

Child and Adolescent Mental Health



Mental Health Is Important

Mental health is how people think, feel, and act as they face life's situations. It affects how people handle stress, relate to one another, and make decisions. Mental health influences the ways individuals look at themselves, their lives, and others in their lives. Like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life. All aspects of our lives are affected by our mental health. Caring for and protecting our children is an obligation and is critical to their daily lives and their independence.

Children and Adolescents Can Have Serious Mental Health Problems

Like adults, children and adolescents can have mental health disorders that interfere with the way they think, feel, and act. When untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide. Untreated mental health disorders can be very costly to families, communities, and the health care system.

Mental Health Disorders Are More Common in Young People than Many Realize

Studies show that at least one in five children and adolescents have a mental health disorder. At least one in 10, or about 6 million people, have a serious emotional disturbance.¹

The Causes Are Complicated

Mental health disorders in children and adolescents are caused mostly by biology and environment. Examples of biological causes are genetics,

chemical imbalances in the body, or damage to the central nervous system, such as a head injury. Many environmental factors also put young people at risk for developing mental health disorders. Examples include:

- Exposure to environmental toxins, such as high levels of lead;
- Exposure to violence, such as witnessing or being the victim of physical or sexual abuse, drive-by shootings, muggings, or other disasters;
- Stress related to chronic poverty, discrimination, or other serious hardships; and
- The loss of important people through death, divorce, or broken relationships.

Signs of Mental Health Disorders Can Signal a Need for Help

Children and adolescents with mental health issues need to get help as soon as possible. A variety of signs may point to mental health disorders or serious emotional disturbances in children or adolescents. Pay attention if a child or adolescent you know has any of these warning signs:

A child or adolescent is troubled by feeling:

- Sad and hopeless for no reason, and these feelings do not go away.
- Very angry most of the time and crying a lot or overreacting to things.
- Worthless or guilty often.
- Anxious or worried often.
- Unable to get over a loss or death of someone important.
- Extremely fearful or having unexplained fears.
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance.

A child or adolescent experiences big changes, such as:

- Frightened that his or her mind either is controlled or is out of control.
- Showing declining performance in school.
- Losing interest in things once enjoyed.
- Avoiding friends or family and wanting to be alone all the time.
- Daydreaming too much and not completing tasks.
- Feeling life is too hard to handle.
- Hearing voices that cannot be explained.
- Experiencing suicidal thoughts.

A child or adolescent experiences:

- Poor concentration and is unable to think straight or make up his or her mind.
- An inability to sit still or focus attention.
- Worry about being harmed, hurting others, or doing something "bad".
- A need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines hundreds of times a day, in order to avoid an unsubstantiated danger.
- Racing thoughts that are almost too fast to follow.
- Persistent nightmares.

A child or adolescent behaves in ways that cause problems, such as:

- Using alcohol or other drugs.
- Eating large amounts of food and then purging, or abusing laxatives, to avoid weight gain.
- Dieting and/or exercising obsessively.
- Violating the rights of others or constantly breaking the law without regard for other people.
- Setting fires.
- Doing things that can be life threatening.
- Killing animals.

Source: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/CA-0004/default.asp>

Did you know?

Finding the Right Services Is Critical!!!

To find the right services for their children, families can do the following:

- Get accurate information from hotlines, libraries, or other sources.
- Seek referrals from professionals.
- Ask questions about treatments and services.
- Talk to other families in their communities.
- Find family network organizations.

It is critical that people who are not satisfied with the mental health care they receive discuss their concerns with providers, ask for information, and seek help from other sources.

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/CA-0004/>



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Clinical Corner: Nutrition and Mental Health

Mental health problems are believed to be the result of a combination of factors that appear to play a role in predisposing individuals to developing a mental health difficulty. These include genetics, age and environmental factors. More recently, however, there is a growing wealth of evidence, which highlights the ever-increasing role that food and nutrition plays in our emotional status.

