

Mental Health *Passport*



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Mental Health Passport

Think about your mental health. What do you do to take care of it? Dedicating even a short amount of time every day to taking care of your mental health will rejuvenate you and give you confidence. It can also prevent the onset or relapse of a physical or mental illness.

This passport presents articles on more than 20 topics that mental health care professionals have found influence people's health and happiness. The passport offers tools to help you identify and reflect on areas you may want to improve in your life. Developing positive mental health habits that work for you will stand you in good stead.

The Mental Health Passport was conceived, written and produced by Statistics Canada's Mental Health Working Group, which is part of the Workplace Wellness Committee. Although originally created for the employees of Statistics Canada, this version has been modified to suit a wider audience. Feel free to share the passport to encourage habits that foster well-being and better mental health.

Enjoy!

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Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.



Disclaimer

Information found in this guide is not to be used for mental health diagnosis, treatment or referral. This guide is intended only to provide general, basic information about mental health. In no way is the information intended to replace the advice of a health professional. Individuals should contact a health professional or their local addiction or mental health agency for further information on mental health.

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1

The importance of good mental health

This passport is designed to help you learn about different aspects of mental health and raise awareness of mental health issues. It offers practical tools to help you develop healthy and positive lifestyle practices and maintain or improve your mental health.

First, we explain what mental health is. Second, we help you evaluate your mental health through a short questionnaire. Last, the passport tells you about mental health warning signs and encourages you to **ask for help when you need it**.

Most of the passport topics, from stress management to happiness, discuss strategies that mental health care professionals find really work. They range from savouring the present moment to positive self-talk, getting a good night's sleep to practising gratitude and doing progressive relaxation exercises.

Use this passport regularly to remind yourself to take time to care for your mental health.

For more information on any of the topics covered here, please contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your healthcare provider. There are also resources listed in [Sections 29 and 30](#) of this passport.



2

What do we mean by mental health?

When we're mentally healthy, most of the time we enjoy life, our environment and the people in it. We can learn, try new things and take risks. We are able to cope with difficult times in our personal and professional lives.

Although mental health is affected by genetics, stress and other factors beyond your control, there are many habits you can develop to maintain or improve your mental health. This passport focuses on those habits.

Working on healthy habits to maintain or improve your mental health is an investment in yourself. The tips you will discover in the passport are easy to use. If you want to explore one or more of the topics further, consult the list of resources at the end of the passport.

Maintaining good mental health can be challenging. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, one in every five Canadians (20% of the population) experiences a mental health problem or illness in any given year. In 2013, it was estimated that more than 6.7 million Canadians were living with a mental health problem or illness¹. Many people do not seek help because of the stigma attached to mental illness even though it affects almost everyone in some way; at home, at work or in everyday life. Researchers are finding evidence that mental illness is a disease, like any other disease. Don't be afraid to seek professional help when you need it.



So jump right in and broaden your knowledge of mental health with this passport. Even more important, be healthy and happy!

1. Mental Health Commission, *Making the Case for Investing in Mental Health in Canada*, March 2013.

3

Put your mental health to the test

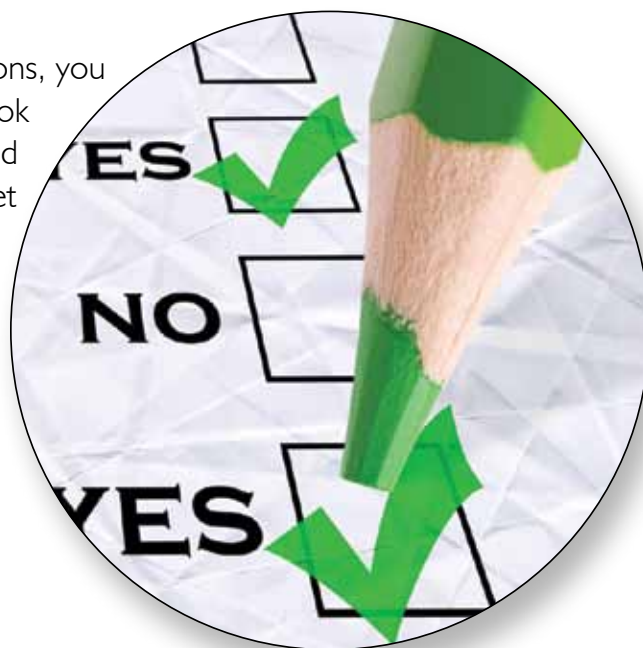
Statistics Canada's Mental Health Working Group developed this test to help identify aspects of your mental health that may need your attention. It is not a scientific tool and, if you think you need help, you should discuss the results with a mental health professional, such as a counsellor from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Please answer "Yes" or "No" for each of the following questions:

- Do you manage stress effectively? Yes No
- Do you savour the moment regularly? Yes No
- Do you have good self-esteem? Yes No
- Is your self-talk mainly positive? Yes No
- Do you laugh several times every day and make time for fun? Yes No
- Do you get enough sleep? Yes No
- Do you sleep well? Yes No
- Do you eat healthy and balanced meals? Yes No
- Do you exercise regularly (about 30 minutes, 5 times a week)? Yes No
- Are you assertive when necessary? Yes No
- Do you think your life is meaningful? Yes No
- Do you know what your priorities in life are? Yes No
- Do you set realistic goals for yourself? Yes No
- Are you making progress on attaining your goals? Yes No
- Is your work and home life balanced? Yes No

- Are you grateful for what you have in life? Yes No
- Are you able to handle intense feelings, like anger or grief? Yes No
- Do you have mental habits that make you resilient to stress? Yes No
- Do you take time to relax every day? Yes No
- Do you breathe deeply? Yes No
- Do you have good relationships? Yes No
- If spirituality is important to you, do you take the time to practise it? Yes No
- Do you spend time in nature, to reconnect with the natural world? Yes No
- Overall, are you happy with your life? Yes No
- Do you seek help when needed? Yes No

If you answered “No” to any of these questions, you can work on areas of your mental health. Look back on the questions to which you answered ‘no,’ and reflect on why. This passport can get you started on improving these aspects of your life.

