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Mental Health for Older Adults: 5 Practical Ways to Boost your Mood

Mental health is a vital aspect of your overall health. As you grow older, you can experience changes in your physical health, social connections, and daily routines that can significantly affect your quality of life, your mood and well-being.

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Mental health is a vital aspect of your overall health. As you grow older, you can experience changes in your physical health, social connections, and daily routines that can significantly affect your quality of life, your mood and well-being.

I have been working as a registered nurse in geriatric nursing care for nearly 40 years. In this post, I will share six practical ways to help you boost your mood and support your overall mental health as you age.

How To Boost Your Mood

1. Stay physically active

Regular exercise can be a game-changer. “Research shows a direct link between physical and mental health. Physical health problems increase your risk of developing mental health issues—and the other way around”, according to Matt Scarfo, NASM Certified Personal Trainer and Resident Training & Nutrition Expert at Lift Vault. Regular physical activities are vital for maintaining good mental health. Here is how to stay physically active:

- **Regular walking.** It’s a wonderful way to stay physically active. Even a short walk around the neighborhood can improve mood and energy levels.
- **Home exercise.** Home exercise programs, such as yoga and stretching, are also good options for people with limited mobility. They will also help to alleviate boredom and keep you enthusiastic.
- **Household chores.** Engage in household chores when you can. They can be beneficial in maintaining independence and a sense of purpose.

2. Nutrition and hydration

Maintaining a balanced diet and staying hydrated are essential for physical and mental health. Combining regular exercise and healthy eating habits supports a healthy lifestyle. Check out these healthy diet recommendations:

- **Eat properly.** A balanced diet will provide you with essential nutrients to stay healthy and mentally alert. Include whole fruits, leafy vegetables, legumes, and food from animal sources in your diet.
- **Control your salt, sugar, and fat consumption.** Keep your salt to less than 5 grams daily and sugar to less than 10% of your total energy intake. Choose unsaturated fats, limit those high in saturated fat, and avoid trans-fat.
- **Drink enough water.** Dehydration can cause fatigue, confusion, and irritability. The Mayo Clinic recommends a daily fluid intake of 3.7 liters for men and 2.7 liters for women.

3. Keep up social connections

One of the best ways to maintain good health is to maintain social connections with your family, friends, and community:

- **Make time for your family, loved ones and friends.** Maintaining loving relationships, connecting with others, and enjoying affection are just as important, if not more so as we get older.
- **Become a volunteer in your community.** Volunteering in the community is a terrific way to meet new people and feel a sense of purpose.
- **Join local organizations.** Joining a social club or community centre will help you stay connected with others. Get involved in church or volunteer activities to support a feeling of community and belonging.

4. Pursue hobbies and interests

Pursuing or trying new hobbies and interests is a fun way to stay engaged and maintain a sense of purpose in life. Some activities are scientifically proven ways to delay cognitive decline, reduce stress, and ease loneliness. Here are 4 recommendations:

- **Dancing.** Improve your physical health and build strong social connections which both increase your sense of well-being. Dancing may also improve concentration and the ability to focus.
- **Cooking and baking.** Not only will you stay preoccupied, but they'll let you share your specialties with your loved ones.
- **Outdoor gardening.** Enjoy the sunlight, fresh air, and the benefits of exertion, which are all good for boosting your mood.
- **Travelling and camping.** Many people enjoy travelling with a recreational vehicle (RV) or camping with family or friends for leisure.

Engaging in mental activities can help improve our cognitive functions. You might want to try:

- **Playing games.** Brain games help sharpen cognitive skills such as planning skills, decision-making, and short-term memory. So, try crosswords, Sudoku, and other puzzles!

- **Reading and writing.** Take advantage of the benefits of reading and writing. Try keeping a journal, as it lets you express your thoughts and feelings.

5. Check for early signs

In Canada, up to 30 percent of adults over the age of 65 experience some kind of mental health problem. Nearly one in three don't receive treatment because of the stigma associated with negative perceptions of mental illness or the fear that their concerns will be dismissed as part of the aging process. Mental health problems are often under-identified by healthcare professionals and older people themselves, and the stigma surrounding these conditions can make people reluctant to seek help.

Be aware of the early signs of mental health issues and don't hesitate to seek further assistance if you or your loved one is experiencing any of the symptoms:

1. Changes in appearance or dress, or problems maintaining the home or yard
2. Confusion, disorientation, or other problems with concentration or decision-making
3. Decrease or increase in appetite, or changes in weight
4. Depressed mood lasting longer than two weeks
5. Feelings of worthlessness, inappropriate guilt, helplessness, thoughts of suicide
6. Memory loss, especially recent or short-term memory problems
7. Physical problems that can't otherwise be explained
8. Social withdrawal, or loss of interest in things that used to be enjoyable
9. Trouble handling finances or working with numbers
10. Unexplained fatigue, energy loss, or sleep changes

Healthy body, healthy mind

Mental health has an impact on physical health and vice versa. The good news is that there are practical ways to support mental and physical well-being. Mental health and well-being are as important in older age as at any other time of life. By maintaining our mental and physical health, older adults can continue to lead active, fulfilling lives and make important contributions to society.

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