



# A **3**-Step Guide to Maintaining Your **Mental Health**

Stress, depression, and anxiety can creep into our lives at any time. Here are three ways to maintain your mental health.



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**A**s a mental health counselor with 30 years' experience, I am often amazed at people's ability to face and overcome challenges. We live in difficult times. And stress, depression, and anxiety can creep into our lives often, especially during a time of life that is so uncertain, like young adulthood. These difficulties sometimes leave us confused and doubting our ability to cope and move forward.

But I've learned that when we take time to tend to our mental health, we gain more strength and more resilience to face challenges. There are many things we can do for ourselves to strengthen our mental capacity so we can better navigate obstacles (and enjoy the good times too!). Here are just three areas of focus that can help you keep your mental and emotional health in tip-top shape.

### **Don't Underestimate the Power of Small and Simple Spiritual Things**

Those small spiritual things you can do each day to draw closer to Heavenly Father pack a lot more power in helping you maintain your mental health than you might think (see Alma 37:6–7). Spiritual habits don't necessarily make our challenges go away, but they do give us the strength, mental clarity, eternal perspective, hope, and courage to move forward.

I often tell clients to do the "dailies." These include meaningful daily prayer, daily scripture study, serving in our Church callings or responsibilities, attending church weekly and going to the temple often, and striving to follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

I've seen these small and simple spiritual practices transform people's ability to cope with and overcome challenges in profound ways. When my clients commit to doing these little spiritual habits consistently, they feel greater influence from the Savior's power in their lives. I have seen that power increase their spiritual and mental strength. And that makes a major difference in their ability to find happiness and focus on what truly matters.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles testified of this, saying, “The spiritual pattern of small and simple things bringing forth great things produces firmness and steadfastness, deepening devotion, and more complete conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

Don’t allow feelings of inadequacy or uncertainty prevent you from doing these small spiritual things with real intent (see Moroni 10:4). If you believe, or even if you simply have the desire to believe (see Alma 32:27) that these spiritual habits can give you strength, healing, peace, and hope, they will.

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### **Remember to Practice Self-Care**

We’ve all heard about the gospel principle of self-reliance. Most of the time we talk about it in regards to financial or temporal needs. But one of the most important parts of this concept is emotional self-reliance—self-care—which is vital to maintaining our mental health.

As much as we do for others, why is it so difficult for so many of us to make time for ourselves? I think sometimes the idea of taking time for ourselves seems selfish or like a waste of time. But that couldn’t be further from the truth! Self-care isn’t selfish! If we fail to take care of ourselves, how can we have anything left to share with others?





Self-care begins with being conscious of your own needs and how much you can give. Recognizing, understanding, and acknowledging the emotions you feel is important in discovering what your needs are. Here are some self-care practices that can fulfill some of your mental and emotional needs:

- Take care of your body by eating a proper diet, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly.
- Develop relationships with people you can talk to and share both your concerns and your happiness with.
- Seek good entertainment, hobbies, and activities that bring you joy and a sense of accomplishment.
- Journal to help you express your feelings and organize your thoughts.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Set healthy boundaries and say no when you already have too much going on.
- Practice gratitude. Being grateful helps us avoid feeling sorry for ourselves or blaming others for our unhappiness. Try writing down three things you are grateful for at the end of each day.
- Change negative thoughts and negative self-talk to something positive.
- Remember who you are—a divine child of heavenly parents. You are loved and supported by so many in heaven and on earth.
- Lessen the time you spend on social media (or avoid it altogether).
- Forgive yourself and others. Holding on to grudges or past mistakes adds an unnecessary burden on your shoulders.

# 3

## Humble Yourself and Ask for Help

None of us were meant to make it through this mortal journey on our own. Even if you're self-reliant, connection with others is essential to caring for your mental and emotional needs. And we have parents, other family members, friends, Church leaders, and our Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost to guide, direct, and help us on our way. Take a moment to review your current social network. Ask yourself:

- Do you have healthy relationships with others?
- Could you use more support from others?
- Do you push people away? Or are you able to ask for help when you need it?

Most of the time, to help others, we need to know if they are struggling. Don't be afraid, ashamed, or reluctant to seek help when you need it, whether it's confiding in someone about your anxieties or even asking someone for help. It definitely takes courage and humility to admit you need help. But Heavenly Father often blesses us through others as we let them in and allow them to be there for us.

True emotional self-reliance begins by knowing our limits and seeking help outside of ourselves to fill in the gaps. Apart from friends and family, your Church leaders may also offer you counsel, guidance, and hope when you're in need. If you could benefit from professional counseling or medical assistance to get your mental health to a healthy place, your bishop can also refer you to qualified therapists.

As you know all too well, we live in challenging times. But we also live in the best of times because of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ! We have knowledge of the plan of salvation and so many tools that can help give us joy, hope, and peace no matter our circumstances. And if we utilize those tools, they will help us make it back to our Heavenly Father. ■

### NOTE

1. David A. Bednar, "By Small and Simple Things Are Great Things Brought to Pass" (Brigham Young University Women's Conference address, Apr. 29, 2011), [womensconference.byu.edu](http://womensconference.byu.edu).



You can find more experiences from young adults about dealing with depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges in this month's issue at [liahona.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://liahona.ChurchofJesusChrist.org) and in the Gospel Library app. Check out these digital-only articles:

- A young adult from Finland talks about her struggle with mental health and how reaching out and connecting with others has helped her find a way out of the darkness of depression.
- Another young adult who has battled suicidal tendencies gives 14 tips for how to help someone else choose to stay.
- A young adult from the Philippines shares how she realized and accepted that she was struggling with depression and how she found the courage to seek help.