

30 Days To Better Mental Health

Challenge

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Introduction

When we have conversations around mental health, we often place the focus on mental illness. There is much more to mental health than mental illness. People who do have a mental illness have a larger piece of work to do surrounding their mental health.

However, you don't need to have a diagnosis in order to take proactive steps to protect your mental health. The truth is, mental illness can strike at any time. It doesn't discriminate, it can happen to anyone.

That's why it's even more important that we are proactive about our mental health. It isn't about the absence or the presence of symptoms. Instead, it's about making decisions that will foster your mental well-being.

What Does Good Mental Health Look Like?

You can boil down good mental health to just a few key components.

- Engagement
- Meaning/Purpose
- Positive Emotions
- Relationships
- Accomplishments

We have to start viewing mental health like the spectrum that it is. On one end you will find a range of mental health disorders. On the other end, you find positive mental health. So, ultimately, good mental health is the opposite of poor mental health.

In addition to the key components above, you will also need to consider resilience, vitality, emotional stability, self-esteem, and optimism. So, what should those things look like?

- Engagement – is simply taking an interest in your activities and working life.
- Meaning/Purpose – feeling that the thing you do in life is worthwhile and valuable.
- Positive emotions – how happy are you? That means all things considered, how happy do you feel?
- Relationships – are there people in your life that care about you and whom you care for?
- Accomplishments – a feeling of accomplishment and competence that comes with doing what you do.
- Resilience – bouncing back when faced with adversity.
- Vitality – being energized or feeling energetic.
- Emotional stability – a feeling of peace and calm.
- Self-esteem – holding positive feelings and a positive view of yourself.

- Optimism – having feelings of positivity about your future and life.

So, what you have is a spectrum. While good mental health is on the opposite end to mental illness, there is more to it than that. Good mental health isn't as simple as the absence of mental illness. Likewise, if mental illness is being managed appropriately, individuals can find good mental health. Your overall health and wellness benefits from you taking proactive steps to protect your mental health.

The benefits don't stop there, though. The people around you also benefit, as does your community. When we have good mental health, we tend to be more social creatures. When we are happy and satisfied we are more inclusive, kinder, and more tolerant.

So, of course, wider society benefits from this. There is an economic benefit as well. Good mental health makes us more productive people, and less likely to take sick time from work as well.

There are a number of different ways that you can boost your mental health, and in this challenge, you have 30 days of tasks to improve yours.

Before you embark on this challenge, there are a few things to bear in mind.

First of all, if you have been diagnosed with a mental illness, you should continue taking medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should never try to take yourself off of your medication without first speaking to your doctor.

Secondly, invest in a cheap notebook to keep a journal. You may want to keep notes on how things are proceeding. A journal is also a really great thing to do on a daily basis to improve your mental health.

If you can, go alcohol-free for the next 30 days, and make sure you drink around 2 liters of water daily. Alcohol is a depressive so it can negatively influence your mental health. We often make decisions under the influence of alcohol that we wouldn't when fully sober.

So, just avoid it altogether as you walk this journey. Finally, make an effort to exercise regularly (at least three to four times a week). This is all to help put you in the right frame of mind to tackle this challenge.

30 Day Challenge

Day One – Start Your Journal

We suggested that you invest in a cheap notebook, now it's time to break it in. It's day one so, we want you to get off to a flying start. Sit down with your journal and write about how you feel. We have some prompts for you, this should help you get started if you just aren't sure what to write about.

- Today, I learned that ...
- My perfect day looks like ...
- I'm grateful for ...
- I'd like to accomplish the following ... (write at least one thing, but no more than three)
- This is how I feel right now ...

This is a valuable exercise that you can do on a daily basis, it will help you gauge how you are dealing with this challenge and the rest of your daily tasks. However, it's also a really important first step. This will help you determine exactly where you are in your mental health journey walking into this challenge. Be really honest with yourself as you ask these questions.

Day Two – Take It Outside

Today, your sole task is to spend time outdoors. Carve out twenty or thirty minutes to spend in nature. You can sit in the park, take a walk in the woods, enjoy a light job in your neighborhood, walk the block or, just chill out. It really doesn't matter which of these you choose to do. The point is to push yourself outside to do something other than walk to your car from the supermarket.

Day Three – Start the De-Cluttering Process

Is there an area of your home or workspace that creates anxiety in you? It could be that your kitchen is disorganized and you avoid dishes like the plague. Perhaps you have a long commute, but your car is filthy. Maybe your desk makes it difficult to be a productive employee.

Today, your job is to de-clutter your biggest stumbling area. Clutter can increase anxiety so, do your mental health a favor by clearing out your space. This is your task for today, but once you complete one area of your home or workspace, we would encourage you to continue this until you have completed all of your cluttered spaces.

Day Four – You, Unplugged

You may feel as though it's indispensable, but technology has taken over our daily lives. We are far too reliant on gadgets. Just think about how often you reach for your phone to search for something, to check into social media even though you have already looked at it multiple times in the last hour... it isn't healthy.

