

Health Insights

May 2024

Working for Mental Health

A new nationwide study indicates that workplace policies that provide employees with security and flexibility boost overall well-being—while encouraging workers to seek health services when they need it. Employment is a recognized determinant of health, and different aspects of a job can be beneficial or harmful to mental health. Published in the journal *JAMA Network Open*, the study found that employed adults with greater job flexibility and higher job security were less likely to experience serious psychological distress or anxiety.

"It is important to recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing mental health disparities and threatened job security, both of which especially impacted individuals in lower-wage positions, frontline workers, and marginalized communities," says study lead and corresponding author Dr. Monica Wang, associate professor at BUSPH. For the study, Dr. Wang and colleagues from BUSPH, Brown University, and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest College of Medicine utilized data from more than 18,000 US adults ages 18 and older. Job flexibility was based on participants' perceived ability to change their work schedule when needed, maintain regular work schedules, and receive work hours in advance. Job security reflected their perceived likelihood of losing their job.

The findings showed that employed adults with greater job flexibility and higher job security were 25% and 26% less likely to experience serious psychological distress, respectively. Those with greater job flexibility were 13% less likely to experience daily anxiety, while participants with greater job security were 27% less likely.

"Being able to predict our work schedule and have the flexibility to make time for important personal or family commitments allows us to better balance work and personal responsibilities, including the time to take care of one's health," says Wang. "This can reduce stress and anxiety while promoting greater control over schedules." Greater job security, she says, can offer a "psychological sense of stability" and reduce work absenteeism because of higher work satisfaction, decreased job-related stress, and financial security.

As advocates continue to push for universal paid sick leave—the U.S. is currently the only high-income country that does not guarantee paid time off—the study highlights other changes and policies that companies can implement to promote work-life balance, including flexible work schedules, hybrid and remote options, and policies for adjusting work hours. They can also provide flexible employee contracts, skill development, and career advancement opportunities. Organizations can support employees' health by revising sick leave policies, expanding mental healthcare coverage, and partnering with services that address healthcare access barriers, such as telehealth counseling.

Boston University School of Public Health. "Job flexibility and security promotes better mental health among employees." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 26 March 2024. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/03/240326170101.htm

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Mental Health Moment

Mental Well-Being

Your mental well-being includes how you think, behave, and feel. It helps you cope with stress, relate to others, and make decisions. According to the WHO, there is no specific definition of mental well-being, but it is generally accepted that, while it includes mental health, it goes far beyond treating mental illness.

What is Mental Illness?

Mental illness refers to a variety of conditions that affect your mood, behavior, feelings, or thinking. These can be temporary, isolated occurrences, while others are chronic and long-lasting. Common mental illnesses include anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.

It's more prevalent than you might think. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 5 U.S. adults will experience a mental illness in any given year, and more than 50% will experience mental illness at some point in their life.

Why is Mental Well-Being Important?

Your mental well-being is directly tied to your physical well-being. Individuals with poor mental health or untreated mental illness are at risk of developing many chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and obesity. Poor mental health can also cause negative effects in your life, both professionally and socially. If you have poor mental health, you may experience productivity issues at work, as well as withdrawal or feelings of loneliness. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to improve your mental well-being.

1. Express gratitude:

Taking five minutes a day to write down the things that you are grateful for has been proven to lower stress levels and can help you change your mindset from negative to positive.

2. Get exercise:

You're probably tired of hearing how beneficial exercise is to your overall health, but it's true. Regular exercise can improve brain function, reduce anxiety, and boost your self-image.

3. Get a good night's sleep:

There's a proven relationship between the quality of your sleep and your mental well-being. Strive for seven to eight hours of sleep a night to improve your mental health.

For more information about mental well-being, please contact your primary care provider.

Selecting a Mental Health Professional

Selecting the right provider for your needs is an important decision that should be made carefully. Since mental health professionals all have different roles, it's important to understand what each can offer. Here are some common types of mental health professionals:

Counselors, clinicians, or therapists are similar but differ based on skills and job responsibilities. They typically choose a specialization (e.g., marriage and family), but can evaluate mental health, connect with patients, and provide guidance.

Psychiatrists are licensed medical doctors. They can diagnose mental health conditions, provide therapy, and prescribe and monitor medications.

Psychologists can make mental health diagnoses based on psychological evaluations. They can provide therapy and additional healthy ways to handle mental health challenges.

