

Improving Your Emotional Regulation by Improving Your Health

Objective

To understand how your physical health can influence your emotions and identify ways to take better care of your body.

You Should Know

Your body and mind are intimately connected. Your body reacts physically to the way you think, how you feel, and the choices you make. Additionally, your health can influence your emotions in positive or negative ways, depending on your habits and choices. The foods you eat, the amount of sleep you get, and even your level of physical pain can further impact the intensity of your emotions and your ability to cope with them. When you are not physically at your best, it can negatively affect your concentration and decision-making skills and make it harder to resist unhealthy urges.

What to Do

Here are some suggestions for improving your physical habits and overall health.

Eating: Eat regularly throughout the day. Limit the amount of foods high in fat to avoid feeling heavy and sluggish. Limit the amount of sugary foods, which can cause bursts of energy before you “crash.” If you tend to eat too little, make sure you are eating enough nutrients and calories to keep you nourished to avoid physical weakness, drowsiness, headaches, or irritability.

Alcohol and recreational drugs: While you may feel happy, numb, or uninhibited at first, both alcohol and drugs can leave you feeling depressed, anxious, combative, or even paranoid. Excessive use can cause addiction, health issues, and other serious consequences. Limit your use of these substances, or eliminate them, if possible. If you have a history of alcohol and drug abuse and want to stop, contact a medical professional or someone you trust.

Caffeine and cigarettes: Caffeine is a stimulant that can leave you feeling jittery and irritated, intensifying feelings of anxiety you may already have. Products like sports drinks and energy drinks have large amounts of caffeine. While cigarettes can make you feel more relaxed, the physical dangers of smoking, including vaping, are well documented. If possible, cut back on these substances.

Exercise: Physical activity keeps your body healthy and strong. It is also proven to help reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, while improving your memory and the quality of your sleep. Try to get 20 minutes of exercise a day. Walking is an excellent low-impact activity for beginners. If you have physical limitations, consult your doctor about the best activities for you.

Sleep: The average adult needs 7-9 hours of sleep a night. A lack of sleep can cause issues with memory, concentration, and reflexes. It can also worsen depression. Avoid caffeine and alcohol at least 3 hours before bedtime. Eliminate the use of cell phones and other electronic devices in bed. Try to go to bed and wake at the same time each day. Avoid exercising or having a big meal shortly before bedtime.

Illness and Physical Pain: Experiencing pain and illness, especially long term, can intensify depression and anxiety. Seek a doctor's care as needed, and take medications as prescribed. Follow the advice of your health care providers, including changes to your diet and levels of physical activity.

Date: _____ Name: _____

Have you identified physical habits that you engage in that you feel are unhelpful or harmful to your emotions and physical health? Explain.

Which habits would you most like to improve or reduce?

What steps can you take to improve or reduce them?

Who can support you and hold you accountable in taking these steps (friends, family, doctor)?

The following chart can help you track your habits and the steps you are taking to improve them. If it does not apply, put an “x” in the box. Rate your pain and/or illness on a scale, where 1 = No pain/illness to 10 = My pain or illness severely limits me and negatively affects my quality of life. Track your progress for one week.

Day of the week	Eating Habits and Food Choices	Drug, Alcohol, Caffeine, or Cigarette Use	Sleep (hours, quality)	Exercise (activity and time spent)	Physical Pain or Illness (Rate 1-10)
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Now, review your week of habits and activity. Are there any patterns that stand out? Is there anything that surprised you? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe people, resources, or other supports that can help you and motivate you in setting goals for positive change.

What steps have you taken to make improvements in your physical health?

Describe any improvements that you have observed in your emotions or moods.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
