

May/
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HealthVine

Mental Health Facts

While one in five people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. About half of Americans will meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental health condition sometime in their life.

It is never too early to seek treatment for your mental health. Did you know the City's benefit providers offer treatment options and resources for you and your dependents? Learn more in our [Mental Health & Mindfulness Webinar](#).



Mental health plays a big role in your overall wellbeing. When you're mentally healthy, you are able to enjoy your life and the people in it, feel good about yourself, keep up good relationships, and deal with stress. It's normal for your mental health to shift over time – we all face difficult situations in our lives. Creating positive habits is a great way to support your mental health when you're doing well and helps you build skills to use if you do face symptoms of a mental health condition. **Learn more on Page 3.**

**Adapted from [Mental Health America](#)*



Mental Health Awareness Month

Since the start of the pandemic, more and more people are talking about mental health. An increasing number of folks are starting to see it for what it is: one important component of your overall health and wellbeing, just like your physical health.

Many people are learning about mental health topics for the first time. Having a widespread understanding of the topic can help you be more informed if you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health condition or crisis. There's often no one single cause for a mental health condition. Instead, there are many possible risk factors that can influence how likely a person is to experience a mental health condition or how serious the symptoms may be.

Some risk factors for mental health conditions include: trauma, which can be a one-time event or ongoing; your environment and how it impacts your health and quality of life (also known as social determinants of health like financial stability and health care access); genetics; brain chemistry; and your habits and lifestyle such as a lack of sleep.

Of course, understanding the risk factors for a mental health condition can be more difficult when it's your own mental health. Take time to ask yourself about your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to see if this is part of a pattern that may be caused by a mental health condition. Here are some questions to get you started:

- Have things that used to feel easy started feeling difficult?
- Does the idea of doing daily tasks like making your bed now feel really, really hard?
- Have you lost interest in activities and hobbies you used to enjoy?
- Do you feel irritated, possibly to the point of lashing out at people you care about?

If you are concerned about your mental health, there are several options available. You are not alone – help is out there, and recovery is possible. It may be hard to talk about your concerns, but simply acknowledging to yourself that you're struggling is a really big step.

Taking a screening at mhascreening.org can help you to better understand what you are experiencing and get helpful resources. After that, consider talking to someone you trust about your results, and seek out a professional to find the support you need.

While you may not need this information today, knowing the basics about mental health will mean you're prepared if you ever need it. Go to mhanational.org/may to learn more.

**Adapted from [Mental Health America](#)*

Kaiser Permanente of Washington Diabetes Prevention and Management Program

Last month we talked about the diabetes prevention and management program ([Livongo](#)) available to Regence members at no cost. This month we wanted to highlight the Kaiser Permanente program.

As a reminder, more than 37 million people in the United States have diabetes, and one in five of them don't know that they have it. Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States (and may be underreported). The good news is that diabetes is both preventable and manageable with healthier lifestyle choices and helpful programs.

Through Kaiser Permanente, members can get a personalized care experience for diabetes management as shown in the below diagram.



Learn more about the Kaiser Permanente program by talking to your health care provider or by visiting the [Diabetes Care website](#).

Recommended Diabetes Webinars

We have a recorded webinar "[Diabetes Basics & Beyond](#)" from the Living Well Alliance that you can watch at your convenience for [points](#) towards your wellness incentive.

And ... stay tuned! We will be offering a recorded webinar in June that highlights the various diabetes prevention and management programs/resources that are available to City employees through our benefit providers.



Juneteenth Healthy Habit Challenge (June 13 — June 19)

Earn 200 points for tracking 'YES' 5 out of the 7 days.

Juneteenth is a time of somber reflection on past oppression. It's also a time of immense celebration of freedom and hope for the future. Juneteenth celebrates the strength of Black people to thrive in the face of oppression, both past and present. After being freed, Black Americans reunited their families, opened schools, ran for office and enacted laws. They sought to change their lives and their country for the better. It also highlights the struggle for rights and justice. This struggle for fairness and equity continues to this day.

Monday: Show up

How is Juneteenth being celebrated nearby (or online)? Choose one or a few events to attend so you can learn more about the day and support your community.

Tuesday: Get local

Local libraries often have an archive with history about your community over the years.

Wednesday: Go beyond books

TV shows, plays, podcasts—these are great ways to learn about Juneteenth. But, make sure the creators have lived experiences dealing with what they discuss.

Thursday: Talk it out

Share what you learn with a trusted friend or family member. Do they know why Juneteenth matters?

Friday: Mind safe spaces

Be mindful when you're in safe spaces—groups based around a shared identity and struggle. They let marginalized folks express parts of themselves they may have to repress usually.

Saturday: Support and donate

Support local Black-owned businesses.

Sunday: Keep going

When Juneteenth festivities end, keep thinking about the struggles they call out. Keep supporting the causes that Juneteenth champions.

