

Recovery and Wellness Lifestyle—A Self-Help Guide

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Foreword

This booklet contains information, ideas, and strategies that people from all over the country have found to be helpful in relieving and preventing troubling feelings and symptoms. The information in this booklet can be used safely along with your other health care treatment.

You may want to read through this booklet at least once before you begin working on developing your own action plans for prevention and recovery. This can help enhance your understanding of the entire process. Then you can go back to work on each section. You may want to do this slowly, working on a portion of it and then putting it aside and coming back to it at another time.

After you have finished developing your plan, you may want to review and revise it on a regular basis as you learn new things about yourself and ways you can help yourself to feel better.

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Introduction

Every aspect of your life — the place you live, the people you live with, your friends and acquaintances, the things you do or don't do, the things you own, your work, even things like pets, music, and color affect how you feel. If you are concerned about your mental health or the quality of your life, you can do many things and make changes in your life that will help you to feel much better. This booklet will help you think about those areas of your life that may need to be changed and possible changes you could make.

Creating Change-Taking Action

It is not always easy to take the action necessary to create change. However, without taking some action, you cannot make changes in your life that may be necessary to help you feel better. Every time you take a positive step in creating change in your life, give yourself a pat on the back or reward yourself by doing something nice for yourself like taking a warm bath, going for a walk, or spending some time with a friend. You also may want to keep a written record of the change you are creating in your life in a notebook or journal.

Change takes time and may be difficult. You may have to overcome many obstacles. Take small steps. Don't give up. Be persistent. Keep working toward whatever it is that will help you to feel better and enjoy your life more. Making change is being able to see beyond yourself to what the solution might be.

Creating change is something you need to do for yourself. No one else can do it for you. Others can help you and support you as you create change but it is up to you to do what needs to be done. You will be the one that benefits from successful change.

Taking Charge-Regaining Control of Your Life

If you feel you have control over your own life, you have gotten over the first hurdle to creating change in your circumstances. If you don't feel you have control over your life, it is important that you take back control. It is very difficult to feel well when you are not in charge of your own life. Answering the following questions and making the suggested lists could help you figure out how to regain control of your life.

- Do you feel that you have control over your own life?
- Or do you feel other people control your life and you can't do anything about the way your life is?
- What controls your life? List things such as your children, your spouse, a disability, lack of money, etc.
- List things you could do to take back control over your life.

For instance, you could —

- talk with your spouse about issues related to control
 - perhaps the two of you could see a counselor together
 - ask your children to take care of some of their own needs and help out with chores
 - get a part- or full-time job doing something your enjoy
 - attend a class on money management
 - learn sign language
- List what you think is keeping you from doing the things you need to do to take back control over your life.

For instance, you —

- have lack of motivation
 - have low self-esteem
 - feel like its too much trouble
 - feel scared
 - do not want to upset others
 - want to avoid the anger of family members
- List the benefits of taking back control over your life.

For instance, you would —

- feel better physically and emotionally
- have less stress
- have more time to do the things you enjoy
- have time to take good care of yourself
- feel more fulfilled
- improve the quality of your life

Getting Good Health Care

You deserve good health care. If you have a good health insurance plan, this won't be a problem. If you don't, or your access to health care is limited, see what is available in your community that is free or has sliding scale fees you could afford. Call your local department of health, health care agencies, or your local hospital to check on available options. While it may be hard for you to access good health care, it is worth making the effort to get what you need and deserve for yourself.

- Do you get good health care for yourself?
- Do you have a general health care practitioner or a team of health care professionals who know you and your life circumstances? Can they provide you with valuable assistance in monitoring your health—giving you advice on treatment, providing treatment when necessary, and referring you to other health care providers when necessary?
- What could you do to ensure that you get good health care for yourself?
- Do you get a complete physical check-up every year?
- If not, what could you do to make this happen?

Go to your check-up with a list of all the medications and health care preparations you are using, a history of your illnesses and surgeries and those of close family members, and any symptoms that have you concerned. Don't think anything is too trivial. The mildest symptoms may give your health care provider the needed clues to provide you with good treatment. See your health care provider if your condition changes or worsens.

Don't be satisfied with the outcome of your visit until all your questions have been answered and you feel comfortable with the answers and with suggested treatment strategies. If necessary, arrange follow-up visits. If treatment is recommended, especially if the situation is serious or requires surgery, get a second opinion.

- Do you feel that you are getting good health care?
- If not, what are you going to do about it?

Lifestyle

The space where you live, your home, can affect how you feel. Perhaps you need to make some changes in your living space or living arrangement or find a different place to call home. The following questions may help you decide if you need to make some changes in living space.

