways to improve your own mental health



Signs and Symptoms of Depression

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Difficulty concentrating
- Appetite or weight changes
- Sleeping more or less
- Restlessness or sluggishness
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt

Depression is Very Common

- In the United States, nearly 20 percent of the population experiences a bout of clinical depression sometime in their lifetime.
- Even so, very few people who have the disorder discuss their symptoms with a healthcare provider.
- Instead, two-thirds of people with depression come in to their doctor complaining of physical symptoms, such as headache, back problems, or chronic pain.

Reasons patients don't discuss this with their doctor

- Concern about the stigma of mental illness
- Concern that a primary care provider is not the appropriate health professional to ask
- Some people see their condition as a personal weakness rather than a "real" illness

Risks of Untreated Depression

- lower quality of life
- higher risk of suicide
- worse physical prognoses for other medical conditions
- double the risk for death compared to people without depression, mostly due to other medical conditions
- depression affects not only the person with the disorder but also those around him or her

Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

- Excessive worry or fear of something that may or may not happen
- Feeling of being on edge
- Having worrying thoughts that are difficult to control (rumination)
- Physical symptoms - GI symptoms, fast heart rate, difficulty breathing

Other Mental Health Conditions

- Obsessive/Compulsive and related disorders
- Adjustment Disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Sequelae of Trauma- PTSD
- Substance abuse
- Eating disorders
- Sleep disorders
- Neurocognitive disorders

Effective Mental Health Care

- Exploration and assessment of symptoms by your primary care physician
- Use of screening tools and standardized assessments to make a clinical diagnosis
- Evidenced-based treatment plan that may include medication and/or psychotherapy
- Relaxation techniques, meditation, and exercise can be helpful
- Referral to a mental health professional may be appropriate

Medications for Depression and Anxiety

- Antidepressant medicines can help both depression and anxiety.
- They can be prescribed by your primary care doctor.
- It may take a few weeks before medicines take full effect.
- They may also cause side effects, but these often lessen over time.
- They generally are used for 6-12 months, sometimes longer.

Role of the Therapist

- Support and empathy
- Confidential, non-judgmental space to share thoughts and feelings
- Collaborative treatment plan, evidenced-based modalities such as cognitive behavioral therapy and other types of talk therapy
- Facilitation of positive change
- Strengths-based approach

Strengths-Based Mental Health Treatment

- Focus on your positive attributes
- Build on what works well for you
- Emphasize your personal growth
- Empower yourself to be resourceful
- Learn your internal and external strengths
- “What is good about you?”

Challenges to Sense of Mental Well Being

- dealing with illness
- loss of spouse or loved ones, also anticipatory grief
- loss of vision or other disability
- loss of independence
- functional decline

Symptoms of Mental Health Challenges

- feeling stressed
- trouble sleeping
- feeling worried
- feeling sad
- loss of motivation
- feeling distracted

Can We Improve our Baseline Mental Health?

- Good physical health:
 - ✦ regular practice of building muscle strength, endurance and flexibility
- Good mental health:
 - ✦ regular practice of building resilience, emotional regulation, empathy, gratitude, meaning and purpose

Mental Health - the *ABSENCE* of NEGATIVE?

Typically, people think of being mentally and emotionally healthy as the **absence** of issues such as:

depression, anxiety, panic, fear, guilt, loneliness, conflict in relationships, personal challenges, anger, and resentment.....

Is this even possible?

Mental Health - the PRESENCE of POSITIVE

What if mental health was actually the state of being “mentally healthy”?

Resilience, confidence, balance, ability to overcome challenges, handle stress well, adaptability, good adjustment to change, social connectedness and support, meaning and purpose

Resilience

Just as physically healthy people are better able to bounce back from illness or injury, people with strong mental health are better able to bounce back from adversity, trauma, and stress.

This ability is called **resilience, and it is often built by overcoming hardship.**

People who are emotionally and mentally resilient have the tools for coping with difficult situations and maintaining a positive outlook. They remain focused, flexible, and productive, in bad times as well as good. Their resilience also makes them less afraid of new experiences or an uncertain future. Even when they don't immediately know how a problem will get resolved, they are hopeful that a solution will eventually be found.

7 Habits of Happy People

- Strong Relationships
- Acts of Kindness
- Regular Exercise
- Finding a Flow State
- Spiritual Engagement and Meaning
- Knowledge of Personal Strengths and Virtues
- Positive Mindset: Optimism, Mindfulness, and Gratitude

How to Become Mentally Healthy

- Invest in your Self
- Keep the body healthy and the mind engaged
- Set boundaries
- Embrace adversity and challenge
- Learn to adapt well
- Find meaning and purpose
- Act with kindness
- Practice gratitude
- Eliminate what no longer serves you
- Commit to lifelong learning