Improve Mental Health: 10 Scientific Techniques to Consider (H1)

(Normal Text) Do you ever feel like you're always overwhelmed or struggling with stress or anxiety? You're not alone. Almost a billion individuals across the world are believed to be suffering from a mental disorder, mainly depression and anxiety issues.

We use the term "mental health" to refer to emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Addressing common misconceptions and understanding the factors that affect mental health, such as genetics, lifestyle, environment, and stress levels, is required for effective improvement measures.

In this article, we get into the subject of mental health to address these issues and offer workable solutions. Our primary goal is to "improve mental health," a matter that is becoming more and more important in modern-day society. We intend to help you with techniques that have scientific support to improve mental health.

Join us as we shed light on the steps toward a healthier, happier, and more resilient mind.

1. Mindfulness Practices (H3)

(Normal Text) Mindfulness practices involve being totally present at the moment and aware of one's thoughts and feelings without any judgement.

A meta-analysis of 18 studies revealed that people undergoing meditation therapy had lessened depressive symptoms. One can build emotional resilience and better handle challenges by being in the present moment and accepting thoughts without being stuck on them.

"Mindfulness is effective when we plan to manage stress and improve mental health. It helps people develop self-awareness and find a sense of inner peace," says Dr Emily Turner*, a clinical psychologist at XYZ Hospital.

Emma*, a 32-year-old marketing executive, suffered from anxiety and racing thoughts. Through regular mindfulness meditation, she developed the ability to keep an eye on her nervous feelings without being dominated by them. She gradually felt more in control of herself and her emotions, which improved her productivity and helped her adopt a more relaxed attitude.

To be more mindful,

- Look for a place that is calm and comfortable to sit or to lie down.
- Concentrate on your breathing or a specific point of focus.
- Pay close attention to any physical feelings, sounds, smells, or other sensory experiences that occur during the session.
- Take into account any wandering thoughts without judgement and gently bring your focus back to the present moment.
- Get started with short sessions and extend them with time.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle, educates readers on incorporating mindfulness into everyday life.
- The app "Headspace" provides beginners and experienced practitioners with guided meditation and mindfulness exercises.

2. Physical Exercises

Exercise stimulates the brain to produce endorphins, which are natural mood enhancers. It also reduces the levels of stress hormones like cortisol and increases the production of neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which decreases the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

A large new analysis of meta-studies finds that engaging in 150 minutes per week of physical activity including brisk walking, weightlifting, and yoga significantly lowers psychological distress, depression and anxiety than standard treatment methods like medicine.

"Physical activity has the ability to improve mental health. Scientific studies have shown the positive effects of exercise on the brain," according to Dr Michael Chen*, a neuroscientist at XYZ Research University.

John*, a 45-year-old teacher, was suffering from low mood and exhaustion. He started including a daily walk of 30 minutes in his routine and found that his mood and energy levels had significantly improved. Exercise became his stress release, and he started to feel more optimistic and motivated.

To start a physical activity,

- Pick a workout that works for your preferences and level of fitness.
- If you're just starting out, begin with shorter sessions and gradually increase the time and intensity.
- Aim for 75 minutes of intense exercise or 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week.
- Find a workout partner or enrol in group classes to keep yourself motivated.
- Feed your body with a balanced diet to support your workouts and speed recovery.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "The Joy of Movement: How Exercise Helps Us Find Happiness, Hope, Connection, and Courage" by Kelly McGonigal, discusses the facts

behind how physical activity and exercise may increase happiness, resilience, and overall well-being.
- The app "Nike Training Club" offers a range of workouts for people of all fitness levels.

3. Cultivating Social Connections

Since humans are social beings, healthy relationships give us emotional support, reduce our feelings of loneliness, and enhance our overall happiness. Oxytocin, also known as the "bonding hormone," is released during social interactions and helps people feel connected and at peace.

Available research shows that social support and a sense of belonging can help individuals reduce depressive symptoms, lessen post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, and enhance overall mental health.

"Social connections are essential for emotional wellness. They build emotional resilience and promote a sense of belonging," says Dr Julia Roberts*, a psychologist at XYZ Community Health Center.

