MENTAL HEALTH, NATURALLY

"Mens sana in corpore sano" (A sound mind in a sound body) ~ Homer "The part cannot be well unless the whole is well." ~ Plato

atural approaches are the foundation of optimal mental and emotional health, just as they are for physical health. There are many things we can do as family members and citizens to promote better mental health in our families, homes and communities. These are covered in great detail in the chapters of *Mental Health, Naturally*. For those who want the bottom line, here are the 7 take home messages:

1. Mental and emotional health challenges are common and becoming even more so. They are among the most common, serious and deadly human health problems faced worldwide, ranking at the top along with heart disease, cancer, obesity, AIDS and injuries as leading causes of suffering for children, adolescents, and adults. The US National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that over 25% of adults (55 million Americans) suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. About 40 million suffer from an anxiety disorder, 21 million from a mood disorder, 9 million with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), 6 million with panic disorder, and millions more with other problems such as Alzheimer's disease or schizophrenia. That doesn't include millions more who are stressed out and struggling but don't fit a specific psychiatric diagnosis. Mental health, on the other hand, is essential for happiness, productivity, and global harmony. Mental, emotional, and physical health are inextricably interconnected. Things that affect physical health also affect mental health and vice versa.

- 2. You can achieve your goals more efficiently by focusing on what you want than on what you don't want. Rather than dwelling on diagnostic labels of what is wrong, focus on your goals, what you appreciate, and what you desire --greater clarity, focus, patience, calm, confidence, security, or feeling cheerful and hopeful, connected, empowered, or resilient. Once you know where you're going, you can pick the strategies that help you get there. When it comes to successful strategies....
- **3. Focus on the fundamentals.** Just as star athletes and gifted musicians do daily drills on the basics of their craft, we need to focus on the fundamentals every day. For health the fundamentals are:
- a. Fitness—moderate to vigorous physical activity (at least 45 60 minutes daily) balanced with restful sleep (at least 7 to 9 hours a night for adults, more for growing children). Remember that regular physical exercise is as effective as many medications in treating mild to moderate depression. In addition to banishing the blues, it augments attention and fights frequent fretting.
- **b. Food**—the brain is the most metabolically demanding organ in the body. It needs a steady supply of high quality fuel. Modern science provides tremendous support for what your grandmother told you. Eat breakfast; skip midnight snacks. Eat fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, beans and fish. Stay away from fast, fried, or processed foods and beverages made with artificial ingredients. Drink pure water. One recent study showed mood could be improved just by eliminating meat from the diet. I'm not saying that everyone needs to become a vegetarian, but do be mindful about the impact of diet on mental as well as physical health. Avoid deficiencies of any essential nutrient, particularly the B vitamins, Vitamin D, amino acids, essential fatty acids, and minerals such as magnesium, calcium and zinc. Make sure your salt is iodized.
- c. Friendship with self—be a friend to yourself. Many emotional, mental and spiritual stress management skills have withstood the tests of time and scientific studies. These can be as simple and low cost as prayer, meditation, or keeping a

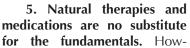
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gratitude journal (what are YOU grateful for today?). Practice one or more consistently. Communicate kindly with yourself.

- d. Friendship with others—develop strong relationships with others in your home, school, workplace and community. Help build a healthy community. Healthy communities promote mentally healthy citizens. Join a club. Volunteer. Become a mentor, tutor, or coach. Spend more time with people and less time with electronic entertainment.
- **e. Fields**—healthy humans need healthy habitats as well as healthy habits. Positive influences used mindfully -- sunshine, music, nature and good design -- promote mental health. Minimize exposure to negative influences noise, clutter, heavy metals, and toxic chemicals in air, water, food and household products. Television can be toxic, too; avoid the depression, fear, and anxiety induced by the 24/7 "all disasters, all the time" networks. Lower your carbon footprint; this is good for the earth, good for your self-esteem, and reduces funds flowing to terrorists. Work with others to eliminate the devastating mental and emotional effects of social violence racism, sexism, child abuse and domestic violence.
- **4. Build on the fundamentals** by seeking support from caring professionals (therapists, teachers, counselors, clinicians or coaches) who believe in and respect you. Psychotherapy, counseling, guided imagery, hypnosis, autogenic training, biofeedback therapy, EMDR, and meditation training can effectively enhance healthy habits, especially stress management and support-building communication skills. Others can help you get started and keep you going. Effective support is available in person, in groups, from professionals, from peers, by telephone, email and the Internet. Medications can be use-

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ful for those with major depression, schizophrenia, and other disabling symptoms; talk with a licensed professional. Do NOT suddenly stop taking a prescription medication without professional advice.