- Think about your lifestyle. Do you try to do too much every day?
- Do you take on more than you should?
- Do you often find yourself rushing from one thing to another and not enjoying anything?
- If you answered “yes” to some or all of these questions, what makes your life this way?
- What could you do to make your life more peaceful and calm (for example, take a relaxation course, take two days off every week, save time for yourself in the evening, ask others to take over your responsibilities from time to time, set aside time every day to do things you enjoy)?

- You can't take good care of someone else until you first take good care of yourself. However, you may be like people who focus their attention on others and don't take very good care of themselves. You may find that you are so busy taking care of others that you don't have time to address your own issues. You may be so busy taking care of others that you neglect personal hygiene tasks that would make you feel better—things like a regular shower or bath, washing and styling your hair, trimming your nails, brushing and flossing your teeth, changing your clothes, or even getting dressed (you may feel so badly about yourself some days that you never get out of your night clothes). Are you always taking care of others and not taking care of yourself?
- If so, why?
- What could you do to be sure that you take good care of yourself (for example, say “no” from time to time, ask others to take over your care-taking responsibilities from time to time, put yourself first, make a list of things you need to do for yourself everyday and do the things on the list)?
- You may have more things than you need. All these things may make your life difficult to manage. If you have too many things, you will lose things more easily, your space will be cluttered, and maintaining these things may take time and energy that you would prefer to use in other ways. Do you have so many things that it makes your life difficult to manage?
- If so, describe the problem.
- What could you do to resolve this problem (for example, throw things away, give things away, have a tag sale, clean out one space at a time keeping only what you need, enlist the help of other people you live with, have a moratorium on getting new things)?
- There may be people in your life, at home, at work, or in the community, who make your life difficult—who seem to rob you of your serenity. For instance, when they are around everything feels hectic and chaotic, or very loud. Do you have people in your life who make your life difficult in some way?
- If so, who are they?
- What could you do to change this situation?
- Like everyone else, you need time alone to do the things you want to do and be the way you want to be. Do you have enough time alone to just “be” and to do the things you enjoy doing by yourself?
- If not, how could you arrange to get some time alone?
- Doing things that are fun and creative will improve the quality of your life and enhance your sense of well-being. These are the kinds of things you “get lost in”—like reading a good book, doing a craft project, or playing with your children. What kinds of things do you enjoy doing?
- Do you spend enough time doing these things you enjoy?
- If not, how could you arrange to spend more time doing these things?
- You need time to relax and to relieve stress. Sometimes the events and circumstances of our lives make it hard to do this. If you are unable to relax, you may notice that you feel badly. This can cause physical and emotional health problems. Do you take time to relax every day?
- If not, what could you do to relax (for example, listen to a relaxation tape, take a relaxation and stress reduction course, read a book on relaxation and do some of the exercises, set aside time each day to sit quietly and think about pleasant things)?

- Do you feel that you are getting good health care?
- If not, what are you going to do about it?

Home

The space where you live, your home, can affect how you feel. Perhaps you need to make some changes in your living space or living arrangement or find a different place to call home. The following questions may help you decide if you need to make some changes in living space.

- Do you look forward to going home and do you feel comfortable in your home?
- If not, why not? For instance, you may not like your living space because it is cluttered and messy. Or it may be too noisy.
- What could you change about your home that would make you want to go there and feel comfortable there?
- Do you feel safe and secure when you are at home?
- If not, why not?
- What could you do that would make you feel safe and secure when you are at home (for example, get new locks, move to a safer neighborhood)?
- You deserve private space in your own home for your own things, a place where you can go and know you will not be disturbed. Do you have private space in your home that others respect?
- If not, why not?
- What could you do to have private space in your home that is respected by others (for example, collaborate with the people you live to arrange private space for everyone, divide off a section of a room with furniture and make it your space)?
- The people you live with should treat you well and help you feel better. You should be supportive of each other. If you live with others, do they treat you well and help you to feel better?
If not, why not?
- What could you do so the people you live with treat you well and help you feel better (for example, discuss it with them, telling them how you want and need to be treated, move out, ask others to move)?
- You may need access to health care providers and other services that are necessary for your recovery and wellness. Is your home easily accessible to these services?
- If not, why not?
- What could you do to make it easier for you to access needed services (for example, move, check out public transportation options, learn to drive, get a car, carpool with others)?
- Some people prefer to live in the city or in a neighborhood, while others are not comfortable unless they are living in a rural area. In what kind of area would you prefer to live? If you don't live in such an area now, how could you make it happen?
- Some homes require lots of upkeep while others practically take care of themselves. If your home requires lots of upkeep, it may be difficult for you to keep up when you are having a hard time. The stress of not taking care of things that need attention can cause or worsen difficult symptoms. Is your home easy to take care of?