You can also evaluate your mental health through the [Mental Health Meter](#), created by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). For more information, visit www.cmha.ca.



4 Put stress in perspective

When your stress levels are too high for too long, they can affect you physically, emotionally and behaviourally. Identify your symptoms of stress using the following table.



Symptoms of stress

Physical	Emotional	Behavioural
Fatigue	Anger	Angry outbursts
Back pain	Anxiety	Crying episodes
Chest pain	Burnout	Personality changes
Decreased immunity; more colds and flu	Feeling depressed, insecure, overwhelmed or driven	Alcohol or drug abuse
Dizziness	Forgetfulness	Eating more or less
Headache	Irritability	Increased caffeine intake
Heart disease	Lack of focus	Smoking more
Heart palpitations	Poor concentration	Interpersonal conflicts
High blood pressure	Restlessness	Social withdrawal, behaviours such as ignoring friends' calls and emails
Sleep problems	Sadness	
Sweating	Worry	
Digestive problems or ulcers	Fear	

If you're experiencing several of the symptoms above, stress may be the culprit. See your doctor about physical symptoms to rule out underlying medical conditions. Take steps to manage stress before symptoms escalate.

5 Stress management

The goal of stress management is not to eliminate all stressors, which is impossible, but to manage them and their effects.

Tips on managing stress

- Keep a diary of your activities when stressed to help you determine what triggers your reactions.
- Identify the underlying feelings, thoughts and physical reactions behind stress, and find long-term solutions. For example, it may not be tight deadlines that bother you but your expectations that you should be perfect and your fear of loss of control.
- Explore options for your personal life, such as contracting out housekeeping chores or sharing routine tasks with other family members.
- Explore options to make work–life balance easier (see Section 19).
- Do one thing at a time and celebrate your accomplishments.
- Accept the help of others.
- Discuss and negotiate areas of concern.
- Be organized; learn better ways of storing your work in physical folders or on your computer.
- Take a course on time management.
- Create or work on a budget, if you have financial worries. Seek help if needed.
- Prioritize what is important and make choices (see Section 18).
- Practise relaxation on a regular basis (see Sections 23 to 25).



In times of stress

Don't let stress escalate. Explore ways to better manage different areas of your life.

6

Savouring the moment

Are you in turmoil because you're short on time? Do you often mull over past events? Do you find yourself paralyzed with worry about the future? Learning 'mindfulness'—focusing on the present moment in a non-evaluative, non-judgmental way—enables us to savour small joys and blessings that we would otherwise miss.

Tricks to help you stay in the moment

- Use your senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Observe and appreciate things around you one at a time.
- Notice the texture, design and colour of an everyday object—or listen to music without words, watch and admire nature as you walk—for a few minutes a day.
- Give yourself periods of silence to get in touch with yourself by observing your thoughts and feelings. This simple meditation will help you regain inner peace.
- Observe your emotions with curiosity, as though they were new. Allow emotions and thoughts to come and go, without judging them.
- Slow your life's rhythm as much as possible. Be realistic about what commitments you accept. There's nothing nicer than having wiggle room and time for yourself.
- Give priority to activities that help you make peace with your thoughts and emotions, like meditating, practising yoga, writing in a journal, drawing or painting.
- Look to children, who are masters of mindfulness. Rediscover your inner child's way of seeing the world. Take delight in a scene, a bird singing or the smell of fruits and vegetables when you're shopping.



Moments of relaxation will help you get in touch with yourself and appreciate your life and the beautiful things around you.

7 Self-esteem

You value your children, family, friends and colleagues, but do you have a good opinion of yourself? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I know what my values, tastes, needs, abilities and limits are?
- Do I consider myself valuable, unique and important?
- Do I like and accept myself with all of my strengths and weaknesses?



Self-esteem involves appreciating and accepting yourself as you are.

- Give yourself credit for the efforts you are making, your strengths and your successes.
- Admit that everyone makes mistakes, including you. When you make a mistake, remember that it can help you grow. Learn from it, without being hard on yourself.
- Be realistic. Don't try to be perfect and stop comparing yourself to others.
- Surround yourself with people that make you feel good, and participate in activities that give you a sense of satisfaction and well-being.

Your degree of self-esteem can vary depending on which aspect of your life you are evaluating, be it physical, intellectual, athletic, social, love, work, etc. Be aware of how you see yourself and work on your self-esteem daily, while accepting and respecting your limits.

Be your own best friend, not your worst enemy.

8

Self-talk

Your self-talk comprises the thousands of thoughts that come to your mind every day. Is your internal dialogue mainly positive, or not?

It's important to pay attention to your thoughts because positive thoughts and positive affirmations can encourage you and inspire good behaviour, success and well-being. Negative thoughts—like worries—can, in turn, lead to poor self-esteem, depression and chronic anxiety.

