

# REVITALIZE MENTAL WELL-BEING

Spring is here and Mother Nature is finally breaking out of hibernation mode. Much like the flowers and plants that have begun to bloom again, spring represents a rejuvenating or “blooming” period for people as well. The warmer temperatures and sunnier days infuse us with us an extra dose of motivation to make positive changes in our lives. This spring, let’s make it a goal to rejuvenate an area of our life and health that often gets neglected in our everyday life: our mental wellbeing. In this newsletter, we have put together a list of suggestions for taking care of your mental health and also your overall health and happiness.

## Healthy Eating

There is a reason why doctors always prescribe eating healthy food for most ailments. Food provides our bodies with all the necessary nutrients for proper functioning, growth, and healing, and it is important that we make food choices that maximize our nutrient intake.

There are several ways that food impacts our mental health. In a *Psychology Today* article, Patricia Hartenak, Ph.D., reported that foods rich in carbohydrates increase serotonin, which is important in fighting stress and keeping calm. Protein-rich foods release chemicals such as norepinephrine, dopamine and tyrosine that boost mental alertness while vegetables and fruits are equally imperative for brain health and mood.

### What should we eat to maximize good mental and physical health?

*Canada’s Food Guide* is a useful resource for planning daily meals. The guide is based on the latest findings in nutritional science and specifies the types of foods as well as the number of servings of each food that one should consume on a daily basis in order to meet all the nutritional needs.

The following table shows the Food Guide’s recommended number of food servings per day by age group and by food item. For your reference, a serving of vegetables and fruits would be a piece of fruit (i.e. an apple) or 1 cup of salad while a serving of grain products would be equivalent to a slice of bread. A cup of milk is considered to be 1 serving of milk and alternatives and 75 grams or 1/2 cup of poultry or cooked fish is equivalent to a serving of meat and alternatives.

	Children			Teens		Adults			
	2-3	4-8	9-13	14-18 Years		19-50 Years		51+ Years	
	Girls and Boys			Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Vegetables and Fruit	4	5	6	7	8	7-8	8-10	7	7
Grain Products	3	4	6	6	7	6-7	8	6	7
Milk and Alternatives	2	2	3-4	3-4	3-4	2	2	3	3
Meat and Alternatives	1	1	1-2	2	3	2	3	2	3

Source: Health Canada

## Exercise

Regular exercise, which releases feel good chemicals known as endorphins, has long been associated with good mental health. In a *Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* article, Dr. Ashish Sharma and fellow researchers reported that certain aerobic exercises, such as jogging and dancing, increase blood circulation to the brain and influence certain areas of the brain which help improve mood, reduce anxiety and depression, and regulate the body’s reaction to stress.

## How much and what kind of exercise is recommended?

According to *Canada's Food Guide*, adults are recommended to have at least 2.5 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity every week. Moderate exercises are those that increase one's breathing and heart rates and include exercises such as biking and brisk walking. Vigorous exercises refer to much higher-intensity activities and work-outs, including running and playing sports like soccer.



## Sleep

Recent studies have found that Canadians are one of the most sleep-deprived groups of people in the world. While lack of sleep can lower productivity and energy levels, it can also be extremely detrimental to mental health. According to a *Harvard Health* article, several neuroimaging and neurochemistry studies have shown that a good night's sleep is imperative to building mental and emotional resilience. On the other hand, insomnia can cause and/or worsen symptoms of depression as well as anxiety.



### How much sleep is needed?

You most likely have heard or read about the importance of getting at least 7-8 hours of sleep every night. That is because a person goes through four different cycles while they are sleeping and each of those cycles is imperative for physical and mental recuperation. According to reports by *The Daily Telegraph* and *Harvard Health*, the last two stages of sleep are linked with memory, learning, and emotional health. Each sleep cycle takes about 90 minutes to complete; more hours of sleep ensures that an individual passes through and completes all the cycles.

## Take time out to take care of your mental well-being

Most of us get so busy in the daily grind that we forget to take time out to care for our mental and emotional well-being. While eating right, exercising, and getting sufficient sleep are the building blocks of good mental health, taking time out for things that are important to you is also imperative for happiness. Here are some suggestions on how you can use regular "time-outs" to take better care of the self:

1. Take mini-breaks every day and partake in an activity that you enjoy.
2. Take a longer break (1 to 2 weeks long) during the year to explore a town, city, or country that you have never been to before.
3. Make time for relationships—friends, family, pets—that are important to you. Spending time with loved ones helps one feel like they are part of a community and can make it easier to weather life-stresses.
4. Check in with how you are feeling every couple of days. Many of us often bottle up our feelings or completely disregard our emotions and thoughts, which can worsen our mental health. Journaling, yoga, mindfulness, and meditation are examples of activities that can be cathartic as well as help us check in with our feelings in a healthy, productive manner.