

# CONNECTIONS

MAY, 2019

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 5

## Do you Focus on #4Mind4Body?

Mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being, and mental illnesses are common and treatable. So much of what we do physically impacts us mentally—it's important to pay attention to both your physical health and your mental health, which can help you achieve overall wellness and set you on a path to recovery.

Did you know that Mental Health America (MHA) founded May is *Mental Health Month* back in 1949? That means this year marks MHA's 70th year celebrating Mental Health Month!

This May, MHA is expanding its focus from 2018 and raising awareness about the connection between physical health and mental health, through the theme #4Mind4Body. We are exploring the topics of animal companionship, spirituality and religion, humor, work-life balance, and recreation and social connections as ways to boost mental health and general wellness.

A healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions, as well as chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. It can also help people recover from these conditions. For those dealing with a chronic health condition and the people who care for them, it can be especially important to focus on mental health. When dealing with dueling diagnoses, focusing on both physical and mental health concerns can be daunting—but critically important in achieving overall wellness.

There are things you can do that may help. Finding a reason to laugh, going for a walk with a friend, meditating, playing with a pet, or working from home once a week can go a long way in making you both physically and mentally healthy. The company of animals—whether as pets or service animals—can have a profound impact on a person's quality of life and ability to recover from illnesses. A pet can be a source of comfort and can help us to live mentally healthier lives. And whether you go to church, meditate daily, or simply find time to enjoy that cup of tea each morning while checking in with yourself—it can be important to connect with your spiritual side in order to find that mind-body connection.

Mental Health America wants everyone to know that mental illnesses are real, and recovery is always the goal. Living a healthy lifestyle may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes. Finding the balance between work and play, the ups and downs of life, physical health and mental health, can help you on the path towards focusing both #4Mind4Body.

For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may).

MAY IS  
MENTAL  
HEALTH  
MONTH

#4MIND4BODY

Humor, spirituality, recreation, social connections, animal companionship, and work-life balance can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental and physical health conditions and also help people recover.

**LEARN ABOUT HEALTH - 4MIND4BODY**  
at [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH).

**SHARE WHAT YOU DO TO STAY WELL**  
by posting with #4Mind4Body.

**SEE WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING**  
at [bit.ly/4Mind4Body](http://bit.ly/4Mind4Body).



CITY OF MADISON EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
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# ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP

The company of animals – whether as pets or service animals – can have a profound impact on a person's quality of life and ability to recover from illnesses.

## NEARLY 70% OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS (84.6 MILLION) OWN A PET.<sup>1</sup>

### Of households with pets:<sup>2</sup>

- 80% believe their pets bring them happiness and emotional support;
- 55% believe their pets reduce anxiety and depression; and
- 66% believe their pets relieve stress.



## PET-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES ARE GOOD FOR BUSINESS



### Workplaces that adopt pet-friendly policies can experience benefits like:<sup>3</sup>

- Attracting more job candidates;
- Keeping their employees longer;
- Better employee health; and
- Increased productivity among workers.

## WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY ABOUT PETS AND HEALTH?

### Pet ownership can help:

- Improve cardiovascular health and physical activity;<sup>4</sup>
- Decrease stress and lower blood pressure;<sup>5</sup> and
- Reduce loneliness, which increases the risk of developing many chronic health conditions.<sup>6</sup>



## ANIMALS HELP PEOPLE WITH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

In people with cancer, animal-assisted interventions (i.e. therapy, education, activities) play a role in reducing anxiety, depression and aggression during treatment.<sup>7,8</sup>



For people receiving treatment for mental illnesses, animal-assisted interventions reduce anger, anxiety, depression, and general distress, while improving the ability to socialize.<sup>9</sup>

Animal interactions have the ability to help people who are critically ill by reducing stress, anxiety, and boredom; improving mood; and reducing heart rate and blood pressure.<sup>10</sup>



For people being treated for HIV, those who own dogs show fewer symptoms of depression and are better at taking medications—likely because of the routines that come with dog ownership.<sup>11</sup>

## SERVICE DOGS CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE



The majority of people with diabetes who own Diabetic Alert Dogs are less worried about extreme changes in insulin levels, and experience improved quality of life and the ability to participate in physical activities.<sup>12</sup>



People who are hearing impaired showed long-term reductions in depression after getting a service dog.<sup>13</sup>



Veterans with PTSD reported decreases in depression, social isolation, anxiety, and alcohol abuse, while also reporting improved sleep and better coping with flashbacks after being paired with service dogs.<sup>14,15</sup>



Additionally, service dogs may help lighten the responsibilities of caregivers by assisting those with disabilities to accomplish everyday tasks and alerting to symptoms of chronic health conditions.

## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

Share pics of your pets or other animals in your life and tell us how they impact your health by posting with #4mind4body.

We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body). You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

## ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

If you are taking steps to care for your mind, body, and soul but still feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org) to check your symptoms. It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and help you find tools and resources to feel better.

For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodyAnimals](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodyAnimals).



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# SPIRITUALITY & RELIGION

Regardless of whether you rely on meditation, yoga or religion, caring for your soul is an important part of taking care of yourself that can improve physical and mental health along the way.

## DEFINING SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS

Spirituality may mean a little something different to everyone. In one study, spiritual was defined as being connected to something larger than oneself, and feelings of peace, well-being or a sense of wonder about the universe. Being religious related to how personally important the ideas of an organized religion are to a person and how often they attended services. Of Americans who participated in the study:<sup>1</sup>

**29%** are both spiritual and religious

**18%** are spiritual but not religious

**31%** are neither spiritual nor religious

**22%** are not spiritual but are religious

## RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES CAN AFFECT BODY CHEMISTRY AND BRAIN ACTIVITY



Spiritual practices like meditation are linked to increased levels of feel-good chemicals like serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins; and decreased levels of cortisol and noradrenaline, which are associated with stress.<sup>2</sup>



Research has found that the areas of the brain associated with reward and positive feelings are activated when devout followers of a religion read scripture.<sup>3</sup>

## MENTAL HEALTH CAN BENEFIT FROM BEING SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS



One study found that people who attended religious services monthly showed a 22% lower risk of depression.<sup>4</sup>



U.S. military veterans who identified themselves as being highly religious or spiritual showed high levels of gratitude, purpose in life, and post-traumatic growth, and lower risk of depression, suicidal thinking, and alcohol abuse than their lesser or non-spiritual/religious peers.<sup>5</sup>



In a study of people receiving treatment at a mental health facility, more than 80% used religious beliefs or activities to cope with daily difficulties or frustrations; 65% reported that religion helped them to cope with symptom severity, and 30% indicated that religion gave them purpose to keep living.<sup>6</sup>



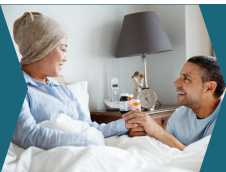
## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS AND CAREGIVERS



In people born with heart diseases, being religious or spiritual led to healthier behaviors, better quality of life, and higher life satisfaction.<sup>6</sup>



Spiritual and religious beliefs related to meaning, peace, and faith were associated with reduced suicide risk and better mental health in people getting dialysis treatments.<sup>7</sup>



Having a sense of meaning, purpose, or connection to something larger than oneself is associated with positive mental health outcomes in people receiving cancer treatment.<sup>8</sup>



Faith communities can provide social connections and support to individuals living with chronic illnesses and those who care for them. Some religious organizations have respite programs available to assist with caregiving.

## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

Share your favorite inspirational verses and tell us how you incorporate spirituality or religion into your life by posting with #4mind4body.

We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body). You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

## ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

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For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodySpirituality](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodySpirituality).



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# HUMOR

Finding humor in the circumstances of life can lift moods with laughter and help people to better deal with and overcome difficult experiences.

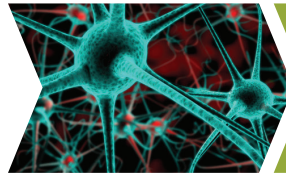
## WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR BODIES WHEN WE LAUGH?

Levels of stress hormones decrease.<sup>1</sup>



Your heart, lungs, and muscles are stimulated.<sup>2</sup>

There is increased activity in parts of the brain's reward system.<sup>3,4</sup>



Endorphins—the body's natural pain blockers—are released.<sup>5</sup>

## INCORPORATING HUMOR INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE HAS MANY POTENTIAL BENEFITS

A stronger immune system<sup>6</sup>



Improved mood and anxiety relief<sup>7</sup>

Better interactions with others<sup>8</sup>



Less burnout on the job<sup>9</sup>

## HUMOR AND LAUGHTER REDUCE THE RISK OF DEVELOPING CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

Stress and the hormones it produces can do a lot of damage to the mind and body over time. Since humor and laughter reduce the amounts of these hormones, it has also been shown that they can help reduce the risk of blood clots, heart conditions, and other stress-related diseases.<sup>10,11</sup>



## 10 TIPS FOR INCORPORATING HUMOR INTO YOUR LIFE



List three funny things that happened to you each day.<sup>12</sup>

Find a TV show or movie that tickles your funny bone.