The next time you find yourself out of sorts, listen to what you're telling yourself. If you're criticizing yourself or someone else, think of the following:

- What thoughts are running through my mind?
- What do the thoughts tell me about myself?
- Are the thoughts I have—about myself, the other person or life—fair or exaggerated?
- Am I putting myself down or doubting myself?
- How can I replace the thoughts with more constructive ones?



To learn more about self-talk or being kinder to yourself, consult the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a specialist in cognitive behavioural therapy or get a workbook on it from a library or a bookstore.

Improving your internal dialogue will reap enormous benefits. Your confidence and self-esteem will increase and anxiety and worries will decrease.

9

Making time for laughter and fun

Planning enjoyable and pleasurable moments is important for leading a balanced life.

Set aside some time for laughter or just let it happen naturally. According to researchers, including R. Berk in his article in the journal *Educational Gerontology*, laughter triggers your body's natural stress-release mechanism. Laughter will increase the level of health-enhancing hormones like endorphins, and will reduce the level of stress hormones like cortisol, adrenaline and dopamine. A little laughter can go a long way to keeping you mentally fit!

Laughter helps to keep you young at heart, and many people do not laugh enough. Depressing, don't you think? When you hear or see something that's funny, laugh out loud. Tell a joke to a friend or share a funny story about yourself with someone you know. Try laughter yoga. Watch your favourite comedy or record a TV show that makes you laugh. Laughter improves mental functioning, it exercises and relaxes muscles, and it improves respiration and stimulates circulation. Even smiling widely can set off a happy response in your body.



Explore new ways to find joy. Take up a hobby, free of the pressure of everyday tasks. Express yourself using the arts by writing, playing an instrument, painting or acting.

What makes you laugh—what do you do to have fun?

10 Sleep

Good sleep is essential to mental and physical health. Sleep is as important as air and food. It rejuvenates the body and brain and releases tension. Lack of sleep can lead to emotional, psychological and physiological problems, such as depression, anxiety and heart problems.

Twelve strategies for good-quality sleep

- 1** Sleep as long as you need to feel rested. Seven to nine hours a night is recommended for most adults. Don't cut back on sleep when you're busy. Your body and mind actually need more sleep than usual to help you manage stress.
- 2** Go to sleep at about the same time every night. Sleep specialists recommend that you fall asleep by 10 p.m. at the latest to rejuvenate your body and maximize your concentration, memory and ability to learn. Consistency is the key.
- 3** Avoid exercising two to three hours before bed.
- 4** Get natural sunlight (around 30 minutes each day, preferably at noon) or use a full-spectrum lamp.
- 5** Avoid caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants five hours before bed, alcoholic drinks just before going to bed and medicines that delay or disrupt your sleep.
- 6** Avoid large meals at night and avoid going to bed hungry. Have a light, non-spicy snack if hungry.
- 7** Nap only if it does not interfere with your regular sleep schedule. (Ideally limit your naps to 15 to 20 minutes.)



- 8** Take time to relax before bed. Try a relaxation exercise, listen to soothing music or have a warm bath.
- 9** Make your bedroom a good sleeping environment, with a comfortable mattress and pillow and a quiet, cool and dark room. If needed, remove distractions from your bedroom, such as a pet, television or computer. If reading helps you fall asleep, make sure you are using a low-wattage bulb to avoid bright light before bed.
- 10** Write down persistent thoughts to release your mind and to encourage a peaceful sleep.
- 11** Sleep on your side and maintain a healthy weight to manage snoring and prevent sleep apnea.
- 12** Talk to your doctor if your sleep difficulties last more than a few weeks. Some sleep difficulties require medical treatment.

Sleep is an important part of mental health that is often overlooked, especially during times of stress. Ask yourself whether you cut short the amount of sleep you get when you're busy.

1 Nutrition

Our bodies don't come with instruction manuals, but Canada's Food Guide offers good general advice on fuelling up. Each day, adults should eat something from each of the guide's four food groups—lots of vegetables and fruits and grain products, and less milk and alternatives and meat and alternatives.

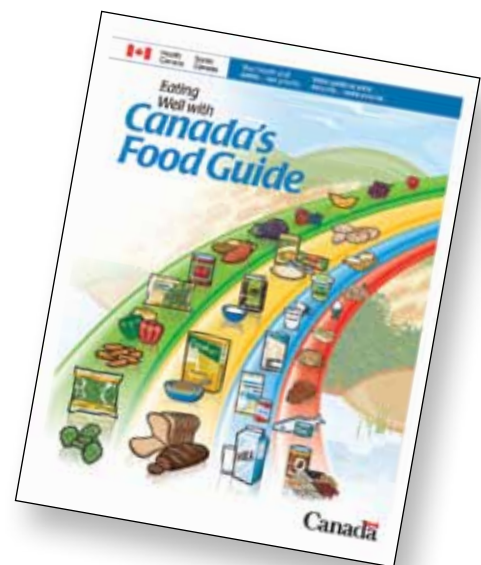


Recommended number of servings per day

Age in Years → Sex →	Children			Teens		Adults			
	2-3	4-8	9-13	14-18 years		19-50 years		51+ years	
	Girls and Boys			Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
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: Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. Health Canada, 2011. Reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health, 2013.

To access the entire *Canada's Food Guide* please visit Health Canada's website (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/order-commander/index-eng.php).



