

Mental Health Challenge

Released: October 4, 2023



October is National Depression and Education Awareness month, and I think I can speak for everyone when I say that we ALL need to have a mental health reset done. Life is crazy, and the world is even crazier; this can make it very hard to forget ourselves in the chaos and lose focus of maintaining our own sanity and protecting our hearts and our minds. So, let's take the month of October to spend focusing on centering ourselves and walking the path of self-discovery together as we all take a big breath and practice mental health awareness.

WEEK ONE:

Day 1: SLEEP

Make a commitment to good sleep hygiene. Our mental health is heavily impacted by our sleep.

- Commit to a regular bedtime
- No caffeine before bed
- Turn off technology an hour before bedtime
- Talk to your medical provider if you need more guidance

Day 2: DIET

We are what we eat, and what we eat impact our mental health.

- Add more fruits and vegetables
- Reduce sugar and processed foods
- Try cooking something new and share a meal with loved ones

Day 3: EXERCISE

Movement has been proven to lead to better mental health.

- Make time for a short walk every day
- Look for ways to add a few steps by taking the stairs, parking further away, dancing, or taking a fitness class at the Y!
- High five yourself for small steps
- Consider a workout buddy to hold you accountable and keep you motivated!

Day 4: COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Did you know that your brain processes more than 70,000 thoughts a day? Make sure those thoughts are POSITIVE not negative.

- Your thoughts impact your mood. Learn to correct your thinking habits.
- Talk to yourself like you would someone you care about
- Surround yourself with positive people and positive conversation.

Day 4: COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Did you know that your brain processes more than 70,000 thoughts a day? Make sure those thoughts are POSITIVE not negative.

- Your thoughts impact your mood. Learn to correct your thinking habits.
- Talk to yourself like you would someone you care about
- Surround yourself with positive people and positive conversation.

Day 5: JOURNALING

Writing down your thoughts and ideas can have a positive impact on your mental health.

- Try a mind dump at the end of the day to help with sleep
- Write without stopping for 5 minutes or until you fill a whole page. You may be surprised with the results, and it can help you gain a deeper insight into your internal or subconscious emotions.
- Write a list of good things. This will train your brain to see more positive things around you.

Day 6: STORY BOARDING

Expressing yourself in an artistic way can be an outlet to help improve your mood, set an intention, and move forward.

- Choose an area of life and set an intention: health, career, fun, family.
- Cut out pictures and words that reflect what you want and place and glue them to a poster board. Stick that poster somewhere you will see it every day so you can be reminded of what you want for yourself.
- You can use anything you enjoy as a creative outlet, so find what works for you and get crafty!

Day 7: LIGHT A SCENTED CANDLE/ OIL DIFFUSE

Studies show that the olfactory sense is directly linked to the limbic system of the brain, which is also connected to emotional regulation.

- Choose a scent you find relaxing. Lavender and frankincense are great options for calming yourself.
- Make this a little ritual your day with morning tea or coffee, OR at the end of the day to unwind.
- Practice slow breathing to calm your whole body

Week Two:

Day 8: STOP

Sometimes we just need to STOP to help reduce the fight or flight response. Even one minute of this can help.

- Stop, take a breath
- Observe
- Proceed

Day 9: BUDDY SYSTEM

Having a buddy can help keep you on track with your good intentions and has been shown to increase success.

- Ask a friend to be a walking buddy or gym partner
- Join an online support group or any kind of support group
- Write yourself a letter of support and be your own buddy.
- You can use this letter to go back and look on when you are having moments of discouragement.

Day 10: LET IT R.A.I.N.

The benefit of RAIN will help you take care of yourself, body, mind and soul.

- R: Recognize what is happening right now
- A: Allow it to be what it is for the moment
- I: Investigate what is going on (Are you hungry, thirsty, angry or sad? Sit in the emotion and allow yourself to feel what it is to help process it. Address your needs.)
- N: Nurture yourself by asking what would help right now.

Day 11: GRATITUDE

Studies show that practicing gratitude is good for your mental health and mood.

- Write down 5 things daily that you are grateful for
- Express your gratitude to someone in your life
- Say a grateful prayer before eating a meal

Day 12: SELF COMPASSION BREAKS

If you are going through a rough patch, offer yourself a compassion break. Acknowledge the difficulty instead of avoiding how you feel.

- Notice: Where do you feel it in your body? (Head, neck, shoulders, heart, gut?)
- Ask: What would help right now? (Rest, a snack, conversation, compassion?)
- Action: Take a small step to support yourself in this moment of difficulty.

Day 13: SOUND BATH

Loud sounds can be overstimulating and stressful on the body and the nervous system. Try a sound bath to soothe the mind.

- Find a quiet place to lie down
- Use headphones to keep the sound equalized, or place a speaker above your head
- Breathe slowly as you allow the sounds of gongs, singing bowls, tuning forks, or rhythmic drumming to bathe over your body and mind. You can also listen to brown noise or green noise as well; YouTube has MANY videos you can use for this practice; search "sound bath music" and you'll be amazed by the results.

Day 14: MENTAL CLEANSING

When the mind gets cluttered with too many worries it may be time for a mental cleanse.

- Write down your worries
- Take slow deep breaths and picture wiping your cluttered mind clean
- Picture a fresh clean slate inside to start the next part of your day and throw away your worry list

Week Three:

Day 15: PROPER MEDICATION:

This pertains to people who are currently on prescription medications or taking supplements to help support their bodies and minds. With the chaos of life, it can be easy to fall off the wagon and forget to take our medications or vitamins that help keep our health on track.

