

HACK YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

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Did you know that according to Economic Times, in India around 60 to 70 million people are affected by common and severe mental health disorders? This is largely due to the taboo around mental health in India.

Some key contributing factors to the stigmatization include cultural notions

around mental health, the idea of what is “normal” and what is not, expressing vulnerability is looked at as a sign of weakness, as well as sharing can be subjected to a lot of judgment. These are major drivers for delays in seeking treatment and oftentimes as not result in social exclusion and isolation for

those who fall prey to these conditions.

Now more than ever it's a major imperative to understand what exactly mental health is and why it's become such a critical talking point in society?

The negative aspects of mental health in various forms have been prevalent for ages; even today they are



matters of deep concern in society, given the frantic pace of everyday life as we experience it now. In fact, there's a burgeoning awareness of the overall well-being of an individual, not just mental health as an isolated concern.

As observed by the WHO "Mental health is an integral part of health; it is more than the absence of mental illnesses. It is the foundation for well-being and effective functioning of individuals. It includes mental well-being, prevention of mental disorders, treatment and rehabilitation."

Mental health refers to a condition of well-being that allows individuals to manage life's challenges, recognize their capabilities, learn effectively, perform well at work, and contribute positively to their communities. It is an essential aspect of overall health and wellness, supporting our capacity to make decisions, foster relationships, and influence our environment. Mental health is a fundamental human right, pivotal to personal growth, community cohesion, and socio-economic progress.

Talking about mental health also puts the spotlight on the confusion of the difference between mental health and mental illness, since it's wrongly used interchangeably.

As described by Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction, British Columbia, while mental health encompasses a spectrum of positive and negative states, mental illness specifically impairs a person's ability to function effectively over an extended period. Unlike feelings of sadness or stress due to challenging circumstances, mental illness involves persistent distress and a sense of losing control over one's life. It can profoundly influence our self-perception, our perception of the world, and our interactions with others.

It's crucial to understand that having a mental illness doesn't preclude the possibility of achieving good mental health. Similar to managing other health conditions, individuals with

mental illness can experience difficult periods but also periods of improved or stable mental well-being. Prioritizing mental health care is essential for everyone, regardless of their specific mental health challenges.

But how do we know that we are struggling?

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) describes some of the common signs of mental health challenges could be:

Significant alterations in sleep patterns or eating habits, or a decline in personal grooming, sudden or extreme shifts in emotions, feelings of depression, or increased irritability, recent isolation from

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social activities and loss of interest in previously enjoyed hobbies, noticeable deterioration in performance at school, work, or in social settings, such as quitting sports, academic struggles, or difficulty with routine tasks, challenges with concentration, memory, logical thinking, or speech that are difficult to account for or explain.

It is necessary to note the above mentioned is not an exhaustive list of signs as well as that all of this need not be present in exact description, you don't have to wait for all signs and symptoms to show up before reaching out for support.

It is also important to remember that all these signs can look different for different people and necessarily will not have the same cause. Each individual is different and they perceive life differently. The cause and effect can vary person to person.

You can reach out for help even when you notice the surfacing of some of the early signs, in the mildest form. Understanding your needs before they become a concern is more beneficial. Mental health also functions on the premise of 'Prevention is better than cure', hence taking care of your mental health is pivotal in your overall well-being.

Here are some handy hacks that could help you take care of your mental health:

Hacks

1. Journaling:

Maintaining a regular journal make things easier to remember, when your thoughts or feelings when you are anxious or under any form of stress can be recorded on the paper or screen, during or at the end of the day.

Just like you have your To-Do Lists, or Tasks for the day on your notepad at work, journaling can be something that you inculcate on a day-to-day basis. Sometimes it can be difficult to start, or even to maintain it regularly—but that's okay.

Everybody can have their own small way of journaling or keeping a record of their thoughts. Journaling has its benefits in reducing anxiety, having a structure and words to your experiences; it also helps in opening up to yourself and eventually to others as well. Journaling is an assisted tool that comes handy during or after stressful experiences.



2. Know yourself better:

The idea of self-awareness is not as widely talked about and neither are the advantages attached to it.

In order to improve your mental health, increasing self-awareness plays a key role. It helps in clearer thinking and better decision making. It can also enhance existing interpersonal relationships, increase confidence and deal with stressors more efficiently.

For e.g., a person who knows why they often feel anxious before an important presentation at work would probably have a list of coping skills to refer to, to counter that feeling when it arises. This is in contrast to a person who doesn't know why presentations at work make him/her anxious and what can they do about it—or even what could help them get through the presentation well.

This analysis of what, why and

how can help you cope with stressful situations in a healthier way.

3. Include humour in everyday life:

Humour plays a significant role in helping navigate your life on a daily basis. It is one of the medicines that is an immunity booster for a happier life.