Although we need a certain amount of fat in our diet, many North Americans get too much fat, as well as too much salt and refined sugar. To feel full and get more nutrients, avoid processed foods, such as rich desserts, baked goods such as pastries, french fries or other fried snack foods. To shift the balance in your diet to whole foods, try switching one item at a time—for example, replace your morning muffin with a piece of fruit. Eating whole foods will reduce fat intake and increase your fibre and natural sugar intake. Try celery or carrot sticks instead of snack foods between meals.

Did you know that we often interpret thirst or fatigue as hunger? The next time you're feeling hungry, have some water and see how you feel. Adults should generally drink six to eight 250 ml glasses of water a day. How much water do you drink each day?

Food for thought

Eat away from your desk at lunch, if possible. Take the time to savour your food to help your digestive system process, so you feel satisfied after eating. Your body takes about 20 minutes to signal that you are full.

If you are affected by stress, it's a good idea to cut down on caffeine, sugar and alcohol.

The following table shows how much caffeine is in products we consume every day. Health Canada recommends that adults in general shouldn't consume more than 400 mg of caffeine a day. Some effects of caffeine may include insomnia, headaches, irritability and nervousness. For the average adult, 400 mg of caffeine is not associated with any adverse effects.



Approximate quantity of caffeine in a selection of beverages and food

Product	Ounces	Caffeine (mg)
Cola drinks (regular)	12	36 to 46
Coffee (brewed)	8	135
Coffee (decaf)	8	3 to 5
Hot chocolate	8	5
Tea (regular)	8	43
Green tea	8	30
Chocolate bar	1	7 to 19

Source: *Caffeine in Food*. Health Canada, 2011. Reproduced with permission from the Minister of Health, 2013.

Espresso has more caffeine per unit volume than brewed coffee, but as the usual serving size is smaller, it often has less caffeine in total. According to the Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.org), a 30 ml (1 ounce) serving of espresso has between 40 and 75 mg of caffeine. Remember that energy drinks contain as much caffeine as a cup of coffee or more. For example, one 450 ml can could contain up to 180 mg of caffeine. Also, many of these drinks contain high quantities of sugar.

More information on caffeine consumption, including advice for children and pregnant women can be found in the *Caffeine in Food* document (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/addit/caf/food-caf-aliments-eng.php).

Be skeptical of diets

Fad diets come and go in popular culture: few of them yield long-lasting results. They often involve cutting out something essential, such as carbohydrates, or eating only a narrow range of foods, such as grapefruits. Use a combination of healthy eating, exercise, relaxation and proper sleep as a recipe for feeling good about yourself.

Let balance be your guide.



12 Exercise

Research has shown that physical activity improves your physical health and overall well-being. It reduces stress, strengthens the heart and lungs, increases energy levels and helps you maintain and achieve a healthy body weight. It will help you feel good about yourself and contribute positively to your body image and self-esteem.

Physical activity is something that everyone can do. Look for simple ways to be physically active every day.

A balanced exercise program should consist of some cardiovascular exercise, some muscular strength and endurance exercise and some stretching. Swimming, aquafit classes or group fitness classes, such as aerobics, provide all three. Cycling, running or speed walking are good cardio exercises; yoga and Pilates are good for strength and flexibility. You may need to combine activities to balance your program.

The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology recommends in its Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines that adults accumulate at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week.

If you are not used to exercise, try 15 minutes, 3 times a week, and increase after 2 weeks. If you haven't exercised in a while, consult your doctor for advice on how to start exercising and to have a complete medical examination, if needed.

If you want to become more active in your everyday life, consult the Public Health Agency of Canada's [Tips to Get Active](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php) for children, youth, adults and older adults to help you make wise choices about physical activity (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php). Physical activities will improve your health, help prevent disease and enable you to get the most out of life.

Be active!



13 Assertiveness

Being assertive involves knowing your needs and wants—at work and with family and friends—and communicating them in an acceptable and respectful way. Conversely, being assertive often means setting boundaries—communicating what you won't do or agree to and learning how to say 'no.'

Asking yourself, "Why is setting this boundary important to me?" will help you get what you need.

Ask yourself the following questions before reacting or making a decision: What do I want and what do I not want? What is important to me? Is this decision in accord with my needs, rights, values and convictions? Do I feel respected? And do I respect myself?

Express yourself assertively by

- using "I" statements: "I feel," "I need," "I prefer," "I want"
 - ▶ structure your statements like,
"I feel _____ when _____."
For example: "I feel frustrated when I do not get an answer."
 - ▶ avoid "you" statements, which can be perceived as judgmental and give the impression that the other person is wrong
- being honest about your feelings and expressing them clearly and simply—you have the right to express them
- choosing the appropriate time and place to talk
- having a respectful attitude
- adopting an assertive body language—upright posture, frequent eye contact with others and warm tone of voice, even while being firm.



Consider what the other person thinks, feels or wants while you are asserting yourself. Collaborate or negotiate with the other person involved and try to find a win-win solution where both of you will feel respected.

14 Gratitude

Being grateful for all the good things in your life helps channel your energy in a positive way. Research shows that focussing on things we are grateful for lifts our spirits dramatically.

Keep a gratitude journal, where you record daily what's going well in your life and why. Start by saying, "I'm grateful for..." and make a list. Record the progress you are making, however small, toward goals (see [Section 18](#)). Find the positive aspects of challenging situations. Identify people who are making your life richer. Focus on the multitude of pleasurable things and kind gestures that you would miss if they weren't there. Acknowledge when you touch other people's lives in a positive way.