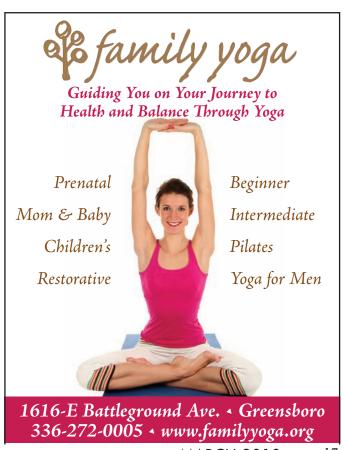




ever, safe, natural therapies can build on a healthy lifestyle to help you achieve your emotional and mental health goals. Examples of non-drug therapies that have helped many people achieve their mental health goals include:

- a. Herbs and other dietary supplements such as lavender, St. John's wort, 5-HTP, L-tryptophan and S-adenosyl methionine (SAM-E), and valerian can be helpful. Be cautious. Natural products are not regulated as strictly as medications, and quality can vary. Just because a product is natural does not mean it is safe. Discuss with you health professional all the medications, supplements, and herbs you take to get the best advice to avoid interactions and side effects.
- **b.** Massage and other kinds of bodywork to help decrease stress and improve sleep, mood, and overall emotional and mental well-being
 - c. Acupuncture can be as effective as medications for im-





proving anxiety, mood and sleep. Services provided by a licensed acupuncturist are covered by a growing number of insurers.

d. Electro-magnetic fields, EMF (specific types). While there has been concern about the adverse effects electrical fields from power lines and cell phones, some research suggests that certain kinds of EMF can be helpful. We're all familiar with electroconvulsive therapy (shock therapy) as a powerful treatment for severe depression. Modern versions are much safer than those used in the 50's and 60's. Some medical centers use transcranial magnetic stimulation

(TMS); others are studying implanted vagal nerve stimulators (VNS) to treat severe depression. Cranial electrotherapy stimulation or electrosleep looks similar to the TENS devices used to treat pain, and have been used for decades to help decrease anxiety and promote sleep; they require a prescription. Obviously, anyone with a pacemaker should avoid exposure to strong magnetic fields. Research on the risks and benefits of different kinds, strengths and patterns of EMF is growing rapidly.

6. Use proven strategies to make the changes you want. As thousands

of smokers know, it's easy to know that quitting is a good idea, it's harder to actually do it. Ancient wisdom tells us that long journeys start with single steps. Modern behavioral science helps us take those steps - exploring our ambivalence; weighing the pros and cons, understanding our resources and barriers; making concrete, specific, measurable plans; tracking our own behavior; anticipating and celebrating success; and periodically re-evaluating where we are, what we've learned, and what we want to improve next.

7. Mental health is part of the overall health of individuals, communities, society and the planet. To optimize the health of current and future generations, it needs to be an explicit priority in our daily decisions and our long-term plans as individuals and communities. Together we can reduce anxiety by finding effective alternatives to domination, threats and terrorism. Compassionate communication is key to promoting calm, clear solution-oriented problemsolving between individuals and groups; it takes discipline, patience and persistence to build the world and relationships we desire. Being mindful of the mental health impacts of social policies about agriculture, transportation, justice, safety, economy, energy, education and even foreign policy can provide greater focus, attention and intentionality in our individual and collective decisions. Individual respect and social justice promote security, hope, focus and overall mental health.

There are hundreds of things you and your family can do today to promote mental health for yourself, someone you love, and those you may never meet. It will take all of us working together to create a healthy planet, healthy societies, and healthy homes where all can flourish with courage, confidence, clarity, kindness, and good cheer. There are many opportunities for constructive action. Together we can achieve our goals for mental and emotional health for ourselves and our communities.

Dr. Kemper will be a guest speaker at the Natural Triad Health & Wellness Show on Saturday, April 10 at 1:00 PM. Details on page 33.

