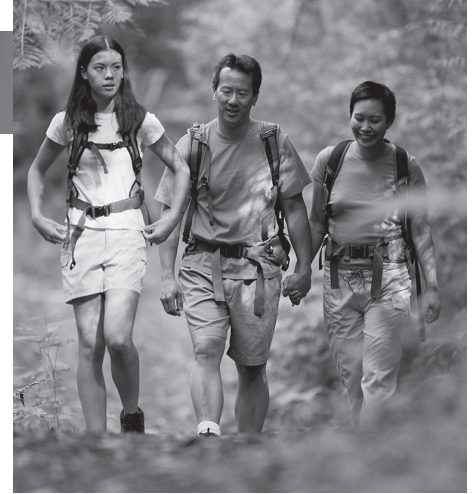


# your family's mental health: 10 ways to improve mood naturally



## Great physical health

is characterized by strength, flexibility, comfort, energy, endurance, and coordination. Similarly, great mental health includes feeling cheerful, hopeful, confident, resilient, adaptable, and connected to the people and world around us. Developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is the foundation for physical *and* mental health.

The information in this brochure focuses on natural approaches to helping individuals and families improve mental health through living a healthy lifestyle. It provides tips that can fit every budget. Keep in mind that well-being is affected by genetics, physical health, and the environment, including relationships. Remember that your doctor can help you track your success and suggest ideas that are best for you and your family.

### 1. Lighten up

Sunshine boosts mood. Try to spend 30 to 60 minutes outdoors daily. Bright lights, especially in the early morning, can also help. Light can work as well as medicine to help with depression.

### 2. Get plenty of sleep

Aim for at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night. For teens, 9 to 10 hours of sleep each night is even better. The following are things you can try to help you relax and get a good night's sleep:

- A hot shower or bath before bed
- A back, hand, or foot rub
- Relaxing music
- A cool, dark room
- Using the bed just for sleep (not homework, TV, or phone calls)

### 3. Connect with someone

Talk it out. Find a friend, teacher, coach, spiritual leader, or counselor who is a good listener. Ask this person to listen to you as you talk it out.

**Combine sunshine, exercise, and social connections. Go for a 30-minute walk each day with a pet or a supportive relative or friend.**

### 4. Eat wisely

- Eat protein-rich foods at breakfast and lunch. Protein helps keep your blood sugar stable and gives your brain the fuel it needs. (And try not to skip breakfast.)
- Eat fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids twice a week. Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids include salmon, sardines, mackerel, and herring. Omega-3 fatty acids help improve mood and heart health.
- Choose colorful fruits and vegetables, beans, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-wheat bread. They contain vitamins, fiber, and minerals your brain needs.
- Limit junk food and fast food. They're often full of fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar.

### 5. Go for gratitude

Focus on the positive. For what do you feel gratitude or appreciation? In a journal, write down at least 3 to 5 people, places, events, or things each day for which you feel grateful.

### 6. Step it up!

Exercise or play so hard you break a sweat for at least 30 minutes a day. When we exercise, our bodies release chemicals that can help boost mood. These natural chemicals can be as effective as many medicines.

### 7. Be kind

Helping other people makes us feel better about ourselves. It can be as simple as saying thank you or holding the door open for someone. Or look for ways you can volunteer your time, like reading to children at a shelter or visiting a senior citizens' home. Try to do at least one kind thing each day. Keep a journal of all the things you do for others—even the little things.

### 8. Turn off the TV

Free yourself from TV ads trying to convince you to buy things to be happy. They are usually more interested in making money than your happiness. Move the TV out of the bedroom, and try to watch less than 2 hours a day. This will help limit your exposure to messages about happiness that are false or unrealistic.

## 9. Address stress

Try yoga, meditation, or another relaxation technique to help you de-stress and improve your mood. Time away in nature, like watching a sunset, may help too.

## 10. Ask your doctor about supplements

- Folate, B and D vitamins, calcium, and magnesium are essential for healthy moods. Ask your doctor to recommend a multivitamin/mineral daily.
- Fish oil supplements (omega-3 fatty acids, EPA, and DHA) help the brain and have less mercury than many fish.
- Talk with your doctor before starting St Johns wort, Sam-E, 5-HTP, L-tryptophan, or other herbs or supplements. The quality and costs can vary greatly.

### When extra help is needed

#### Call the doctor if...

- You are concerned that your child or teen might hurt himself or others.
- You want an accurate diagnosis and to rule out other conditions.
- You want to try medications or to find out if medications might be causing mood problems.
- You would like a referral to another health professional such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, licensed acupuncturist, massage therapist, or social worker.
- Natural therapies are not enough.
- You have any other questions.

Written by Kathi Kemper, MD, on behalf of the Section on Complementary, Holistic, and Integrative Medicine.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician and allergist. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician and allergist may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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