Watch stand-up comedy. There are lots of options to watch online or on television and if you can get to a live show – even better!<sup>13</sup>

Reach out to someone who gets your sense of humor. Share the funny things that have happened to you recently or reminisce.



Get online. Comics, memes, YouTube videos, blogs—if it gets you to laugh or smile, spend 15 minutes or so to check it out.

Have a game night. Charades is a classic, and there are also plenty of newer card and board games that are designed with humor in mind.



Try laughter yoga.

Read a funny book.



Spend time with an animal or a child. Their antics are almost always good for a laugh.

Incorporate funny things into your environment. It could be a goofy photo; a page-a-day calendar; or a mug with a witty saying or cartoon.



## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

Tell us how you incorporate humor and laughter into your life or share something you find funny by posting with #4mind4body.

We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body). You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

## ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

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For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodyHumor](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodyHumor).



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# WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work allows you to provide for yourself and your family while also serving a purpose in the community, but when it takes over your life, it can negatively affect your health.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS IMPORTANT

Of adults employed full time in the U.S., nearly 40% reported working at least 50 hours per week, and 18% work 60 hours or more.<sup>1</sup>



People who feel they have good work-life balance are more satisfied with their job and their life, and experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM MHA'S WORK HEALTH SURVEY™

More than half of people who responded to MHA's Work Health Survey say that they do unhealthy things (e.g. drinking, drug use, lashing out at others) to cope with workplace stress.



Over 75% of people are afraid of getting punished for taking a day off to attend to their mental health.

More than two-thirds of people have had their sleep negatively affected by workplace issues.



People who work in manufacturing, retail, and food/beverage jobs were most likely to report that work stress "Always or Often" impacted their personal relationships.

## HEALTH SUFFERS WHEN WORK TAKES OVER YOUR LIFE



The mental and physical health impacts of workplace burnout and stress are estimated to cost as much as \$190 billion per year (\$6,025 per second) in healthcare spending in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>



Poor work-life balance increases your risk for health conditions like sleep problems, digestive disorders, and mental health problems. This is especially true for people who work longer shifts or on nights and weekends.<sup>5</sup>



Working overtime increases the likelihood of having symptoms of depression, especially in men.<sup>6</sup>

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS AND CAREGIVERS

For people with chronic illnesses, balancing the demands of work while also caring for your health can be difficult, but laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Medical Leave Act are designed to protect the jobs of people with disabilities or medical concerns. Talk to your HR representative and your boss about your health care coverage and what accommodations can be made to help you manage – such as working from home or shifting your hours – so that you are better able to tend to your health.



In studies of people who had been diagnosed with cancer, those who believed that their employers would be accommodating to their treatment were more likely to return to work.<sup>7</sup>



A survey of people with diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis found that self-acceptance, understanding and support from coworkers and management, adaptations to workflow and work environment, and adequate benefits were among some of the most important factors when it came to their ability to keep on working.<sup>8</sup>



Research about caregivers is unclear as to whether paid employment has more of a positive or negative impact on the caregiver's well-being. However, one study found that among caregivers who work, caregiving responsibilities caused women to miss work twice as often as men.<sup>9</sup>

## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

**Tell us how you balance your personal and professional life by posting with #4mind4body.**






We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body).  
You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

## ARE YOU STRUGGLING?

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For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodyWork](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodyWork).



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# SOCIAL CONNECTIONS & RECREATION

Finding other people to relate to and doing things that bring you enjoyment are great ways to improve your mood and overall mental health.

## LONELINESS IS BAD FOR HEALTH

Being lonely can cause the same amount of damage to your lifespan as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is more dangerous to health than obesity.<sup>1</sup>



Loneliness is associated with a higher risk of high blood pressure in older people.<sup>2</sup>

Poor social supports make it harder to recover from mental illnesses, while a strong social support system improves overall outcomes and the ability to bounce back from stress.<sup>3</sup>



Women with breast cancer who have weak support systems before treatment have more pain and symptoms of depression over time.<sup>4</sup>

## SOCIAL INTERACTION AND RECREATION ARE ALL AROUND GOOD FOR YOU

People with strong social relationships are 50% more likely to live longer.<sup>5</sup>