- If not, why not?
- What could you do to resolve this problem (for example, move, hire someone to do some of the upkeep, ask for help from family members or friends, trade tasks with others)?

Employment or Career

You may not have a job and wish you had one; or you may have a job or a career. You may enjoy this work. It may help you to understand your value and provide you with needed income. This work, or parts of it, may cause you stress and make your life more difficult. While there are difficult aspects of every job or career, overall you should have a job or career that you enjoy, one that increases your enjoyment of life rather than detracting from it. The following questions may help you decide if you need to make some changes in your employment situation:

- Does your job or career enhance your life and wellness?
- If it doesn't, what needs to change in order to make it a good job for you?
- What can you do to make these things happen?
- If you don't have a job, would you like one?
- If so, how could you make that happen?
- Would you rather work for someone else or work for yourself?
- If this is not your current situation, how could you make this happen?
- Do you have interests, skills, and talents that you could use to develop your own job or career?
- If so, what are they?
- What steps could you take to make this happen?
- Various resources in your area can assist you with work-related issues. They may be agencies for employment and training, vocational rehabilitation, protection and advocacy, social security, mental health agencies, or schools, colleges, and universities. You can begin this process by reaching out to one of these places and asking them who else they would suggest. As you reach out to an agency they suggest, ask for other referrals. If you feel you need to reach out for assistance on work-related issues, who are you going to reach out to first?
- You may know or find that you need more education and/or training to get the job of your choice. If you do, one or several of the agencies listed above would help you figure out how to do that.
How are you going to find out if you need more education and/or training?
- If you already know that you need more education or training, how are you going to work toward getting it?

Diet

The foods and other substances you put in your body may be affecting the way you feel. Many people have found that they feel much better when they pay close attention to what they put in their body, eliminating some things and adding others. If you feel your diet might be affecting the way you feel, try to become more aware of what you eat and drink. Notice how you feel half an hour or more after you have eaten that food or had that drink. If you notice you don't feel very good, try eliminating it from your diet for a short time. If you feel better not eating this particular food, you may want to avoid it as much as possible. Do you notice that you feel

badly after you have eaten certain foods or drunk certain beverages like sugar, caffeine, heavily salted, or fatty foods?

You may find that you feel much better when your diet consists mostly of foods that are wholesome and natural. While it may seem that these foods are more expensive, when you choose them instead of junk foods the increase in your food bill will be hardly noticeable.

According to the Food Guide Pyramid developed by the United States Department of Agriculture, (Home & Garden Bulletin Number 252), you need to eat the following each day —

- 3-5 servings of vegetables
- 2-4 servings of fruit
- 6-11 servings of grain based foods
- 2-3 servings of milk, yogurt, and cheese
- 2-3 servings of meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts
- use sparingly fats, oils, and sweets

Focus on foods that are wholesome, natural, and fresh. Do you feel you have a good diet?

If not, how are you going to improve it?

Do you often overeat or avoid eating?

This can cause you to feel badly. Make it a habit to eat three healthy meals a day with several healthy between-meal snacks if desired. Don't skip any meals.

Exercise

If you are exercising regularly, you will enjoy the following benefits —

- an overall feeling of well-being
- enhanced ability to sleep with more restful sleep
- improved memory and ability to concentrate
- a decrease in some uncomfortable symptoms
- decreased irritability and anxiety
- improved self-esteem
- weight loss
- improved muscle tone
- increased endurance
- increased mobility

Do you exercise regularly to help reduce unpleasant symptoms and improve your overall stamina and health while reducing stress?

If not, how could you make that happen?

With some illnesses or disabilities your ability to exercise may be limited or restricted in some way. You may be able to exercise for only short periods of time. You may need to avoid strenuous activities. You may be able to exercise only some parts of your body. You may need to avoid moving some parts of your body. You can do the same kind of exercise every day or vary it according to the weather, what you feel like, and what things you need to get done. Is your exercise tailored to meet your specific needs?

If not, what do you need to do to make sure your exercise protocol is the right one for you?

If you haven't exercised recently or have health problems that may affect your ability to exercise, check with your physician before beginning an exercise program.

