

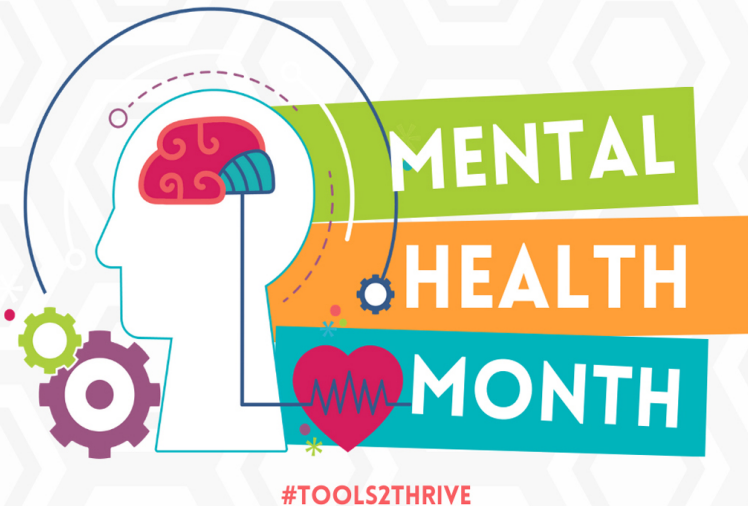
WELLNESSMONTHLY

Spring Cleaning for the Mind | May 2021

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Conscious efforts to find sources of solace and cultivate a positive attitude help put your mind at rest.

Spring Cleaning for the Mind

In recognition of Mental Health Month, our May wellness newsletter offers tips to help you achieve mental clarity. When you're doing some spring cleaning around the house or at work, think about all the ways you can also clear the cobwebs from your mind.

Over the past year, many people have been complaining about "brain fog" in connection with COVID-19, either as a symptom after infection or in response to pandemic-induced stress. Brain fog is a term people use when they feel fuzzy or cotton-headed.

If you have post-COVID symptoms that affect cognition, consult with your physician. Sometimes there is no apparent reason why your mind feels cloudy – it just does. You may be experiencing the effects of seasonal allergies, burnout, insomnia or a hangover. Maybe you've changed your habits, such as exercising less than you did before the pandemic.

In a previous edition of *Wellness Monthly*, we talked about the physical and mental health benefits of decluttering your home, workspace and computer files. Now we're recommending some ways to declutter your mind.

Allergies

Springtime is when people seem to complain the most about allergies, but about two-thirds of U.S. adults have year-round allergy symptoms. Allergies are an immune system overreaction to allergens such as pollen, mold spores, dust mites and pet dander. Some people have an allergic reaction to cigarette smoke, certain fragrances, foods or chemicals, such as sulfites in wine.

Common symptoms of allergic rhinitis include mental haze, sneezing, runny or stuffy nose, fatigue and eye irritation. Symptoms may interfere with sleep and cause daytime sleepiness, in turn affecting concentration and increasing risk for errors, accidents and injuries.

Here are some related tips:

1. Avoid exposure to allergens that trigger a reaction. For example, while you are doing spring cleaning or gardening, wear an N95 mask and use an indoor-outdoor vacuum with a HEPA filter. Wash your clothes and take a shower after cleaning.
2. Consider getting an allergy test to identify source(s) so you can avoid allergens and develop a targeted response.

3. For symptom relief:
 - Rinse your nose with a saline solution using a bulb syringe
 - Inhale steam vapors in the shower or from a bowl of hot water
 - Put a warm, wet towel on your face to relieve nasal pressure
 - Drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol – it increases swelling
 - Use over-the-counter drops to reduce eye discomfort.
 4. If you use over-the-counter medications to alleviate symptoms, make sure they do not make you drowsy and affect your ability to operate machinery or drive safely.
 5. If allergies consistently impact your quality of life and productivity, allergy shots may be recommended to reduce symptoms and desensitize you to allergens over time.
1. Inventory: Experts recommend writing down thoughts in a journal or recording “notes to self.” Ryder Carroll, who created a method called the [Bullet Journal](#) to help people live “intentional lives,” suggests taking a mental inventory, listing priorities (e.g., must do versus nice to do or don’t need to do) and focusing energy on accomplishing critical tasks. To achieve success, break down priorities into manageable parts.
 2. Distractions: If you find yourself going down web search “rabbit holes” or constantly checking text messages and email, create a plan to break these patterns. Set time-limit reminders and take breaks from your computer and smartphone, as feasible. Schedule blocks of time to reduce interruptions.
 3. Engagement: Maintaining social contact with other human beings is important to mental health. Confiding in a therapist, trusted partner, friend or family member helps control racing thoughts and inform decision-making.
 4. Meditation: The mind and body practice of meditation has been around for centuries. Mindfulness meditation attracts new practitioners who want to train their “monkey mind” and quiet mental chatter. One simple way to help clear the mind is through focused breathing. Another way is to intentionally watch thoughts come and go without judgment. Studies suggest mindfulness meditation deactivates the brain’s “default network,” which is active during passive moments, when recalling or anticipating events, and when making social inferences.
 5. Renew: Most people feel refreshed when they change their usual routine. While the pandemic requires us to take certain precautions to stay safe and healthy, it’s still important to plan quality time away from home and give your mind and body needed respite.

Nurture Your Body

Your mind responds to the way you treat your body. About 30 minutes of aerobic activity five days a week is recommended for a clearer head. Exercise increases blood pressure and blood flow in the body, in turn boosting oxygen saturation. This improves mental clarity, raises energy levels and relieves stress.

Healthy foods help keep the mind sharp. For example, a low-fat, Mediterranean-style diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts and beans, and whole grains has been shown to improve thinking, memory and brain health. If you drink alcohol, moderation is strongly advised for many health reasons.

It’s important to get enough sleep, optimally seven to nine hours a night. When you are sleep-deprived, you will notice it is harder to focus, you may feel irritable and be more forgetful. Your body cleans out toxins and repairs itself while you are asleep.

Letting Go

There are many practices aimed at calming a racing mind. Here are a few examples:

Finally, it’s important to pay attention to what brings you happiness and lifts your spirits. Conscious efforts to find sources of solace and cultivate a positive attitude help put your mind at rest.