Emily*, a 28-year-old software developer, felt lonely and stressed due to her work commitments. She decided to join a neighbourhood hobby group and over time, formed meaningful connections. Talking about her experiences and having a support system lifted her mood and made her feel better.

To build healthy connections,

- Call or meet up with your friends and family often.
- Make time for your loved ones. Have meaningful conversations with them.
- Join clubs, organisations, or online groups that have relevance to your hobbies or interests.
- Attend social events or get-togethers to expand your network and meet new people.
- Visit new places and talk with different people.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression and the Unexpected Solutions" by Johann Hari, talks about how essential social connections are to prevent depression.
- The website "Meetup" helps you locate regional events and groups using your interests as a guide.

4. Nourishing Diet

Essential vitamins and minerals that promote brain function may be found in nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and omega-3 fatty acids. A balanced diet improves mood regulation and cognitive function. It also lowers the chance of developing mood disorders.

In 2016, a group of researchers discovered that a greater intake of fruits and vegetables was associated with higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being. It also led to improvement in their depression.

"Diet has a direct impact on brain health. Eating nutrient-rich foods provides the essential building blocks for ideal brain function, says Dr Michelle Lee*," a nutritionist at XYZ Wellness and Rehabilitation Center.

Adam, a 35-year-old graphic designer*, used to be dependent on fast food and sweet snacks. After switching to a balanced diet high in vegetables and seafood, he observed better attention and decreased feelings of irritability. His general health improved with a healthier diet.

To make a healthy diet,

- Consume a variety of fruits and vegetables in your daily meals.
- Choose whole grains over processed carbs to get long-lasting energy.
- Include sources of omega-3 fatty acids in your diet, such as fatty fish or flaxseeds.
- Consume foods high in probiotics like yoghurt, kefir, kimchi, etc.
- Limit your intake of processed foods, sugary snacks, and too much caffeine.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "The Mind-Gut Connection: How the Hidden Conversation Within Our Bodies Impacts Our Mood, Our Choices, and Our Overall Health" by Dr Emeran Mayer, reflects upon the connection between brain health and the gut.
- The website "Eat Right" offers nutritional resources and guidelines supported by science.

5. Quality Sleep

A good night's sleep is crucial to improve mental health. The brain goes through critical processes including memory consolidation and emotion control as you sleep.

The risk of mental health illnesses is decreased by regular, restful sleep. It also increases mood and cognitive performance.

According to research, people who experience sleeping problems like insomnia or obstructive sleep apnea also experience greater rates of depression than those who don't.

"The cornerstone of mental health is sleep. It enhances emotional processing and helps the brain to recharge," says Dr Rachel Simmons*, a sleep specialist at XYZ Neurology Clinic.

Harry, a 40-year-old entrepreneur*, frequently skipped sleep to meet work demands. However, after prioritising 7-8 hours of sleep every day, he found that his productivity and attitude towards life improved.

To get quality sleep,

- Have a fixed bedtime and wake-up time, even on weekends.
- Limit your screen time at least 30-60 minutes before bed.
- Set a peaceful bedtime routine to let your body know it's time to sleep.
- Ensure your sleep environment is quiet, dark and comfortable.
- If you have ongoing sleep issues, speak with a healthcare professional.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams" by Matthew Walker, highlights how crucial sleep is to one's general health and well-being.
- The app "Sleep Cycle" monitors sleep patterns and offers tips for improving sleep.

6. Engaging in Creative Expression

Creative expression acts as a therapeutic outlet, enabling people to process their emotions, lower their stress levels, and enhance their general psychological health. It encourages self-discovery and offers a sense of satisfaction and delight.

In a study, cognitive neuroscientists found that making art lowers cortisol levels, which are indicators of stress, and that it is possible to improve mental health through art.

"Creative expression provides an excellent way of gaining access to and tackling emotions. Being creative can be soothing and powerful," says Dr. David Foster*, an art therapist at XYZ School.

Jasper*, a 40-year-old engineer, used to struggle with self-doubt and anxiety. He found relief from anxiousness by taking up painting as a hobby. It helped him to communicate his thoughts without using words.

