Mental Health Prevention

We are advised to take many preventive measures to help support our health. It’s suggested to brush our teeth and floss daily to support oral health. To eat a balanced diet and exercise to support overall physical health. To wear sunscreen and avoid too much sun to protect skin health. But what preventive measures can we take to support mental health?

The CDC defines mental health as our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make healthy choices. It is estimated that 1 in 5 Americans are struggling with a mental illness. And there are likely thousands who have a mental illness but are not diagnosed or receiving treatment. With mental health being such an important part of our experience, it’s important to know that there are many things you can do to support your mental health before you start to struggle.

Because we are all different in terms of what supports our emotional and social well-being, there’s no one-size-fits-all solution, but here are several research-backed suggestions:

- Stay connected: Research shows that social isolation is one of the leading causes of depression.
- Get good sleep: Decrease your screen time before bed, and create a wind-down practice each evening.
- Spend time outside: In addition to regulating our sleep/wake cycles and many hormone cycles, time in nature is shown to lower stress hormone levels.
- Eat a low inflammatory diet and take care of your gut health — our gut and brain health are deeply connected.
- Learn to manage your stress — this is a lifestyle practice. Mindfulness and meditation can be very helpful. JHM teams can learn to practice mindfulness together in the Live & Work Mindfully program.
- Ask for help: We don’t need to wait until we start to feel poorly to reach out for support. If you are not sure where to turn, the Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance Program is a great first step.

Taking care of our mental health is not one tool for every situation. As life stressors occur, our state of mental well-being also shifts. Know that this is normal, and that it’s OK to change up your self-care routine to best support what is needed right now.

Success Story

Lorenzo Fesler, Supply Chain Supervisor
Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center

I have been focusing on work-life balance. I do my best not to take work home. My wife supports my goals tremendously. We have a short discussion on how the day went, and that is it. We then focus on being present in the moment, whether it’s relaxing, taking the dogs for a walk or doing chores. We also talk about our goals, to help keep each other accountable.