Incorporating humour into your everyday routine can result in a range of advantages. Studies indicate that it increases energy, enhances cognitive function, strengthens the immune system, reduces stress levels, and uplifts mood.

You can watch Comedy TV shows, Movies, Short clips on the internet, read comic books, go for live stand-up comedy, and in fact sometimes just sit with your near and dear ones and have a series of sharing jokes or even sharing funny memories or experiences from your day-to-day life.

4. Seek professional help:

Just as you would reach out to a physician for fever, cough and cold, you can also reach out to a psychologist for support and learning better ways to cope. Reaching out to a mental health practitioner can help you in manoeuvring your stressors in a more effective way.

Mental health practitioners, i.e Counselling Psychologist, Psychotherapists, Clinical Psychologist and Psychiatrists are your go-to support systems.

The key difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist is that a psychiatrist can prescribe you medications if the need arises, whereas a psychologist can help you with 'talk therapy'. Both act as facilitators in this journey of dealing with your mental health. They are professionals who maintain utmost confidentiality and

are present as a support while you discover yourself and learn to cope.

5. Express your emotions:

Emotions are an intrinsic part of your life. Every emotion indicates something and that is what you and your body can tell best for yourself.

Each experience can bring different kinds of emotions and it can be interpreted differently for different people. No one experience is “supposed” to be felt in the same way by everyone. There might be a tendency to accept and celebrate all “socially acceptable” positive emotions like happiness, pride, joy while discarding the emotions that can be challenging to deal with and are commonly described as negative emotions for example, fear, anger, helplessness.

Here is the surprise. Both are emotions that exist in their natural form and have a purpose. It is important to understand that emotions exist for a reason. They should be allowed to have a space in your life. For instance, fear might indicate that there is an unknown territory somewhere and you are not prepared for it. Recognizing and dealing with that fear can help you overcome the uncertainty and also prepare you for the next time.

As a practice, you can download a feeling chart and name and describe at least five feelings you had during the day. This will also help you enhance your emotional vocabulary.

6. Be your best friend:

The process of trusting yourself is almost like an act of self-care. Sometimes, the advice we end up giving others is not very easily applied to ourselves. We are great friends to others maybe but when it comes to being a friend to ourselves, we often ponder and doubt ourselves. Self-doubt can easily show up and it's okay to have questions about your abilities.

The hack is in knowing that you also have strengths that have helped you deal with experiences so far. And

all that self-awareness of strengths required was a pinch of confidence and trust in yourself. What's critical is knowing, and even more importantly believing, that you can handle and deal with whatever you choose or whatever comes your way.

Our environs may not always be helpful in showing one's own strengths, but that does not mean one doesn't have any. Human beings are built for survival and each survival brings to the fore some strengths and weaknesses. Utilizing both for your empowerment is an important hack for taking care of your mental health. Talking to yourself like your best friend would, might help you see yourself differently.

7. Take care of your physical health:

When we talk about health, it's about our mental and physical health. They are important for each other to co-exist for one's overall well-being.

Focusing on your physical health includes, eating a balanced diet with a diversity of nutrients, daily movement activities, Yoga, taking a 20 min walk, mindfulness activities like box breathing and meditation can help you ground yourself and stay connected to yourself in the present.

Staying in the present, however, can be easier said than done for a few people. It is not just a conscious effort but also can be a trigger because it can bring up difficult emotions. While addressing these difficult emotions is equally necessary, you can also seek professional help in order to deal with those difficult emotions to ground yourself better.

8. Build new hobbies/ enhance old ones:

With every new phone upgrade and social media entering our lives like never before, hobbies may have taken a back seat.

Hobbies are a great way to take care of your mental health. That's because when you involve yourself in activities you enjoy, it requires you to be in the

present moment. It doesn't mean that you have to, or can ignore the feelings you were having while struggling; it simply gives you a break from the same loop of thoughts, perhaps giving way to a new perspective or lets you deal with the situation in a more relaxed state of mind.

You can jog down the memory lane and remind yourself of your favourite hobbies. It could be a combination of outdoor and indoor hobbies as well as hobbies that involve people and the ones that can be done solo. This way you have a bunch of activities you can rely on when having a hard time.

If you don't have any particular hobbies, you can try building new ones. It's never too late to try something new.

9. Build a social support network:

Social connections throughout life can have a positive impact in your life. Building positive social relations can elevate your mood significantly. Social connections play a vital role at each stage of life. They help reduce feelings of loneliness and stress; they can also serve a space to express difficult emotions.

Support groups are a great example of such social connections. It can be your friends, neighbours, relatives, a common group you enjoy your hobby with or volunteering within the community for a cause close to your heart.

A support group brings together individuals dealing with similar challenges to discuss their concerns. By sharing their experiences, members provide mutual support, encouragement, and comfort to one another.

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