It's especially rewarding to tell people how they have touched your life in a positive way. Be generous with compliments. For example, write a letter to someone for whom you are grateful.



Celebrate successes and milestones

Counting your blessings improves health and well-being. Being grateful will help you cope better with life's transitions. You will feel better about your life and relationships and you will unconsciously create more opportunities to be grateful for.

15 Meaning in life

We all want to grow and experience life to its fullest. Most of us have one or more potentially fulfilling dreams we'd like to see come true.

Hopes and dreams are powerful, at all ages, and they may differ depending on your stage in life. Hopes and dreams might include having a family, being professionally successful or being involved in a social cause.

Find meaning in the challenges you've had during your life. How have you grown or what have you learned as a result of difficult times?

Ask yourself if what you're doing now is meaningful to you. If you can, find meaning in your day-to-day activities. Often meaning involves your values, skills or talents. Identify which values, skills or talents give you the greatest meaning.

Make a list of things you'd like to achieve in your lifetime. If you can't create a whole list, start with one simple thing you have always wanted to do and that you can achieve soon. Do it, see how you feel, and make more resolutions. Define your dreams and transform them into goals (see [Section 18](#)).

Don't wait for a major event, such as death or illness, to remind you that life is important. By having a purpose in life, you will live more widely and authentically.

Finding meaning in your life can take some time. Allow yourself some time to reflect or meditate on it. If you have difficulty, don't hesitate to consult someone who can help you explore the meaning in your life, such as a mental health practitioner.



16 Spirituality

Spirituality means different things to different people, and can be influenced by culture, beliefs, values and traditions.

No matter what kind of spiritual path you choose to pursue or explore, having a sound, healthy belief system can give meaning to your life and help you maintain a positive outlook.

There are many ways to explore and develop a spiritual practice. You can meditate, pray, sing or chant, serve others through volunteer work or incorporate acts of generosity and compassion into your life. You can enjoy being in nature to help find inner peace, practise mindfulness (see [Section 6](#)), read contemplative works or participate in a religious group. Art and music can help you explore your creative side, and physical activities, such as martial arts disciplines, that are based on a spiritual philosophy can help you connect to your spiritual side. You can also participate in a sport that helps the body, mind and spirit function at their best.

Receiving and giving love and support can help you develop a genuine compassion for yourself and others, which is a key element for spiritual growth.

Spirituality can help you through difficult times in your life by providing a sense of belonging and a greater connection with others and with your inner self. You can even gain wisdom and an understanding of some of life's truths by exploring spirituality.



17 Nurturing relationships

It's good to develop and maintain healthy relationships of all kinds—with colleagues, people you are involved with in your community, friends and family.

Good friends are worth their weight in gold: psychologists have found that good friends are often more important to happiness than earning more money.

Friends are people who help you feel you're not alone. They share and talk about positive and negative experiences. They are there to give you support through difficult times, and you can do the same for them.

Invite a friend to lunch during the week or brunch on the weekend. Join a club or team, based on your interests. Be open to establishing new friendships throughout your life. Take chances. Making friends takes time and effort. Be present and available with people you care about. Enjoy the time you spend together.

Devote time to your family. Remember to have fun with them, in addition to getting the serious things done. If possible, mix play and chores.

Make sure to listen when your child, relative or partner has something to say. Encourage one another. Show them you are proud of them. Value each family member's skills and abilities. Give and accept support.



18 **Setting priorities and realistic goals**

Knowing your priorities and having realistic goals can help you achieve happiness and good mental health.

Think about your day-to-day responsibilities as a parent, child, grandparent, spouse, employee or member of the community.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What gives me the greatest joy? List the activities that make you happy—even things as simple as reading, baking or walking.
- How much do the activities that make me happy figure into my day-to-day responsibilities?

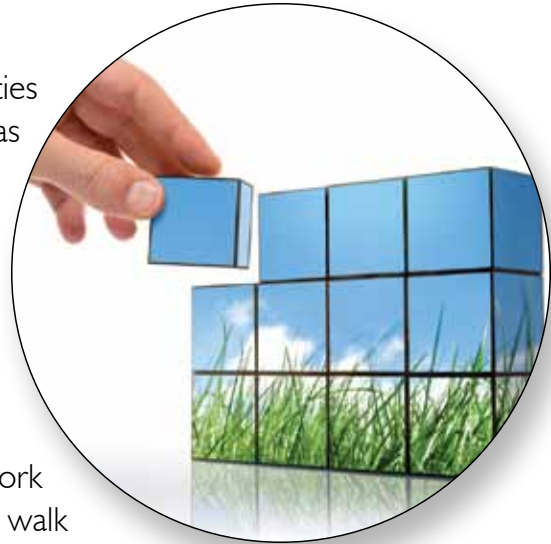
If you decide you don't do those activities often enough, or at all, think about how you can fit them into your day. It may not be possible to walk after work because of family commitments, but maybe you can walk during your lunch time.

Go through the list of activities that make you happy, and think of ways you can make them happen, now or later, keeping in mind your responsibilities. Be specific and realistic about when and how you work those activities into your day.

Determine which things are most important to you and bring you satisfaction. Balance realistic and achievable goals with challenging ones that can push you to try new things.

Start with smaller, simpler goals and achieve them. If needed, break down your goals into more manageable and tangible sub-tasks. This enables you to start with 'baby steps' towards your goal.

Be persistent. Keep track of your goals. Reward yourself for each goal you achieve.