Today, your challenge is to unplug yourself from your phone (and tablet) for the day. Now, you might need to use your phone for its literal purpose. If this is the case, then you can log out of your apps (or delete them if you need to). It's possible to download an app that will lock your phone for periods of time, this will keep you from those apps you want to ignore.

So, your phone is now *just* a phone. You're avoiding social media completely. You should also avoid looking at the news because the never-ending news cycle is not doing you any favors. Just focus on *you*. This would be a good opportunity to catch up with a friend, kick back with a book or, indulge in your favorite hobby or activity.

Day Five – Call Home

Or, just call someone you love. As social creatures, humans need to spend time with the people they love. Sometimes, that can be as simple as picking up your phone and calling someone you love, someone you enjoy talking to. You might want to send them a text first to make sure they're available for a chat.

Don't call someone who is going to drag you down, call someone who will lift you up. You'll be amazed at how great you feel after you hang up the phone. Don't wait so long for the next phone call.

Day Six – Practice Your Presence

The world is moving fast, your day is moving even faster. It's getting harder to root yourself in a given moment. Today, your challenge is to practice being present. So, at every opportunity, work hard to be present. You can do this by noticing what is going on around you. In your mind, list five things associated with your senses, so, five things you can touch, see, smell, hear, and feel.

Day Seven – Goal Planning

It's time to plan for the week ahead. What are your short-term goals for each day, and your long-term goals for the week and beyond? What do you want to achieve? Take time to think about that, plan for it, and decide how you are going to approach the week.

Often, the worst thing you can do for your mental health is failing to plan. A lack of knowing can create a lot of anxiety and worry. So, go out of your way to plan for everything.

Day Eight – Just Do It!

What do you always say you're going to do, but you never actually do it? You've been putting it off and putting it off... today is the day that you are going to do it. It might be something you really enjoy, it might be something you hate. It doesn't matter, *just do it!*

Day Nine – Read

This is as simple a challenge as it can get. Today, your job is to read something that will improve your mental health. It might be a book that feels like a warm hug, it could be fun facts about your favorite sports team, it could be about mental health.

The point is that you read things that make you feel good. You may have to make your choice based on how much spare time you have, so a simple article that leaves you feeling uplifted is more than sufficient.

Day Ten – Adjust Your Self-Talk

Your mental health can easily be overrun by negative self-talk. So, your job today is to find a positive affirmation that you feel resonates with you. When you feel stressed out, you're struggling or you feel your negative self-talk creeping in, repeat that positive affirmation.

Day Eleven – Find Your Holy Ground

Everyone needs a quiet place to retreat to for peace and quiet. So, find your holy ground. Is it a small area in your bedroom where you fill it with some of your favorite things? Is it a specific rock on your favorite hiking trail?

Today's task is all about finding your sacred space and creating your holy ground. You should feel comfortable there, and it should be somewhere that you can easily retreat to when you're having a difficult time.

Day Twelve – Practice Kindness

Today, your challenge is to practice kindness. More specifically, extend kindness to someone that you don't know. It doesn't have to cost you a penny. It could be as simple as holding the door for someone or, offering everyone you see a genuine smile. If you have additional funds, then you can pay it forward in your local coffee shop.

Day Thirteen – Make Your Own List

It's time to use your journal again (hopefully you've been doing this daily anyway). In your journal, make a list of what you are truly grateful for. You should aim to include 10 things on your list. That might sound like a challenge, but once you get started it will become easier. Remember the little things.

Day Fourteen – No Complaints

Have you ever noticed you have a tendency to complain? It's so easy to do, slip into a complaint after one thing goes wrong in your morning. We are all guilty of it. Today, your aim is to go through your day without a single, solitary complaint. If you hear yourself complaining, correct yourself and move on. Don't beat yourself up if you slip, just correct it, and continue on.

Day Fifteen – Laugh Therapy

Laughter is great medicine so, take time today to watch a movie or a television show that makes you laugh (or lifts you up). It really is as simple as that. Think about the type of content you typically consume. A lot of the biggest movies and programs right now are dark and anxiety-inducing. Take a break from all of that – none of that today, laughter and edification only.

Day Sixteen – Speak Intentionally

Today, be intentional with your words. Use words that will build people (and yourself) up, rather than tearing everything down. It's so easy to allow your mood to influence your words and vice versa. Today, speak intentionally and your intent should be kindness, compassion, and edification.

Day Seventeen – Enter the Danger Zone

Okay, maybe don't go into the danger zone, but do leave your comfort zone. Do you have a neighbor that you see from a distance, but never speak to? Say hi. Is there a restaurant you want to try or a movie you want to see, but you've been too afraid to go by yourself? Go eat! Go watch! Your comfort zone is comfortable, but sometimes the best thing that you can do yourself is color outside the lines.