Tips to Boost Your Mental Health

- **Track gratitude and achievement with a journal:** Include three things you were grateful for and three things you were able to accomplish in the day.
- **Start your day with a cup of coffee:** Coffee consumption is linked to lower rates of depression. If you can't drink coffee because of the caffeine, try another good-for-you drink like green tea.
- **Set up a getaway:** It could be camping with friends or a trip to the tropics. The act of planning a vacation and having something to look forward to can boost your overall happiness for up to 8 weeks!
- **Keep it cool for a good night's sleep:** The optimal temperature for sleep is between 60 and 67 degrees.
- **"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." - Martin Luther King, Jr.** Think of something in your life you want to improve and figure out what you can do to take a step in the right direction.
- **Experiment** with a new recipe, write a poem, paint or try a Pinterest project. Creative expression and overall well-being are linked.
- **Boost brainpower by treating yourself to a couple pieces of dark chocolate.** The flavanoids, caffeine, and theobromine in chocolate are thought to work together to improve alertness and mental skills.
- **Feeling anxious? Take a trip down memory lane and do some coloring** for about 20 minutes to help you clear your mind. Pick a design that's geometric and a little complicated for the best effect. Check out hundreds of free printable coloring pages [here](#).
- **Take time to laugh.** Hang out with a funny friend, watch a comedy or check out cute videos online. Laughter helps reduce anxiety.
- **Go off the grid.** Leave your smart phone at home for a day and disconnect from constant emails, alerts, and other interruptions. Spend time doing something fun with someone face-to-face.
- **Dance around while you do your housework.** Not only will you get chores done, but dancing reduces levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and increases endorphins (the body's "feel-good" chemicals).
- **Go ahead and yawn.** Studies suggest that yawning helps cool the brain and improves alertness and mental efficiency.
- **Relax in a warm bath once a week.** Try adding Epsom salts to soothe aches and pains and help boost magnesium levels, which can be depleted by stress.
- **Spend some time with a furry friend.** Time with animals lowers the stress hormone - cortisol, and boosts oxytocin - which stimulates feelings of happiness. If you don't have a pet, hang out with a friend who does or volunteer at a shelter.
- **Be a tourist in your own town.** Often times people only explore attractions on trips, but you may be surprised what cool things are in your own backyard.
- **Try prepping your lunches or picking out your clothes for the work week.** You'll save some time in the mornings and have a sense of control about the week ahead.
- **Work some omega-3 fatty acids into your diet** — they are linked to decreased rates of depression and schizophrenia among their many benefits. Fish oil supplements work, but eating your omega-3s in foods like wild salmon, flaxseeds or walnuts also helps build healthy gut bacteria.
- **Practice forgiveness** — even if it's just forgiving that person who cut you off during your commute. People who forgive have better mental health and report being more satisfied with their lives.
- **Feeling stressed? Smile.** It may not be the easiest thing to do, but smiling can help to lower your heart rate and calm you down.
- **Send a thank you note** — not for a material item, but to let someone know why you appreciate them. Written expressions of gratitude are linked to increased happiness.
- **Do something with friends and family** — have a cookout, go to a park, or play a game. People are 12 times more likely to feel happy on days that they spend 6-7 hours with friends and family.
- **"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new." -Albert Einstein.** Try something outside of your comfort zone to make room for adventure and excitement in your life.

*Source: [Mental Health America](#)

What to Know About Social Media and Mental Health

Many people in today's world live with their smartphones as virtual companions. These devices use electronic social media networks that alert users to updates on friends, favorite celebrities, and global events. Social media has become firmly integrated into a lot of people's daily lives. According to the Pew Research Center, 72% of people in the United States now use social media.

At its core, social media is a powerful communication tool that has changed how individuals interact with one another. It speeds up how people exchange and share information, thoughts, and ideas across virtual networks. However, social media does have downsides. Some evidence suggests that its use — in particular, its overuse — can negatively affect mental health in numerous ways.

Negative effects on health

Social media has associations with depression, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, particularly among heavy users. A 2019 study tied social media use to disrupted and delayed sleep. Regular, high quality sleep is essential for wellbeing, and evidence shows that sleeping problems contribute to adverse mental health effects, such as depression and memory loss.

Social media may also trigger feelings of inadequacy. People may feel as though their life or appearance does not compare favorably with that of others on social media, leading to feelings of envy and dissatisfaction. A 2018 study found that high social media usage increases rather than decreases feelings of loneliness. It also reported that reducing social media use helps people feel less lonely and isolated and improves their wellbeing. Additionally, social media can facilitate cyberbullying and create unhealthy self-centeredness and distance from friends and family.

Linked conditions

Unregulated social media leads to a constant fear of missing out, which many refer to as FOMO. People may feel as though others are having more fun than them, which can affect self-esteem and cause mental health issues. Individuals may compulsively check their phones at the cost of missing sleep or choose social media over in-person relationships or meetups. Additionally, prioritizing social media networking over physical and social interactions increases the chances of mood disorders such as anxiety and depression.