19 Work-life balance

If you feel you're devoting too much time to one area of your life and not enough to others, your work–life balance may be off.

Work–life balance is different for every person; one size does not fit all. Over the course of your life, the right balance will change as the circumstances in your life change. A balanced lifestyle may be quite different for you when you are young, single and starting your career than when you are raising a young family or nearing retirement. Even if you feel 'in balance' now, you may need to reassess your life periodically as the needs and circumstances in your life change.

To judge whether you have a good balance now, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have trouble juggling roles and responsibilities?
- Are you trying to do more and more in less and less time?
- Does work interfere with family life or other aspects of your life?
- Do family or other parts of your life interfere with your work?



Achieving balance

Achieving balance involves deciding how much time to spend at work and on career development, and on other aspects of your life, including pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development.

You may find it difficult to cut back on any one part of your life, and you may have the impression that everything is urgent and necessary. You may, for example, feel guilty if your home is less than spotless or if you feel that you aren't putting in a good day's work.

Obstacles to balance

These feelings and traits can be obstacles to deciding on the right balance for you:

- Feeling guilt
- Caring too much, or feeling overly responsible
- Needing to be perfect
- Over-scheduling
- Lacking time, energy and support
- Seeing fun as a waste of time
- Believing problems will just go away
- Feeling compelled to please people, at the expense of your needs
- Feeling like a victim.

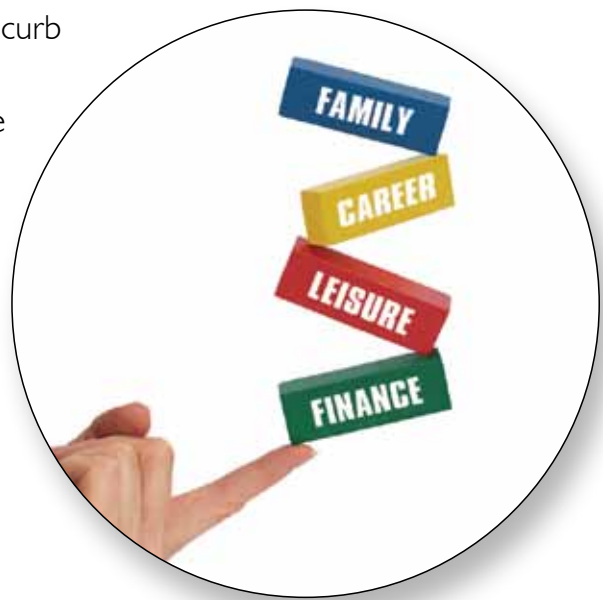
Consult the next section for tips on how to find balance.

20 Tips to make balancing life and work easier

You may feel tempted to think, “If I can just finish everything on my list, I’ll be able to relax.” But if your list is longer than your day, you may never get to relax, and you’ll end up exhausted and disappointed. Make the changes and choices you need to gain balance in your day and leave time for relaxation.

Life tips

- Scale back your lifestyle expectations, and curb your need for perfection.
- Prepare your meals at the beginning of the week, and prepare double meals to put in your freezer.
- Manage the length of telephone conversations.
- Recognize which situations are out of your control and let them go, if possible; for other situations, choose how you will react.
- Make time for yourself, your partner and your children.
- Participate in activities that enable your body and spirit to stay in balance (yoga, meditation, spirituality, music).



Work tips

- Address concerns about deadlines and deliverables early.
- Use active coping strategies such as prioritizing, delegating and planning.
- Learn how to avoid procrastination.
- Take a course in email or time management.
- Seek social support; make lunch dates with friends and get to know your colleagues.
- Think about your current job, but also about your future desired career.
- Pursue professional development activities that will help you gain qualifications and new skills.
- Adopt flexible hours, teleworking and other options if possible. See if your organization has flexible work policies and guidelines.
- Turn off electronic communication when you are away from work.
- Take breaks and time for lunch.
- Take your vacation time.

Take the Canadian Mental Health Association's [Work–Life Balance Quiz](http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/work-life-balance-quiz/) to assess balance in your life (www.cmha.ca/mental_health/work-life-balance-quiz/).

21 Handling strong emotions

We experience a wide range of emotions, some pleasant and some not. Emotions often act as signposts, telling us about whether what we're experiencing is good for us or not. Some emotions, like happiness and anger, give us energy; others, like sadness and anxiety, drain it.

Grieving and sadness

Disappointment, being hurt or receiving bad news can make you sad. The death of a loved one, separation and divorce are among the most difficult experiences in life. Sadness drains your energy; be gentle and patient with yourself.



Anger

Anger is a powerful emotion that can be positive or negative, depending on how you deal with it. Acting out of anger inappropriately could cause you to lose or hurt friends or family, or jeopardize your job. You can, however, use anger to learn about yourself and develop new attitudes. Anger can also motivate you to take action to improve situations. Chronic anger can cause health problems, such as hypertension and heart disease. If you have anger management issues, there is help available (see [Section 29](#)).

Guilt

Guilt, shame and embarrassment are from the same family of feelings: they all make you feel scrutinized and make you want to hide. To counteract guilt, you first need to identify the thoughts and beliefs behind those feelings (e.g., "I'm a failure because I made a mistake") and evaluate them as realistically as you can (e.g., "I made a mistake in the report partly because of time constraints and partly because I didn't sleep well for two days"). That kind of process is easier said than done, and you might need the support of others, even professionals, to get through it. You might need to work through long-standing issues (e.g., "Am I trying to be perfect?").