- If you take medication or supplements for your mental or physical health, please remember to take them today!
- Keep a journal to track your moods, symptoms or reactions.
- If you do not take any supplements or medications use this day to make sure you are getting sufficient water intake!

Day 16: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence can be developed, it can also be helpful to your relationships and mental health.

- Increase your EQ by getting to know yourself. Having a coach or counselor can also help greatly with this.
- Know your triggers and write down situations that get you upset. This is the beginning of taking control.
- Stay motivated to keep growing. Read inspiration stories and know your WHY.

Day 17: REFLECTION TIME

Looking back can be a way of gaining perspective, learning lessons, and moving forward.

- Choose a time in your life to reflect on. Maybe you had a hard time, some amazing accomplishments, or a hard loss.
- Use pictures, journaling, or sharing stories with a loved one to help you reflect and learn from your experiences.

Day 18: SMART GOALS

Being SMART about your goals will help you accomplish the things that are important to you.

- **Specific:** Get clear about what you want
- **Measurable:** Make sure you can measure your progress
- **Achievable:** Be honest and realistic about your goals
- **Relevant:** Make sure it matters to you
- **Timely:** Set a limit for your goals

Day 19: YOGA

Yoga is an ancient practice of physical, mental, and spiritual awareness designed to help reduce stress levels.

- Reduce stress and learn about yourself with the mental and spiritual practice of yoga.
- Try a chair yoga class for an easy introduction or take a yoga class at the Y!
- Listen to your body and check with doctors if necessary to make sure yoga is a good fit for you.

Day 20: MOOD MUSIC

Studies show that music can have a positive impact on mood, blood pressure, and heart rate.

- Explore classical music and see how it improves your mood!
- If you are feeling down or fatigued, try listening to happy upbeat music to boost your mood and energy
- Jazz can be used to reduce stress and improve your focus
- Experiment with new and different music to see how your mood responds.

Day 21: BOX BREATHING

Tracing an image of a box in your mind, along with breath can help soothe your mood and lower stress levels

- Picture a box in your mind and repeat the following 4 times then see how you feel:
- Breathe out along the bottom of the box
- Hold the breath for 4 seconds as you picture going up the right side of the box
- Breathe in as you picture going along the top of the box
- Hold for 4 seconds as you picture going down the left side of the box

Week Four:

Day 22: BODY SCAN

Scan your body to get in touch with how you are feeling in the moment

- Sit or lie down quietly for 5–10 minutes
- Bring your attention to your feet
- Scan your legs, torso, hands and arms, shoulders and neck and head
- Widen your awareness of your whole body
- Notice any sensations of tingling, pulsing or tension
- When you are done take a final deep breath and notice how you feel

Day 23: WRITING AS A NARRATIVE MEDICINE

Writing helps us to understand what we are thinking. It can also be used as a creative outlet.

- Try using some writing prompts to get started
- What was your first childhood home like?
- What was it like when you got your first job?
- Look at a picture of yourself as a child and write a letter to him/her

Day 24: Affirmations

Using positive self-affirmations can support your sense of self-worth. Read your positive affirmations every morning.

- Write your affirmations down and bring them with you wherever you go. Say them throughout the day and see how it affects you.
- I am loveable, valuable, powerful and equal
- I won't always feel this way, this too shall pass
- Today I will listen to what I truly need— both physically and emotionally.
- I love myself and will find ways to prioritize myself

Day 25: Breathe and Repeat

Learn a relaxing three-part breathing method that works the belly, diaphragm and lungs.

- Breathe into the belly, then the diaphragm and then the lungs
- Practice the in-breath to expand the belly, the breath out to deflate the lungs, diaphragm and belly
- Alternate nostril breathing— close your left nostril and breathe through the right then switch

Day 26: Mantras

Mantras are soothing words that calm us during hard or stressful times. Choose words or phrases that help you meditate into a calm and peaceful mood.

- I am safe
- Calm washes over me
- Or try repeating the classic "om" for five minutes

Day 27: Metta Meditation

Metta means "loving kindness" and it can be a healing and powerful practice. Offer these loving phrases to yourself, someone else, or both!

- May I be safe
- May I be free from pain
- May I be happy
- May I be at ease in life

Day 28: Jin Shin Jyutsu

This is the art of releasing tensions in the body.

- Hold your thumb if you feel worried
- Hold your index finger when you feel fear
- Hold your middle finger for anger
- Hold your ring finger for grief
- Hold your pinky when you feel you are trying too hard and overexerting yourself

Day 29: Stop Hitting the Snooze Button

When we hit the snooze button, we are conditioning our bodies to procrastinate.

- Work toward being honest with yourself about when you need to get up
- Practice this routine until it becomes second nature
- Open the blinds to let the light in right away. Letting light in goes a long way to improve your mood.

Day 30: Nature

Grow your mental health by being in nature

- Getting out in nature is an important part of good mental health
- Take a walk and notice the sky, trees, changing of seasons, even the temperature outside
- Get your hands in the dirt, feel the earth. Whether it's planting a garden or simply just grounding; make sure you connect to the earth.
- Lie in the grass, lean against a tree or sit by a stream/lake

Day 31: Singing

You do not have to have a good voice to sing your favorite songs, let your voice be heard because you are a wonderful human being.

- Singing with a recording
- Sing with a choir
- Sing in the shower
- Sing while you clean and do chores
- Make time for a short walk every day
- Look for ways to add a few steps by taking the stairs, parking further away, dancing, or taking a fitness class at the Y!
- High five yourself for small steps
- Consider a workout buddy to hold you accountable and keep you motivated!