

Mental Health America, Clifford W. Beers Award, 2018

Nominee: Lori Hamilton, RN, C., Director of Healthy Initiatives, K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc.

The following articles are experts from associate (employee) newsletters produced by the Healthy Initiatives team at K-VA-T Food Stores, Inc. Lori Hamilton, Director of Healthy Initiatives, requests that mental health information and resources be highlighted in associate newsletters and programming.

Mental Health Myths and Facts

Myth: Mental health problems aren't very common and don't affect me.

Fact: Mental health problems are actually very common. In 2014, about:

- One in five American adults experienced a mental health issue
- One in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression
- One in 25 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression

The 10th leading cause of death in the United States is suicide. It accounts for the loss of more than 41,000 American lives each year, which is more than two times the number of lives lost to homicide.

Myth: Personality or character flaws cause mental health problems. People with mental health problems can stop having issues if they try hard enough.

Fact: Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy or weak and many people need help to get better. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes, physical illness, injury, or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

People with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.

Myth: Therapy and self-help are a waste of time. Why bother when you can just take a pill?

Fact: Treatment for mental health problems varies depending on the individual and could include medication, therapy, or both. Many individuals work with a support system during the healing and recovery process.

Myth: Prevention doesn't work. It is impossible to prevent mental illnesses.

Fact: Prevention of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders focuses on addressing known risk factors such as exposure to trauma that can affect the chances that children, youth, and young adults will develop mental health problems. Promoting the social-emotional well-being of children and youth leads to:

- Higher overall productivity
- Better educational outcomes
- Lower crime rates

- Stronger economies
- Lower health care costs
- Improved quality of life
- Increased lifespan
- Improved family life

Source: <http://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/myths-facts/index.html>

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. In other words, mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine our coping skills, stress management, relationships with others, and the choices we make. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Individuals struggling with physical conditions can often develop mental and emotional issues as well. It is important to take care of your mental and emotional health just as you would take care of your physical health.

Early Warning Signs

Are you or someone you know living with mental health problems? Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

Mental Health and Wellness

Positive mental health allows people to:

- Realize their full potential
- Cope with the stresses of life
- Work productively
- Make meaningful contributions to their communities

Ways to maintain positive mental health include:

- Getting professional help if you need it

- Connecting with others
- Staying positive
- Getting physically active
- Helping others
- Getting enough sleep
- Developing coping skills

Source: <http://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health/index.html>

Food and Mood

As the temperature gets colder and the days get shorter, energy levels can drop, along with mood. We also tend to be less active in the cold, winter months, making it extra important to focus on adequate nutrition. The following foods will help boost your energy and mood to keep you healthy and happy this winter and all year round.

Protein: Salmon & animal proteins

- The tryptophan in salmon and other animal proteins helps our bodies make a chemical in the brain called serotonin. Serotonin helps to regulate mood.
- Salmon is also packed with omega-3 fatty acids. These healthy fats make up about 60% of the brain's structure.

Dairy: Lowfat milk & yogurt

- Vitamin D, found in dairy products, is not only good for bone health but for mental health as well. Science shows that getting enough vitamin D can reduce the risk of developing depression.

Starch: Sweet Potatoes & Winter Squash

- Starchy vegetables are high in fiber and other nutrients that give us energy and help our bodies make hormones.
- They are also packed with vitamin A and potassium which promote heart health and the immune system.

Fruit: Clementines and citrus fruits

- Citrus fruits are high in vitamin C and fiber which help protect us from infection. Seasonal sickness is not fun and often has a negative effect on mood.
- These fruits also contain minerals that promote strong bones and good muscle function which is important to help us feel our best.

Vegetables: Cauliflower

- Cauliflower is in the same vegetable family as broccoli and cabbage. These veggies are packed with nutrients to prevent cancer and inflammation and to keep your metabolism healthy.
- They also contain protein, fiber, and other minerals to give you lasting energy.

Increase Body-Positive Thinking in your Family

With obesity persisting as a major health concern, it is common for conversations about weight to occur at home and often at the dinner table. However, focusing only on weight can be mentally and emotionally harmful, especially for children and teens who are still developing. Negative weight talk can lead to guilt, body insecurity, and even forms of disordered eating. Instead, it is more helpful to talk positively about the nutrients that food can provide for the body. A healthy lifestyle is important for more than just weight management. Good nutrition affects mood, energy, academic and athletic performance and overall health. Try to focus on the beneficial attributes of food to encourage behavior change and body-positive thinking.

1. Teach your family what healthy eating is and what it isn't.

Popular “fad” diets promote obsessing about calories, carbs, fats or other particular nutrients, but this is not healthy eating. Frequent dieting can create “food phobia” and make mealtimes stressful rather than an enjoyable experience. Rather, teach your family that healthful meals should include a variety of foods from all the food groups. Each food group performs a specific role in the body. If we restrict one, and favor another, we will end up malnourished in some way. Remember, balance and moderation is key.

2. Make preparing and eating meals an enjoyable experience.

Get everyone into the kitchen and involved in food prep. Kids especially are more likely to try something new if they have helped prepare the dish. Start theme nights such as “Meatless Mondays” or “Taco Tuesdays”. Be creative and show how making and eating food can be fun and healthy. It is also important to eat meals regularly as a family at the dinner table. Research shows that kids who eat most of their meals at home not only have improved mental health and positive family relationships, but are also less likely to be overweight and obese.

3. Model a healthy lifestyle and positive body image.

If you wouldn't want your kids to model your eating habits and self-talk, perhaps now is a great time for change. Portraying a positive body image and relationship with food is extremely important. If you are always complaining about your weight or talking about how certain foods are “bad”, your kids will pick up on these practices as well. If you are consistently starting new “fad” diets that restrict certain food groups, your children will get the message that restrictive eating is more important than balanced, healthful eating.

4. Think of weight in perspective to overall health.

We can't know everything about a person's overall health simply from looking at a number on a scale. Similarly, with children, you cannot get a full story by plotting a single number on a growth chart. Children's bodies change with growth and development. Behavior is more important than appearance. If

you are concerned about your child's weight, speak to a medical professional first. If changes need to be made, adopt these behaviors for your whole family so that everyone is focusing on the same actions to improve nutritional health and promote a positive self-image.

Seeking Help

Looking for help? If you are on the K-VA-T insurance plan, check the back of your insurance card for a number to call concerning mental health benefits. If you don't have insurance, there are still resources and care options for you. Contact your Healthy Initiatives department for assistance.

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