

Commentary: 5 Tips for prioritizing mental health

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May is Mental Health Awareness Month, which is a great time to check in with yourself, the people in your life and explore ways to prioritize emotional well-being.

With one in five U.S. adults experiencing mental illness each year, taking small, intentional steps to support mental wellness may have a very meaningful impact.

This month, and in the months ahead, there are simple yet effective ways to focus on your mental health. Here are a handful to consider:

Stay Connected to a Strong Support System

Social support can play a critical role in mental well-being. Research shows that strong social connections are linked to lower levels of anxiety and depression. In fact, according to UnitedHealthcare's College Student and Graduate Behavioral Health Report, young adults are increasingly turning to their peers for emotional

support more than any other outside influence. Whether it's friends, family or colleagues, maintaining these connections may provide stability and encouragement during life's ups and downs.

Build Healthy Habits

Lifestyle choices may have a significant impact on mental health. Regular physical activity, proper sleep, and balanced nutrition may help regulate mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Studies have shown that individuals who engaged in regular exercise experience lower levels of stress and improved mental well-being. Even small changes, like a daily walk or practicing mindfulness, may make a significant difference.

Limit Online Time

Studies have shown that excessive social media use is linked to a higher risk of depression and anxiety, especially among young people. It's important to keep in mind that a person's social feed may not reflect their actual life story. Instead, try to embrace the difficulties of life as normal, focus on the present, and prioritize your offline relationships.

Take Advantage of Mental Health Resources

Exploring available mental health resources available through your health plan can be a great first step. For example, some insurers, such as UnitedHealthcare, offer digital self-care tools such as Calm Health, coaching, 24/7 mental health support lines for “in-the-moment” support visits, along with in-person and virtual visits, allowing individuals to access support in a variety of ways. If you're unsure where to start, sign in to your health plan or call the number on your insurance ID card.

Seek Professional Help When Necessary

If feelings of stress, anxiety, or depression start to feel overwhelming, reach out to your primary care physician (PCP). If you don't have a PCP, establish a relationship with one. Your PCP will provide valuable insights and care, and referrals if needed. Getting the right support can guide you toward a more balanced and fulfilling life.

Please remember, taking care of your mental health isn't just important this month – it may be something that benefits overall well-being year-round. Even small, consistent efforts may lead to long-term improvements in emotional resilience and quality of life.

For more mental health resources, visit [uhc.com](https://www.uhc.com).

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1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year

1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year

1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year

50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10-14

National Alliance on Mental Illness