Day Eighteen – Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is an excellent way to relieve stress and anxiety. Today, practice a deep breathing exercise.

Day Nineteen – Just Say No

If you don't want to do it... if you don't have the time to do it... why do you always say yes? You're afraid to disappoint people. You're scared that people will get bad. Well, forget about all of that and just say no!

Exercise your use of the word no today and use that time and space to chase something that sets your heart alight.

Day Twenty – Love Yourself

It's time to pull out your journal again. Today, write a list of 10 things you love *about you*. What do you really love about yourself? It could be your sense of humor, perhaps it's your smile or your ability to recall every state capital when quizzed.

Day Twenty-One – Take Yourself on a Date

The most important part of today's challenge is that you spend time on your own. You can take yourself on a date if you like, but the purpose of this is really just that you spend time with yourself. The best way to get to know yourself is to date yourself!

Day Twenty-Two – Digital De-Cluttering

Just like your physical environment can influence your mental health, so can your digital environment. Today, start a digital de-cluttering. Your email inbox is your starting point. Go through and unsubscribe from the junk mail you no longer want, read or find to be useful.

Delete all the old emails you opened but left to take up space. Once you have done that, download an app that will help you manage whom you follow on social media. Use this to do a clear out of individuals who drag you down or stress you out.

Day Twenty-Three – Take A Picture, It Really Does Last Longer

If you see something that makes you happy, snap a photo of it. Take at least three photos that fill you with joy today. If you can print them out and hang them somewhere you will see them, that's even better.

Otherwise, keep them handy in your phone so you can look at them when you want and get a boost of joy when you need it. Sometimes, just looking at something that makes you happy is a great reminder of everything you have to be grateful for – whether it's your dog, a stray cat or your partner.

Day Twenty-Four – Community Volunteering

Get out into your community and volunteer your time. There are all types of organizations out there who are desperate for a helping hand. Find one that aligns with your beliefs and interests and go out there and get involved. You're going to feel much better about yourself when you put yourself out there and help others.

Day Twenty-Five – Practice Optimism

Let's be clear here – there is a major difference between positive thinking and fostering true optimism. True optimism is grounded in reality, but it's focused on the positive. This isn't about ignoring the bad things and pretending that everything is awesome when it isn't.

Rather, it's about promoting positive thoughts that will help you make the most in negative situations. It's problem-solving, rather than sweeping things under the carpet. It's impossible to be happy *all* the time, life comes at you fast.

There are plenty of events that can negatively impact your mental health. That's why the key to true optimism is focusing on what you can control. When you're hit with a challenging situation today, try to practice true optimism.

Day Twenty-Six – No Procrastinating

Today, your challenge is to get through your day without procrastinating. So, write out your list of priorities and everything that you need to accomplish. You can take scheduled breaks, but aside from that... put everything else aside and nothing else comes into your world until you have accomplished your to-do list.

Once you finish, you can enjoy the day as you wish. Put your phone away, turn the internet off if need be, just completely focus on what you need to do until it's done. Do you have any idea how much procrastination affects your focus, performance, and productivity?

It's so damaging, but it's also influential on your stress levels. You spend so much time procrastinating, you start to panic about whether you will get everything done. That kind of stress does your mental health no favors. Don't even think about multi-tasking!

Day Twenty-Seven – Exercise Your Creativity

Do you enjoy writing? Are you a painter? Do you draw? Are you a musician? Today, you should exercise your creativity in whatever form it might take. The beautiful thing about creativity is it's an effective way to work through your emotions, but it also is an excellent exercise in being in the present.

Day Twenty-Eight – Go For A Swim

Exercise is great for your mental health, and swimming is an excellent choice. It's low-impact, it's solitary, and it's going to get your heart-rate up. Basically, it's part exercise for your body, part an exercise in relaxation for your brain.

Day Twenty-Nine – Sleep Well

By now, you have made major strides forward in your mental health journey. So, you may have already noticed a difference in your ability to get a good night's sleep. Sleep is so important for good mental health because a lack of sleep fuels stress. Today's task is simple – what time do you have to get up in the morning?

Count back nine hours and take yourself to bed half an hour before you need to be asleep. In the run-up to that bedtime, take a warm bath, read a book, and make sure all of your screens are off at least two hours before bed.

This is today's challenge, but you will see a real difference in the sleep you get tonight and how you feel tomorrow. So, really, this is a challenge we would recommend you repeat on a nightly basis for the rest of your life. Additionally, you should get up at the same time every day, whether you're working or not. It's important to keep your body in a routine.

Day Thirty – Final Evaluation

Now is your opportunity to look back over the last thirty days and think about the progress that you have made. You may want to record this in your journal!

Of all the things that you have experienced and tried in the last thirty days, what will you continue to do?

What really worked for you and what didn't at all? Which day was the best day and why was that?

Walking away from this challenge, what have you learned that you can take with you as you continue your journey to maintain good mental health?