The evidence suggests that many foods play an important contributing role in the prevention, progression and management of mental health problems including, Depression, Anxiety, Schizophrenia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Alzheimer's Disease. Research is ongoing in this area and the role of nutrition in mental health has yet to be fully understood and embraced. Much of the proposed benefits require further research before we can equivocally relate specific mental health problems to our nutritional status.

The food we eat plays an important role in our physical and emotional wellbeing at every stage of our lives from the pre-conceptive nutrition of a mother planning her pregnancy through to weaning, adolescence, adult and older adulthood. The benefits to babies of breast versus formula milks, in terms of brain function, are well documented. These benefits are thought to be as a consequence of increased levels of Essential fatty Acids (EFAs) in breast milk.

Many studies have reviewed research over the past number of years, which clearly support the notion that the inclusion of breakfast improves daily and long-term academic performance in children. Similarly, research studies suggest that when children are hungry, behavior is worsened. Conversely, the provision of nutritious meals helps decrease fighting and absence whilst simultaneously increasing attention. A number of studies suggest that supplementation of the diet can impact on the behavior of offenders and have a positive impact on reduction of antisocial behavior (Gesch, 2002). However, further studies are necessary to replicate these findings amongst the general population.

Most people have a good understanding of the effects of nutrition on our physical health.

The ongoing health-promotion messages both in the media and in health-care settings appear to have reached the general public. People now accept the effects that a diet high in saturated fat, salt and sugar plus a diet low in fiber, fresh fruit and vegetables can have on our long-term health. The public is aware that an unhealthy dietary intake increases the risk of



Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), Type 2 Diabetes, **Hypertension** and some types of **Cancer**. Less awareness appears to be evident in terms of how the diet can impact on our emotional status and mental health.

However, anyone who has ever drunk alcohol, tea or coffee or eaten chocolate recognizes how certain fluids or foods can influence our mood. Perhaps one of the reasons why we do not associate food with mood is due to the delay in seeing an immediate effect, for example, eating some foods which are raw or undercooked can cause people to become very ill and consequently develop an immediate association between a particular food and physical discomfort. However, the impact of what we eat, on our mood, is usually a slower less tangible process.

Arguably, the contribution of diet to mental health status is complex and affected by many other complex issues. Nonetheless, we do know that diet affects our physical health, which in turn can impact on our emotional status and wellbeing. A restrictive dietary intake, which is low in essential nutrients, is unlikely to meet the daily recommended nutritional requirements to help minimize the risk of development of nutrition-related illnesses, including, iron-deficiency anemia, low energy levels and poor concentration. Similarly, dietary intakes high in fat or sugar, can frequently be low in essential **vitamins** and **minerals** despite meeting our energy or calorie requirements.

Therefore our brain, like the heart or liver, is sensitive to the foods we eat on a daily basis. To remain healthy the brain needs differ-

ent amounts of the following nutrients; complex **carbohydrates**, EFA's, amino acids, vitamins and minerals and **water**.

The brain contains billions of nerve cells, which allow the brain to communicate with itself and other parts of the body. These nerve cells are made up of fat primarily, which is derived from the diet. Chemicals, called neurotransmitters help the nerve cells communicate with each other and they are made from amino acids, which are often derived from the diet. Amino acids are the building blocks of **Protein**.

The most widely known neurotransmitter is called Serotonin and is derived from an amino acid called Tryptophan. Other transmitters include Acetylcholine, Dopamine, Adrenaline, Noradrenaline and 4-aminobutyrate (GABA). A sufficient balance of these neurotransmitters is essential for good mental health and they play an important role in feelings of anxiety, memory and cognitive status.



The frequent consumption of certain foods can hinder and decrease the effectiveness of these chemicals in the brain, for example, foods high in saturated and trans-fats.

Conversely, certain foods can help nourish the brain by helping it to release an efficient balance of neurotransmitters. Similarly, foods, which are high in **antioxidants**, can help protect the cells in the brain from becoming damaged.

