

## Sick in the Body, but not in the Mind



Something has nagged me for the past few years. So many of us face the same challenges of work-life balance and come out better or worse according to how we cope.

The [tragedies showcased](#) in the limelight are aching reminders that no one—no matter who you are or where you are in life—is guaranteed mental health. Mental health is a constant act of self-care. But we don't treat it that way. People affected by illness can be friends and family improving our communities and lives. How can we let them down?

**"It's all in your head. Get over it."**

When you have the physical symptoms of an illness or chronic condition, nobody questions you. People set boundaries on your abilities according to how you look. They alter their baseline judgement of what you can do. But mental illness isn't treated the same way. Instead, you're expected to be well, to be alert and cognizant at all waking hours of the day.

We don't have similar standards for our physical selves. Most of us admit we can treat our bodies better—we can exercise and sleep more, eat healthier. We accept our flaws and set aspirational goals like losing weight or gaining muscle. No one expects us to be physically perfect. But mentally? That's a different story. The default baseline is operating at one hundred percent peak performance and balance. And our society says if you can't do that, something's wrong with you. Why the discrepancy between our

mental and physical health? When did mental health become an expectation, instead of the goal that it should be? Has it always been this way?

### **Different Tents, Same Circus**

I think it's hard to have balance in today's 24/7 world. We have so much working against our best interest and well-being. How do we carve out time for mindfulness when our attention has been commoditized by algorithms and advertisements? How do we thrive in this saturated space? Today's social climate is a real concern.

America has a troubling history of lobotomies and insane asylums, centered on the stigma of mental illness. I believe the attitude of packing someone's bags up and sending them away is partly based on our focus on individualism. We place value on a person according to the social capital he or she has. And this value derived from being able-bodied and able-minded.

### **Count Your Lucky Stars**

It's a blessing our brains work as well as they do. That three-pound mass of gray and white matter nestled inside your skull is the most complicated [thing](#) in the known universe. It has a milky way of neurons equal to the number of stars in our galaxy. Each neuron fires hundreds of times a second, with trillions of connections to each other. Because of this, we're able to form complex thoughts and communicate with people across the world through a machine made of ones and zeros. How incredible! That's worth celebrating.

There are still so many things we don't know about our minds. What makes them tick? What makes them behave a certain way? Mental illness happens through a complex interaction of genetics, biology, psychology, and environmental stressors. Mental health should be approached with the same nuance. Maybe the first step to understanding is realizing there's a lot we don't understand. Acceptance begins with a change in mindset on a global scale. And it starts with us.

Find peace in what you do. Seek social support. Learn to take care of yourself before you take care of others. It's okay not to be okay—It's hard to be okay! And if you really aren't okay, [talk](#) to someone about it. How do you think we can reach out to the people who need it the most?