The consequences of strong emotions

If you're out of touch with or denying strong feelings they may be stored and expressed in an unhealthy way in your body. You may develop psychosomatic symptoms, such as back pain or digestive problems.

If you have trouble handling negative emotions, or if you feel you're not in touch with your emotions, you may want to get professional help (see [Section 29](#)).

Emotions need to be expressed: find the time and place to experience them. You can talk to others about your emotions and seek professional help, if needed. Find a safe place to let your feelings out. Write a personal journal or paint a picture of how you feel. Sometimes simply 'being with' your emotions—not distracting yourself or acting out—is the best thing to do, and will allow you to act more authentically and wisely.



22 Building resilience

The word resilience comes from the Latin word 'resalire' which means 'to jump again'. Resilience is the ability to cope and do well under difficult circumstances. People can become stronger and more resilient through adversity or even trauma, if they have some support.



This capacity for resilience is innate in all humans. Ask yourself how you tend to react to difficult situations, how long it takes you to bounce back and in what ways you are resilient.

Resilience can be developed over time. Through trial and error, you can try different resilience tips—described in the following list or in self-help books—and identify which ones work for you.

See each problem as an opportunity to develop and learn. Persevere despite difficulties.

Tips to build resilience

- Be flexible, like plants in the wind: assess things from many different points of view before taking action.
- Put a difficult situation in perspective: imagine how you will feel about it tomorrow, next week or next year.
- Learn new skills to manage a situation, be it learning new ways of doing a job or doing the give-and-take of making relationships work.
- Do what it takes to stay engaged in a worthwhile endeavor, be it imagining success or cheering yourself on.
- Take credit for what goes well; consider the factors that make things difficult; let go of what you cannot control.
- Take responsibility for your actions.
- Reinterpret your role in the face of adversity by focussing on why you did what you did and how it served you well.
- Identify strengths you've had all along and be proud of them.
- Give yourself time to become resilient; to do so, you may need to step back and reflect.

A key part of being resilient is having good support and finding meaning in your struggles. Be philosophical about your experiences.

23 Breathing exercises

Breathing well is key to reducing stress. Breathing properly will enable you to clear your head and feel relaxed.

Be aware of your breathing

- 1 Lie on your back or sit comfortably, with arms at your side and legs uncrossed and your spine straight.
- 2 Close your eyes, if you feel comfortable doing so.
- 3 Put one hand on your abdomen, below the belly button, and the other hand on your chest.
- 4 Breathe in and out slowly a few times.
 - Slow inhale... Slow exhale (count “one”)
 - Slow inhale... Slow exhale (count “two”)
 - Slow inhale... Slow exhale (count “three”)



Notice how your hands move slightly as you inhale and exhale. Which hand rises most as you breathe? When you're breathing deeply, the hand on your abdomen should rise and fall more than the one on your chest.

- 5 Breathe out fully—push the air out from the bottom of your lungs—then breathe in and breathe out several times. This will help you relax.
- 6 Breathe out slowly and smoothly and return your attention to the present moment.

This exercise sends extra oxygen to the blood and causes the body to release endorphins, which are naturally occurring hormones that re-energize and promote relaxation. If you feel dizzy, stop the exercise and start again, at a slower pace. Being dizzy is a sign that your body is not used to moving a lot of oxygen to your brain.

Do this exercise a few times during the day. Make it a habit. It will improve your overall physical and mental health.

Try practicing breathing techniques with a guided relaxation CD. If you find it difficult to relax, help is available (see [Section 29](#)).

24 Progressive relaxation

Progressive relaxation allows you to distinguish between tensed and relaxed muscles. By tensing and relaxing different muscles, you can decrease tension in all the muscles of your body.

Steps to follow

- 1** Ideally, find a quiet room and sit or lie down. Close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply.
- 2** Tighten a group of muscles for five seconds. For example, start with your fists. Then relax for a few seconds. Next, bend your elbow and clench your biceps. Release and relax for a few seconds.
- 3** Release and relax between each muscle tightening. To prevent cramping, avoid clenching your muscles too tightly. Release and relax.
- 4** Wrinkle your forehead as much as you can. Release and relax.
- 5** Squeeze your eyes shut. Release and relax.
- 6** Open your mouth widely; notice any tension you may have in your jaw. Release and relax.
- 7** Shrug your shoulders so they move toward your ears. Release and relax.
- 8** Move down your body, tensing other muscle groups such as your abdomen, thighs, lower legs and feet. Release and relax your muscles after each contraction.

If you would like more detailed instructions, you may want to borrow a progressive relaxation CD from the library, buy one, or download from the Internet.

With practice, you'll need less time to become relaxed and you'll get a deeper feeling of relaxation each time. Use this technique regularly, especially when you first notice you're stressed.



25 Meditation

Meditation can help you feel calm by slowing down the pace of your thoughts and getting you in touch with what's going on in your body. Many studies have proven that meditation can significantly reduce stress and improve your breathing and overall mental health.

You can start by meditating for 10 minutes once or twice a day. Once you feel comfortable, you can increase this to 20 minutes a day or more.

