

# Mental Health Awareness Month: Tips & Tools for Resilience

There's no way around it: the past 14 months have been intense, and the mental health impacts of the pandemic will last for years – if not decades – to come. Whether it's the effects of social isolation, loss & grief, financial turbulence, nationwide divisiveness & upheaval, and/or the awkward reemergence of crafting our “new normal”, our neurology has been significantly impacted, both individually and collectively.

How do we move forward? How do we cultivate resilience for ourselves and our clients in this strange new world, in the face of so much worldwide trauma? In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, here are tips & tools for wellbeing:

## 1. Meditation

The research supporting the efficacy of meditation for mental wellbeing is astounding. Meditation has been proven to: relieve pain, increase focus & concentration, decrease blood pressure, improve sleep, control anxiety, and [much more](#). It can also be employed to cultivate other beneficial habits & feelings, such as a positive mood, optimistic outlook, and self-discipline.

Meditation doesn't need to mean sitting in a cave, staring at the wall! A simple 10 minute daily practice can be life-changing; try an app like [Calm](#) or [Headspace](#) to get started.

However, please note that there is some data that mindfulness is preferable to meditation for clinical depression, while the reverse is true for anxiety. Mindfulness can make some anxious folks even more hypervigilant; meditation can pull a depressed person even further down.

If you – or a client – is depressed and/or anxious, proceed with caution, testing short trials of both meditation and mindfulness practices in session a few times before employing the techniques solo.



## 2. Gratitude

Like meditation, gratitude has been shown to improve relationships, increase self-esteem, and enhance physical health.

“Participants who kept gratitude lists were more likely to have made progress toward important personal goals (academic, interpersonal and health-based) over a two-month period compared to subjects who did not.

Those who kept gratitude journals on a weekly basis exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives as a whole, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to those who recorded hassles or neutral life events”.

(Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

Try this simple daily habit: during the day, jot down three things you're grateful for; you can also try sharing via text or email to a friend or group of friends for accountability. At bedtime, call those three things to mind, and try to really feel the positive sensations they create in your body, as you fall asleep.

After a week, notice if your capacity for happiness has increased and/or if you find yourself feeling more buoyant.

### 3. Sleep & Rest

Sleep is an often overlooked component of a healthy lifestyle – and yet, ironically, it's one of the most powerfully effective ways to support good health. Good sleep supports immunity, healthy weight, increased productivity, and a host of other benefits for physical & mental health.

Conversely, poor sleep can cause high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack, heart failure, or stroke. Other potential adverse effects include obesity, depression, lowered immunity (especially important during the pandemic), and decreased sex drive ([Cleveland Clinic](#)).

Chronic sleep deprivation can affect your appearance: over time, it can lead to premature wrinkling and dark circles under the eyes. There's also a link between lack of sleep and an increase in the stress hormone, cortisol, which can break down collagen, the protein that keeps skin smooth.

Beyond the personal benefits of “beauty sleep”, the importance of good sleep to support mental & behavioral wellness cannot be overemphasized, especially in a culture like ours that actually values being too busy to get enough rest. For concise, yet compelling, data about the importance of sleep, check out [“Why We Sleep”, by Matthew Walker](#).



## 4. Move!

We all know that physical exercise reduces stress, releases feel-good endorphins, improves sleep, and can make challenges seem more manageable.

It can serve us mentally at least as much as physically, if not more. The key is finding a routine that you can maintain.

The latest research indicates that physical activity doesn't need to be lengthy to provide powerful benefits. Even just stretching for a few minutes every hour or two during the day can be effective in supporting physical & mental health.

Simple activity throughout the day like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, can add up. Challenge yourself to weave movement into your daily routine; and experiment with working out at different times of day, testing various forms of exercise.

Maybe a brisk walk on your lunch break is more attainable than going to a gym, especially as pandemic restrictions fluctuate. Or perhaps strength training in a home gym or taking a virtual dance or yoga class works best for your body & schedule. Determine what works realistically for you, and stick with it!

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mental health break

We'd like to share a simple fact that brings us joy: There's a superhero with a hearing aid called 'Blue Ear'. He was created by Marvel Comics to encourage a little boy to wear his own!



#mentalhealthbreak #findthegoodstuff #gratitude #daybyday

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