



# MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

by Penny Sitler, Executive Director

For over 60 years, Mental Health America of Licking County and our national Mental Health America have led the observance of May as Mental Health Month. The 2014 theme is "Mind Your Health". We hope you recognize the importance of mental health to overall health and wellness – there is NO health without mental health!

There are three common traits in mentally healthy people:

1. They have good self-esteem. That means that they like who they are. They feel like valuable, worthwhile people. They recognize they are not perfect – after all, who is? They think and behave in ways that are good for them and others.
2. They get along with others. They use self-control when interacting with other people, respecting the differences in others.
3. They are able to meet the demands of life, using positive ways to cope and deal with stress.

Above all, take good care of yourself. Today, we know a lot about ways to promote mental health. Here are some simple steps:

1. Get enough sleep
2. Eat well
3. Exercise
4. Get social support and find healthy ways to cope when you feel stressed.

How does stress affect you? It's a natural part of life. Unfortunately, stress has a negative connotation but stress also has beneficial effects. We call that good stress or EUSTRESS. Eustress motivates us, thrills us, excites us, stimulates us, produces creativity, etc. It's the bad stress or DISTRESS that causes the problems. Everyone handles stress differently – some better than others.

Left unchecked, stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioral problems which can affect your health, vitality, peace-of-mind, personal and professional relationships. Some signs of stress are short temper, general irritability, anger, impatience, agitation, ineffective work habits, sense of being overwhelmed, difficulty performing creative projects, headaches, tight neck and shoulders, back pain, chest pain, hypertension, jaw tension or teeth grinding, overeating or undereating, depression and/or anxiety – you get the idea! Can't you see how these symptoms can affect every facet of your life?

Here are some stress management techniques:

1. Learn to Relax. Use appropriate breathing, stretching, meditation/yoga, massage and effective communication.
2. Exercise! Try walking, hiking or running; swimming; biking; aerobics; weight lifting; kick boxing; playing sports such as basketball, tennis or golf; just get outside and play with your children, grandchildren or neighbors.

3. Eat right and sleep well. Start with a well-balanced diet, reduce caffeine and alcohol and get eight hours of sleep.
4. Learn to be assertive by standing up for yourself without being aggressive or argumentative. Know your limits – don't agree to things or volunteer when your plate is already full.
5. Use good time management skills. Get organized, plan ahead and prioritize your activities so you don't get overloaded.
6. Relax! Talk to someone and express your feelings. Do something you love to do. Do you have a hobby, such as needle arts, photography, enjoying pets or following your children's or grandchildren's activities? Don't be afraid to cry. Laugh – watch a funny television show or movie or read the comics. Spend time with people you enjoy.

It's important to find a balance for good mental health. Know who you are—make a list of your qualities, skills, hobbies and goals and focus on your assets. Develop skills for better time management. Make time for physical exercise. Develop a support system of family, friends and associates. Above all, take care of yourself.

Your local Mental Health America agency is available to help if you need it. We can point you toward community resources. Don't hesitate to call on us if you need assistance (740-522-1341).

Welcome to MHALC and let us know how we can be helpful to you! Please feel free to call me at 740-788-0302, or send an email to [psilter@mhalc.org](mailto:psilter@mhalc.org)