A meditation technique you might want to try

- 1 Find a quiet place or room where there are no distractions.
- 2 Sit with your legs crossed, as upright as possible, or lie in a comfortable position. Start breathing slowly and as you start to feel relaxed, close your eyes. Slowly repeat a pleasant-sounding word, such as the universal mantra “om,” or a word that means something special to you while breathing deeply.
- 3 If you notice that thoughts such as to-do lists or feelings enter your mind, acknowledge them and focus on your mantra or your breathing. Distractions are normal: don't be discouraged. Feeling drowsy or sleepy is normal when you meditate. Practice will eventually help you have more control over your mind.
- 4 When you finish the meditation, bring your attention to your body and posture. Open your eyes, look around the room for a minute or two, stretch and slowly stand up.



If you practice meditation regularly, you may start to feel detached from your body and your physical surroundings.

You can be in touch with your innermost self while meditating and feel more energized in your day-to-day activities.

26 Nature

Nature is an important component of well-being and health. You can benefit from being outdoors to energize and calm yourself. Reawaken your senses with the wind on your skin, the warmth of the sun, the smell of pine, the sound of water lapping the shore or even admiring the beauty of a plant. It helps you to rediscover the world as alive, vibrant and meaningful.

Being outdoors may also motivate you to be more active. Exercising outdoors—whether hiking in the forest, going for a walk along a river or cycling—may be more beneficial than indoor exercise because of the oxygen, Vitamin D from sunlight and sensory stimulation (such as sights, smells and sounds).

Studies show that walking in nature can decrease symptoms of depression and reduce physical tension and mental stress. Being in touch with nature is conducive to mindfulness—the practice of focussing on the present moment in a non-evaluative, non-judgmental way (see [Section 6](#)).

Take regular breaks from electronic devices, including your computer, cellphone and television. If nature is not accessible to you, contemplating a photo of wilderness or having plants can provide relief and help you visualize yourself in nature.

The author Henry David Thoreau (1817 to 1862) wrote about the therapeutic effect of nature and said, “I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright.”



27 Happiness

People often think, “I just want to be happy,” but they’re not sure how to achieve it. Happiness may seem more complex than it actually is. All of us can experience it.

Happiness is a broad term. Most people think that having a great job, a big house, being married and having children are major components of happiness and well-being. Other factors, however, such as nurturing relationships, being in and savouring the moment (see Section 6) and practising gratitude (see Section 14) are just as or more significant.

Think of the things that make you feel good. Do you remember the last time you felt happy? What were you doing? Whom were you with? Where were you? Could you do more of it? What would you like to change to feel happier?



Happiness is a by-product of good mental health. The main ways of promoting mental health and happiness are to find meaning, be engaged and cultivate pleasure. No single way of being happy works for everyone: use your strengths and find the ways that work for you.

Being happy can be as simple as accepting yourself the way you are.

28 Warning signs

Some of the warning signs that you need help are obvious. For example, you probably know when to call **911** for an ambulance or a fire truck. Some warning signs related to mental health are if:

- you often feel angry or sad, or you find it hard to enjoy life on a regular basis
- you feel depressed for more than two weeks
- you've noticed a significant loss of energy and you're feeling tired and unmotivated
- you constantly worry about everything or one thing in particular, for example, finances and whether you can afford basic living expenses
- you are overwhelmed with family responsibilities, such as caring for children or an aging parent, or both
- you are going through a difficult period in your life, for example, the death or loss of a loved one
- you find yourself taking alcohol or drugs when confronted with a problem
- you have thoughts of harming yourself or others.



When you are in a crisis, it may be difficult to seek help. You may be afraid of being judged or of disclosing personal information. Keeping your problems to yourself, however, may lead to isolation and feeling overwhelmed. Speak to your family doctor or a mental health professional, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counsellor, a psychologist or a psychiatrist. These professionals are bound by confidentiality and they are a good resource during difficult times.

Do not hesitate to seek help. Most people, at some point in their lives, need to reach out, and it takes courage to do so. Seeking help can make a real difference in your life. See the next section for tips on where you can find help.

29 Where to look for help

Most communities have a range of resources for people with mental health questions or concerns. Your family doctor may be able to help you find the professional help you need. First, your doctor would probably give you a thorough physical checkup, as your symptoms may not be purely psychological.

You may also want to contact a counsellor, health care provider or psychologist in your community. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your family doctor are good starting places.

If you or someone else is in a mental health crisis—for example, having suicidal thoughts—call **911**, go to the nearest hospital emergency department, contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or consult your telephone book for the number of a crisis hotline. The [suicide prevention](http://www.suicideprevention.ca/) website lists crisis centres in your area. Some crisis hotlines are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (www.suicideprevention.ca/).

People working at crisis hotlines and other mental health agencies can also provide contact information for appropriate services in your community. The [eMentalHealth](http://www.ementalhealth.ca/) website provides lists of mental health services, help and support in communities right across Canada (www.ementalhealth.ca/).

You can also look online for information about reputable organizations that offer programs, support groups or workshops related to mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety or anger management. You can find groups that can teach you stress management tools.

Your mental health and well-being are of utmost importance. Multiple resources are out there to support you. Just reach out!



30 For more information

Internet sites

- Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada
www.anxietycanada.ca
- Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (National Crisis Centres)
www.suicideprevention.ca/in-crisis-now/find-a-crisiscentre-now/crisis-centres
- Canadian Mental Health Association
www.cmha.ca
- Canadian Psychological Association
www.cpa.ca
- Check Up From the Neck Up
www.checkupfromtheneckup.ca
- Heart and Stroke Foundation
www.heartandstroke.ca
- Mental Health Canada
www.mentalhealthcanada.com
- Mental Health Commission of Canada
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- Mental Illness Foundation
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