In addition, to feeding the brain with foods that will help regulate neurotransmitter activity and protect the brain from damage, mood can also be improved by ensuring that the diet contains adequate amounts of complex carbohydrates, essential **fats**, amino acids, vitamins and minerals and water.

Source: <http://www.diet.com/g/nutrition-and-mental-health>

Resource Readiness

Here are a few resources related to Behavioral Health:

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

The National Institute of Mental Health serves to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery and cure. The website offers research on a range of mental health disorders, publications in both English and Spanish, information on clinical trials, statistics, and much more!

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

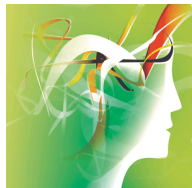
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/>

Available weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. EST to answer your mental health questions.

(800) 789-2647

(866) 889-2647 (tdd)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Mental Health Information Center provides information about mental health. The National Mental Health Information Center was developed for users of mental health services and their families, the general public, policy makers, providers, and the media. Information Center staff members are skilled at listening and responding to questions from the public and professionals. The staff quickly directs callers to Federal, State, and local organizations dedicated to treating and preventing mental illness. The Information Center also has information on Federal grants, conferences, and other events.



Staff Star

Let's all celebrate Bhavini Solanki-Vasan as our star staff member of the month!!! Bhavini is currently the Intake Coordinator for the Attachment and Bonding Center of Atlanta. She came to us from Texas and has been with the agency for 3 years. Bhavini has background in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault and was employed in 2 women's centers prior to moving to Georgia and becoming an in-home therapist. Bhavini reports seeing positive growth for the agency as it has expanded services to include the CORE population and several types of assessments in the DFCS realm.



According to Bhavini, "we have great minds at this agency and I think we could really begin to reach some different populations (such as Spanish-speaking) if we apply all of our resources and talent". She asserts that her individual contribution to the organization is her "sense of organization when it comes to getting assessments and psychologicals scheduled and completed as well as being an ear for people to talk to". Bhavini's colleagues have cited

such attributes as, "she always maintains a good attitude and stays positive, she is a hard worker and keeps you informed, and she goes over and beyond".

Bhavini contends that she has experienced some challenges within this field such as "people not wanting the help they need, people not addressing the root cause of their behaviors, and people not being comfortable with change". She is however, driven by the fact that there is a constant abundance of referrals which indicates the consumers' need for help; "If I stop my job, everybody suffers. I am a part of the team and, as a therapist, I love to see the progress that any one person can make!" When asked how she

keeps her positive attitude and outlook, Bhavini stated that she thrives off "self-care, a great support system at home and at work, and sometimes just hearing my own clients say that I have helped or they have enjoyed their time with me".

Congratulations on a job well done Bhavini! You are great at what you do and we look forward to continuing to work with you to provide outstanding service to our families!!!

Upcoming Events

***The Georgia Kids Expo.** The Convention Center at Gwinnet Center will be hosting this year's Kids Expo on October 3rd from 10am-6pm. Children 12 and under are free!!! The food, fun, and family entertainment will be located at 6400 sugarloaf Parkway Duluth, GA 30097. <http://www.thekidsexpo.com/>

***Little Five Points Halloween Festival and Parade.** This annual event will be held on 10/16 from 5pm to 10pm. The festival is free and open to the public and is located in and around Findley Plaza at the intersection of Moreland and Euclid Avenues in Atlanta, 31107. There will be live music, street entertainment, outdoor beverage vendors, free children's activities, the not-to-be-missed Halloween parade and Little 5 Points restaurant and retail promotions. <http://www.l5phalloween.com/>

***Atlanta Parent Magazine's 6th Annual Family Block Party.** Get out and play all day with more than 50 kid-friendly activities, entertainment, storytelling, informational booths and more! The Family Block Party is on October 10th from 10am-4pm at Mercer University's Atlanta Campus (3001 Mercer University Dr. Atlanta, GA 30341). Price: \$5/per person, children 2 and under are free! <http://www.atlantaparent.com/familyblockparty.html>

"Mental-Minute"

Light bulbs in the attic!

