



Happy Days

Don't let anxiety or the blues get the best of you. Here are some ways to help improve your emotional health and well-being.

Get moving

Even just 20 to 30 minutes daily of moderate activity, such as brisk walking, offers many benefits for the mind. Exercise can boost your mood, help you manage stress and enhance cognitive functioning, according to the National Institutes for Health (NIH). It's even used as an effective treatment for those living with chronic pain, arthritis, heart disease and diabetes, says the NIH. Walking, yoga or gardening are activities that can be fun and easy to fit into your daily life.

Adopt a pet

Owning a furry companion may boost one's mood and reduce feelings of stress, according to a 2012 study in *Frontiers of Psychology*. Dogs in particular are a great choice, as they

encourage regular exercise through daily walks. You can also volunteer to walk dogs at the local animal shelter to give your heart and happiness a boost.

Keep a journal

“Writing can help you sort through thoughts and emotions you never even knew you had,” notes Rebecca Lee, an RN based in New York City and founder of **RemediesForMe.com**. Journaling may reduce anxiety by helping you identify stressors and plotting steps to resolve them. The best part about writing? “There are no rules — it just provides a creative way to express your thoughts and emotions,” says Lee.

Socialize

Social isolation may be bad for your health and happiness, and loneliness has been linked to faster cognitive decline, says a 2015 study in the Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease.

“Companionship comes in many forms ... lunch with friends, time with a grandchild or walking the dog,” says Dr. Beatrice Tauber Prior, a clinical psychologist and owner of Harborside Wellbeing in North Carolina. Other social outlets include church groups, community classes and volunteering.

Nix the nicotine

While it’s well-known that smoking is bad for your physical health, it’s also been linked to higher rates of depression and faster cognitive decline, according to a 2012 study in Archives of General Psychiatry. Quitting can be tough, but here are some ways to help nix the habit:

- Use aids such as nicotine gum, patches or lozenges.
- Enlist the help of family, support groups and/or a counselor. [Drafting note: UHC MA/MAPD, AARP

MA/MAPD plans only will receive Smoking Cessation benefit text]

[UnitedHealthcare offers two counseling quit attempts within a 12-month period as a preventive service and each counseling attempt includes up to four in-person visits. This preventive service is covered at a \$0 copay when you see a network provider, if your plan has a network.]

- Replace the habit with a positive one, such as tea or a healthy snack.
- Carry motivational reminders of why you're quitting such as a picture of your family.

Get outside

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, surrounding yourself with fresh air and greenery has been shown to reduce depression, anxiety and cortisol levels (our body's stress hormone). Even city dwellers can find ways to soak in the benefits. "Hiking under trees, walking through parks or by bodies of water, and gardening are also beneficial," notes Lee.

Volunteer

Helping others actually helps yourself in many ways: Volunteering encourages social interaction and has been shown to boost self-esteem and happiness, according to a Vanderbilt University study. Websites like **VolunteerMatch.org** are a great way to find opportunities in your area.

Let go of regret

As we age, lamenting over the things we never accomplished in life can trigger anxiety and sadness. If there is something you've always wanted to do, it might not be too late. "If you woke up this morning, then you have been given the opportunity to accomplish another goal or dream," says Prior. Even if you don't

have the means to accomplish a loftier goal such as travel across Europe, Prior recommends exploring smaller alternatives to satisfy that dream, such as planning a fun getaway to the coast.

Laugh it off

Sometimes laughter really is the best medicine. Humor has been shown to decrease stress, and laughter itself has been linked to greater feelings of emotional well-being and life satisfaction, says the NIH. Recounting funny memories with loved ones, watching comedic films and sitcoms, and reading humorous books are just a few ways to get the giggles going.

[NOTE: AARP (PDP) version will not receive the behavioral health content. AARP (MA/MAPD), UHC/CIP MA MAPD and Group Retiree versions will receive the behavioral health content.]

[Seek support

Are you having trouble finding happiness in your life, or feel depressed? UnitedHealthcare® is here for you, through our behavioral health services, which are available 24 hours a day. Simply call the number on the back of your member ID card, and you will be connected to a trained specialist who will listen to what the problem is and suggest resources to help you. If treatment is needed, the specialist will match you with a therapist or facility that will help you with your specific needs.]

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