Light

- You may notice that you have less energy than usual, feel less productive and creative, need more sleep, feel sad, down, or depressed, and have less control over your appetite as the daylight time gets shorter in the fall or when there is a series of cloudy days. If so, you may have Seasonal Affective Disorder (more commonly known as SAD). If you think this may be an issue for you, spending more time outdoors, or near windows when you are indoors, can relieve this problem, which tends to be worse for people who live in the north and in places where it is cloudy much of the time. You can supplement your light with bright or full spectrum light indoors or by using a specially manufactured light box. You may want to plan ahead, knowing that the fall and winter are hard times for you and that you need to take very good care of yourself and get as much outdoor light as possible. If you increase the light in your life, you may notice changes in the way you feel right away, or after 4 or 5 days. Do you think you have SAD?
- If so, what are you going to do about it?

Sleep

You will feel better if you sleep well. Your body needs time every day to rest and heal. If you often have trouble sleeping—either falling asleep, or waking during the night and being unable to get back to sleep—one or several of the following ideas might be helpful to you —

- Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. Avoid “sleeping in” (sleeping much later than your usual time for getting up). It will make you feel worse.
- Establish a bedtime “ritual” by doing the same things every night for an hour or two before bedtime so your body knows when it is time to go to sleep.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Eat on a regular schedule and avoid a heavy meal prior to going to bed. Don’t skip any meals.
- Eat plenty of dairy foods and dark green leafy vegetables.
- Exercise daily, but avoid strenuous or invigorating activity before going to bed.
- Play soothing music on a tape or CD that shuts off automatically after you are in bed.
- Try a turkey sandwich and a glass of milk before bedtime to make you feel drowsy.
- Try having a small snack before you go to bed, something like a piece of fruit and a piece of cheese or some cottage cheese so you don’t wake up hungry in the middle of the night. Have a similar small snack if you awaken in the middle of the night.
- Take a warm bath or shower before going to bed.
- Place a drop of lavender oil on your pillow.
- Drink a cup of herbal chamomile tea or take several chamomile capsules before going to bed.

You need to see your doctor if —

- you often have difficulty sleeping and the solutions listed above are not working for you.
- you awaken during the night gasping for breath
- your partner reports that your breathing is interrupted when you are sleeping

- you snore loudly
- you wake up feeling like you haven't been asleep
- you fall asleep often during the day

Do you have a hard time getting to sleep or staying asleep?

If so, what are you going to do to help yourself get a good night's sleep?

Simple Things You Can Do To Improve The Quality of Your Life

You can do many simple things to improve the quality of your life—things that are free or that would not cost very much—things that would make you feel better. Check off which of the following ideas appeals to you. Then note how you could make it happen.

- Increase your exposure to colors you enjoy (for example, change the colors in your home, wear clothes of color you enjoy).

If you feel it would be helpful to increase your exposure to colors you enjoy, how could you make this happen?

- Arrange to have more music in your life (for example, go to concerts, listen to the radio, CD's or tapes, learn to play an instrument, playing an instrument).

How could you make this happen?

- Increase your exposure to art (for example, going to museums and art galleries, hang posters and paintings in your home, take an art course).

How could you make this happen?

- Increase your exposure to the water (for example, live near water, swim, spend time near water, use a hot tub).

How could you make this happen?

In Conclusion

As you read through this booklet and answered the questions, you may have felt overwhelmed with all the things you need to do to help yourself feel better and improve the quality of your life. Review the booklet and draw a circle around one or two things you want to work on right away. Then, begin working on them. When you feel you have made some good progress on those issues, review the booklet again and choose something else to work on. Keep doing this until you have made your life the way you want it to be. Do it at your own pace. Take small steps—gradually they create big change.

Further Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Center for Mental Health Services
Web site: www.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center
P.O. Box 42557
Washington, D.C. 20015
1 (800) 789-2647 (voice)
Web site: www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

Consumer Organization and Networking Technical Assistance Center
(CONTAC)
P.O. Box 11000
Charleston, WV 25339
1 (888) 825-TECH (8324)
(304) 346-9992 (fax)
Web site: www.contac.org

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
(formerly the National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association)
730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60610-3526
(800) 826-3632
Web site: www.dbsalliance.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
(Special Support Center)
Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201-3042
(703) 524-7600
Web site: www.nami.org

National Empowerment Center
599 Canal Street, 5 East
Lawrence, MA 01840
1-800-power2u
(800)TDD-POWER (TDD)
(978)681-6426 (fax)
Web site: www.power2u.org

National Mental Health Consumers'
Self-Help Clearinghouse
1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1207
Philadelphia, PA 19107
1 (800) 553-4539 (voice)
(215) 636-6312 (fax)
e-mail: info@mhselfhelp.org
Web site: www.mhselfhelp.org

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