There are three switches downstairs. Each corresponds to one of the three light bulbs in the attic. You can turn the switches on and off and leave them in any position.

How would you identify which switch corresponds to which light bulb, if you are only allowed one trip upstairs?

Mental Health Georgia provides an extensive array of mental health services for both children and adults. "Our mission is to provide high-quality, easily accessible services for Georgians, focused on promoting mental and emotional well-being through personal and professional development, family preservation, resource coordination, and individualized treatment.



Self Care Corner

Stronger mental health by nourishing your nervous system:

•Eat healthy whole foods full of vitamins and nutrients. Beneficial nutrients include B vitamins (especially thiamin, pyridoxine and niacin), calcium, magnesium and trace minerals. These building blocks help build neurotransmitters and repair damaged nerve cells.

•Include essential fatty acids in your diet everyday. Your brain is the richest source of fatty acids in your body. Essential fatty acids are incorporated into the membranes of its nerve cells. If your diet has an overabundance of trans-fatty acids or saturated fats, these elements are incorporated into your brain's nerve cells' membranes, which will make the membranes less fluid and affect their ability to function effectively.

~Sources of essential fatty acids include cold water fish (such as wild salmon, mackerel, herring and halibut), flax seeds (either ground or as an oil) and nuts (especially walnuts). Grass fed beef and free-range organic chickens have more essential fatty acids than grain-fed animals.

~To decrease trans-fatty acids, avoid processed foods containing partially hydrogenated oils, margarine, and shortening.

Ways to decrease the stress on the nervous system and improve your mental health

•Decrease caffeine consumption. Caffeine is generally overused in our society and is a stress to the body to eliminate. Many studies have shown benefits from eliminating caffeine for people with depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders.

•Decrease refined sugar consumption. The effect of sugar is worse when eaten with caffeine. While sugar acts as a stimulant, the effects are short-lived and do more damage than good in the long run for people with depression, anxiety, seizures, ADD, and other mood disorders.

•Decrease alcohol consumption. Alcohol actually interferes with many brain cell processes, disturbs sleep, changes the adrenal gland output, and can lead to low blood sugar and sugar cravings.

•Avoid food allergens. Food allergies have been related to mental health disorders for decades. Food allergy symptoms include depression, fatigue, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and nervousness.

Source: <http://www.thedietchannel.com/Diet-and-Mental-Health-Improve-Your-Outlook-with-a-Healthy-Diet.htm>

Recipe Round-Up

Veggie Tortilla Lasagna

Prep time: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 tsp. vegetable oil
- 1 large zucchini, cut in half and sliced
- 3/4 c. frozen corn, thawed
- 7-oz. jar roasted red peppers, sliced
- 1/3 c. ricotta cheese
- 1 1/4 c. grated monterey jack cheese
- 1 c. salsa, drained of juice in a colander
- 6 6-in. corn tortillas



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 500 degrees Fahrenheit (260 degrees Celsius).
2. Add vegetable oil to large pan and heat, adding zucchini, corn, and peppers.
3. In bowl, mix cheeses.
4. Trim sides of tortillas to fit a loaf pan. Layer tortillas, veggies, cheeses, and salsa.
5. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 10 to 15 minutes.

Serves: 5

Serving size: 1 slice

Nutritional analysis (per serving): 293 calories, 14 g protein, 13 g fat, 32 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber, 32 mg cholesterol, 570 mg sodium, 335 mg calcium, 3 mg iron

Mental-Minute Solution

Bulbs - solution

Keep the first bulb switched on for a few minutes. It gets warm, right? So all you have to do then is ... switch it off, switch another one on, walk into the room with bulbs, touch them and tell which one was switched on as the first one (the warm one) and the others can be easily identified ...

We're on the Web!

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