Managing the effects

An individual can make their use of social media positive by:

- Turning off a smartphone's data connectivity at certain times of the day, such as while driving, at work, or in meetings
- Turning off data connectivity while spending time with friends and family
- Leaving the smartphone out of reach while sleeping
- Turning off notifications to make it easier to resist the distracting beeps or vibrations
- Limiting social media use to a computer rather than a smartphone

Preventing negative effects

People can help themselves avoid some of the adverse effects of social media by limiting use to 30 minutes a day, in turn reducing FOMO and the associated negative consequences. By being more conscious of the amount of time they spend on social media, a person may notice improvements in their general mood, focus, and overall mental health.

Positive effects

Despite its drawbacks, social media remains an efficient means of connecting communities and individuals across the world. Social media-based networking among small groups of people is beneficial for many. Through social media, youngsters who struggle with social skills and anxiety can express themselves and socialize. It can be particularly advantageous for marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ communities, as it enables people to meet and interact with other like-minded individuals. Social media also serves as a platform that gives a voice to the voiceless. For example, people who have been subject to violence and abuse can use communities such as the #MeToo community to air their views, talk about what they are facing, and find support. Social media can also educate and inform and provide an outlet for creativity and self-expression.

*Source: [First Choice Health EAP](#)

2023 Wellness Incentive Period (Ends Sept. 30, 2022)

There are a variety of different ways for you to [earn points](#) in [Virgin Pulse](#) (VP), but below are some recommendations to help get you to the finish line (25,000 points).

Journeys: Did you know that there is no longer a limit on the amount of Journeys that you can complete each month? There is, however, a max per program year — 12 Journeys. Additionally, you can now earn 30 points for one step per day. We recommend that you only participate in one to two Journeys at a time to ensure that you are maximizing the experience and available points.

My Care Checklist: In addition to getting your [annual physical](#) (2,500 points), you can also earn 500 points if complete three preventive care activities, including (but not limited to) eye exams, dental check-ups, flu shots, mammograms, prostate exams, colon screenings, and the COVID vaccine.

Personal Challenges: One of the great features of VP is being able to create your own personal challenge(s) and to invite family and friends to join you along with you (if you'd like). A personal challenge is now worth 150 points. Wellbeing is a personal experience and we hope this entices you to try new things throughout the program year.

Shout Outs: Because everyone did such an amazing job recognizing one another last program year, you can now earn points for giving and/or receiving a shout out (100 points each) once a month.

Sleep: Whether you manually track or wear a device to track your sleep, it's worth the same amount of points this program year. Did you know you can earn at least 2,900 points a month for tracking 7+ hours of sleep daily?

Setting Your Interests: You are encouraged to complete the "Topics of Interest" section to identify the important areas of wellbeing that you'd like to focus on during your journey to a better self with the Virgin Pulse program. These interests drive the content provided on the Daily Cards that you complete each day and personalize your experiences in the platform. As a bonus, you can earn 100 points each quarter for modifying your wellbeing topics of interest.

You are also encouraged to watch the [2023 Virgin Pulse Training webinar](#). Make sure that you submit a [smart form](#) for points!

Employee Testimonial

Rose Mitchell of IBEW 483 and Wellness Committee Member

25,000 points...this task seems daunting and unrealistic. Especially with all the demands of life these days. Great news! You can do it! I am not an athletic person or an over achiever. In fact, I wanted to complete this task as quickly and painless as possible. I completed the 25,000 points in 4 months by tracking my steps and completing the Cards and Healthy Habits each day on the Virgin Pulse app and/or website. This task only needs a minute of your time each day. And on the days that you garden, clean house, mow the lawn, or play baseball, volleyball, or Wii Sports with the kids you can track all of that under Healthy Habits/Get a Workout for extra points! Along the way I did indeed create some healthy habits. I park faraway at the grocery store, I go outside and get fresh air daily, and I drink a glass of water each morning. I also try to get more sleep each night and take the stairs when I can. All of these little things add up quickly to 25,000 points. You got this!

Daily Cards: Daily Cards show you personalized content based on the interests you selected on your Virgin Pulse account. You'll get two new cards each day with new content. Since Daily Cards are unique each day, you will not be able to complete the Daily Cards for previous days. Here is how your points can add up by viewing this personalized content:

- Read two daily cards (20 points each; 40 point daily total)
- Complete 10 daily cards in a month (100 points)
- Complete 20 daily cards in a month (200 points)

Example: *If you read two cards every day in July (31 days), you can earn up to 1,540 points for the month. This takes you less than a minute to do each day!*

If you are seeing cards that you'd rather not see, get rid of them by clicking 'reminder' and select 'never'; you will no longer see that card each day.

Health Check: This is a 10-minute survey that helps guide your recommendations in the Virgin Pulse platform. Completion of this survey is worth 2,500 points.

Healthy Habits: You can track three healthy habits per day for a total 30 points (10 points each). You can also earn bonus points for tracking 10+ days a month.

Example: *If you track three healthy habits every day in July (31 days), you can earn up to 1,430 points for the month. This takes you less than a minute to do each day!*

View all of the different [ways to earn](#) by visiting "Rewards" and "How to earn" on the [VP platform](#).