People who do things in nature have better perceptions of their own emotional well-being.<sup>6</sup>

Taking a vacation can help you to feel happier and less stressed for a while. Even short vacations help!<sup>7</sup>



Adolescents who participate in sports have lower odds of suffering from depression or thinking about suicide, likely because sports increase self-esteem and social support.<sup>8</sup>

One study showed that people who participated in leisure activities like reading, playing board games, playing musical instruments, and dancing were less likely to develop dementia.<sup>9</sup>



Participating in outdoor recreation decreases symptoms of depression in people with disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

People with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses who participated in MHA's *It's My Life* Social Self Directed Care Program experienced increased quality of life across 12 different measures and a drastic reduction in hospitalization rates.



## CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAREGIVERS



Feelings of loneliness and isolation are common among caregivers.<sup>11</sup>



Adult day care and other respite programs can help reduce the demands on caregivers which may improve morale and allow more time for social and recreational activities.<sup>12</sup>

## TIPS FOR FINDING FRIENDS AND THINGS TO DO



Look for rec sports leagues in your community. Softball and kickball are common. You may be able to find other games like bocce ball or shuffleboard as well.

Check meetup.com. The website has groups all over the country that are based around specific activities or interest areas.



Volunteer! Volunteermatch.org has a database of opportunities across a variety of causes, all across the country.

Take a class. Check out your local parks and recreation department or look at national chain stores like Michaels or Home Depot that offer how-to classes.



## SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH #4MIND4BODY

Mental Health America has created a space where people can learn from each other about what they do to stay well.

Tell us how you work fun and friendships into your life by posting with #4mind4body.

We'll collect your Twitter and Instagram posts at [mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/4mind4body). You can also post directly and anonymously to the site if you would like.

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For a complete list of sources, please visit [bit.ly/4mind4bodySocial](http://bit.ly/4mind4bodySocial).



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# // MORE RESOURCES

## ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP

Habri.org - Information and research on the connection between people and animals.

PetPartners.org - Organization promoting the health and wellness benefits of animal-assisted therapy, activities, and education, and providing education and credentials for therapy animal teams. Visit [petpartners.org](http://petpartners.org) to learn more about therapy animals and inquire about setting up therapy animal visiting programs.

PetPeaceOfMind.org - Organization that helps people receiving hospice or palliative care to care for their pets.

TherapyDogs.com - Provides training and certification for dogs to become registered therapy dogs and has teams that make visits in the community.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

AskJAN.org - Job Accommodation Network's official website with resources for individuals, employers, and others surrounding workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Also in Spanish.

MentalHealthAmerica.net/Workplace-Mental-Health - Data from MHA's Workplace Health Survey on work environments, workplace stress, employee engagement, and employee benefits.

WorkFlexibility.org - National initiative in support of workplace flexibility.

## SOCIAL CONNECTION AND RECREATION

Clubhouse-Intl.org - A website for individuals living with mental illnesses to find Clubhouses—safe environments with opportunities for friendship, employment, housing, education and access to medical and psychiatric services in a single setting.

ColorTherapy.app - Color Therapy is an app for every day people, from all walks of life, to de-stress and unwind through a social coloring experience. The in-app community benefits from friendly, unconditional support when voicing their worries, anxieties, or mental health battles, all while creating beautiful artworks to share with the world.

Inspire.com - A social network for patients and caregivers to connect, share, and learn from each other about medical conditions, treatment, and support.

LoveKnitting.com - LoveKnitting is a global community for makers. We're dedicated to creating a place where your projects are celebrated, advice is shared and it's easy to buy supplies.

TheMighty.com - A safe, supportive online community for people facing health challenges and the people who care for them.

## CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS & CAREGIVING

CaregiverAction.org - Education, peer support, and resources for family caregivers.

ChoicesInRecovery.com - Support and information for people with Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective, and Bipolar Disorder and their caregivers, including resources for having conversations with treatment professionals.

HeadsUpGuys.org - Information and resources for men dealing with depression.

Lung.org - The American Lung Association provides information and resources around lung diseases, air quality, and tobacco cessation.

MoreThanMyDiagnosis.com - Stories and advice from people who either live with mental health issues or care for someone who does.

WomenHeart.org - Information and support about heart disease designed especially for women.

*Thanks for reading,  
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the  
EAP Office at (608) 266-6561**

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To learn more about your external EAP services, please contact FEI at 1-800-236-7905 or log on to [feieap.com](http://feieap.com) and type username: madison.