Social workers can evaluate mental health and offer therapy services. They can aid in recovery from various behavioral, emotional, and mental challenges.

Who's the Best Fit?

Finding the right mental health professional requires a bit of work, so here are some ways to locate a provider:

- Get referrals from your physician, friends, or family members.
- Ask your health insurance company for a list of providers.
- Check your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for a referral.

Be sure to consider factors that are important to you such as age, gender, language, and cultural background. You'll be establishing a long-term relationship with this person, and you need to feel as comfortable with them as possible. Choosing a mental health provider can be challenging, but you don't need to go through it alone. Ask family, friends, or your primary physician for assistance.



Baked Salmon

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp light brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp paprika
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1/2 cup parsley leaves, chopped
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 1 1/2 pounds skin-on salmon fillet, preferably center-cut
- 1 tablespoon Dijon

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Line a baking sheet with foil.
2. Mix the brown sugar, paprika, garlic powder, cayenne pepper, 1 tsp kosher salt and a generous amount of freshly ground black pepper in a small bowl.
3. Mix the panko with the parsley, butter, 1/4 tsp kosher salt and a few grinds of black pepper in another small bowl.
4. Place the salmon skin-side down on the prepared baking sheet and spread the surface with the Dijon. Press the brown sugar mixture all over the salmon then top with the bread crumb mixture. Fold all four sides of the foil to create a border around the salmon. This will help collect the juices so they don't spread and burn. Bake until the bread crumbs are golden brown, and the salmon is firm and flakes easily when pressed, 15 to 18 minutes. Cut into four equal portions for serving.

Calories: 444 kcal, Carbs: 9 g, Protein: 36 g, Fat: 29 g

The best baked salmon. Food Network. (n.d.).
www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchen/the-best-baked-salmon-1-8081733



May Quiz

Working for Mental Health

1. A nationwide study has found that increasing _____ and _____ has a positive impact on mental health.
2. How much did job flexibility and security affect the likelihood of daily anxiety?
 - a. 5% for both
 - b. 13% for flexibility, 27% for security
 - c. 38% for flexibility, 20% for security

Mental Well-Being

3. Poor mental health can also cause _____ in your work life as well as in your social life.
4. What are some ways to improve your well-being?

Mental Health Moment

5. List two mental health professional types from the article.

See page 5 for quiz answers.

Healthy Habits Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
					Welcome to May! Start the Read Everyday Challenge.	Saturday Service: Do a task that has been on your to-do list for a while.
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sunday Sleep: Make a plan for your week to get 7-9 hours of sleep per night.	Monday Motivation: Think of one thing you can do this week to exercise self-care and plan a time you can do it!			Challenge Check-in: What book are you reading for the Read Everyday Challenge?	Friday Fitness: Go online and find a 20-minute workout that you can do from home.	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Sunday Sleep: Clean your room to have a neat and cozy space to fall asleep in.		Tasty Tuesday: Try including in-season vegetables into your diet like artichokes, avocado, asparagus, and potatoes.	Wellness Wednesday: Go outside and be in the sun to boost your mood and receive some Vitamin D.			Social Saturday: Call a friend and share what book you have read for the Read Every Day Challenge.
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	Monday Motivation: Make time to read for at least 30 minutes today.			Thursday Tip: Park farther away at the grocery store to get more activity during your errands.		
26	27	28	29	30	31	
Sunday Sleep: Try listening to a guided sleep meditation before bed.	Memorial Day		Challenge Check in: What has been your favorite thing that you have read so far in the Read Everyday Challenge?		Friday Fitness: Go on a walk during your lunch break.	

30 DAY WELLNESS CHALLENGE

Read Everyday



This month, try to read at least 15 minutes a day. Dig out a book you've been meaning to finish or take a recommendation from a friend for a new book to start. Benefits of daily reading include:

- Reduced stress and depressive symptoms
- Slowed progress of dementia and Alzheimer's disease
- Improved focus and concentration
- Increased empathy
- Lowered blood pressure and heart rate
- Improved sleep quality

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
DAY 1	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____
DAY 2	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____
DAY 3	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____
DAY 4	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____
DAY 5	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____
DAY 6	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____
DAY 7	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____	Book _____ Minutes _____

Answers to Quiz:

Q1: job security, scheduling flexibility

Q2: b. 13% for flexibility, 27% for security

Q3: negative effects

Q4: Express gratitude, exercise, and good sleep

Q5: Counselors, clinicians or therapists, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social workers