



As nature blooms and the days grow longer, it's the perfect time to focus on nurturing our mental health and wellbeing! Jennifer VanSkyock, a licensed clinical and independent social worker, licensed clinical addiction specialist and program manager at IU Health, offers insight into how to improve mental health every day.

What can we do to improve our mental health?

Several factors can significantly impact our emotions. One area to consider is your physical well-being. This means incorporating daily physical activity into your routine. This doesn't require any special equipment or even highly strenuous activities, but simply walking, dancing and stretching can help. It can also be beneficial to walk outside; being in nature can help you feel calm and grounded. Other important areas to focus on when improving mental health are sleep and diet. Ideally, people should aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night to support their mental health. Focusing on a healthy diet, which involves consuming nutritious foods—particularly those that are unprocessed, low in fat and low in sugar—and maintaining adequate hydration throughout the day will also support proper mental health.

How can we monitor our thoughts to help our mental health?

Often, we let our thoughts dictate our emotions and behaviors. Shifting this behavior into a more intentional approach can help us feel more peaceful, content and joyful. We can work on our thoughts by using mindfulness activities, practicing meditation, seeking professional help when needed, cultivating gratitude, and setting realistic goals for ourselves.

How does technology impact our mental health?

Intentionally limiting screen time can improve overall mental health. While technology is a valuable resource that can provide a wealth of information, it can also create tension, stress and anxiety, disrupting sleep and even impacting our relationships.

Limiting exposure to technology provides an opportunity to focus on other activities or behaviors that can have a positive impact on our mental health. Making time for personal, in-person connections is essential to us as humans. Try to put down your screen and look up at the people around you. Discuss topics that interest you with others and learn about their passions. This personal interaction will likely have a much more significant impact than scrolling through your phone.

What else can we do to enhance our mental well-being?

There are many enjoyable activities you can do to enhance your mental health, such as engaging in a hobby. If you don't have any hobbies, now is the perfect time to start considering what might be a good fit for you!

Think back to your youth; what did you love doing? Our communities have local parks, community and art centers, libraries, places of worship and local businesses that offer classes. You could try gardening, photography, dance or an exercise class.

Mental health is a form of health, and YOU have the power to develop routines that will help you optimize your wellness!