Prior to engaging in anything,

- Choose a creative activity that appeals to you, such as writing, playing an instrument, painting, or sketching.
- Schedule regular time only for being creative.
- Create a non-judgmental place where you can freely express your creativity.
- Use your sense of imagination to visualise inspiring and uplifting scenarios.
- Accept imperfection and place more emphasis on the process than the result.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity" by Julia Cameron, is a well-known guidebook for cultivating self-expression and creativity..
- The website "Creative Live" offers online classes and workshops on various forms of creativity.

7. Practising Gratitude

Research suggests people who kept gratitude journals exercised more frequently, experienced fewer ailments, felt better about their lives overall, and were optimistic about the upcoming week.

"People experience happiness and positivity when they engage in practices that promote gratitude. They can be simple but effective methods to improve mental health," says Dr Sarah Adams*, a psychologist at the XYZ Rehabilitation and Recovery Center. Grateful individuals tend to focus on the positive, leading to increased resilience in the face of challenges.

Nancy*, a 30-year-old writer, battled with stress and negative thinking. She observed a change in her attitude after creating a daily gratitude diary. She found joy in

everyday experiences by acknowledging and writing down things she was grateful for.

To cultivate gratitude,

- Create a gratitude diary and write three things every day for which you are grateful.
- Being mindful and appreciating the little things are ways to practise gratitude.
- Write thank-you cards or verbally express your gratitude for others.
- Do good deeds or volunteer for a cause that really means to you.
- Make the most of challenging situations to look for the positives and lessons to be thankful for.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "The Gratitude Diaries: How a Year Looking on the Bright Side Can Transform Your Life" by Janice Kaplan, looks into the positive impact of gratitude on happiness.
- The app "Gratitude" helps you develop a daily gratitude practice.

8. Setting Realistic Goals

No matter how small, achieving these goals may build self-confidence and give a sense of accomplishment. For example, you can set aside 15 minutes each day to learn a new language, instrument, or any other skill you've always wished to learn.

According to a study, people who had a greater purpose in life at the beginning of the experiment were more likely to still be alive five years later than those who had a lesser purpose.

"Setting goals is a powerful approach to give your life a shape and meaning. Realistic goals help people stay motivated and focused so that they can accomplish their desired outcomes" – Dr Rachel Simmons*, a psychologist at XYZ Research Institution.

David*, a 36-year-old project manager, used to consistently feel let down because he set unrealistic targets. By setting smaller, more achievable goals, he felt more motivated and accomplished.

To set attainable goals,

- Make sure you clearly define, specify, and measure your goals.
- Break up your big goals into smaller, more doable levels.
- Define deadlines for each level and keep track of your progress.
- If you face challenges, be kind to yourself and modify your goals a little if needed.
- Celebrate all of your victories to keep yourself inspired.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "Goals! How to Get Everything You Want Faster Than You Ever Thought Possible" by Brian Tracy, delivers an exhaustive description of how you can set goals and develop a step-by-step plan to achieve them.
- The website "MindTools" provides resources and tools for efficient goal-setting.

9. Embracing Nature

Nature therapy, also called 'ecotherapy', involves the practice of immersing oneself in natural surroundings to improve mental health. In fact, a review of a number of researches showed evidence linking exposure to nature to better blood pressure, mental health, physical activity, and sleep as well as increased cognitive performance and brain activity.

"There are numerous benefits of nature on mental wellness. Ecotherapy uses the healing power of nature to revive balance and soothe emotional distress," explains Dr Robert Green*, an environmental psychologist at XYZ Architecture Firm.

Eliza*, a 26-year-old marketing assistant, felt overwhelmed by the urban lifestyle and endless screen time. by going for frequent walks in a local park and by going on weekend hikes she found that she could recharge and get back on track.

To get ecotherapy,

- Spend time in nature regularly, whether it is for a little stroll during breaks or prolonged outdoor adventures on the weekends.
- While in nature, practise mindfulness by paying attention to the sights, sounds, and sensations you experience.
- Take part in leisurely outdoor activities like gardening, birdwatching or photography.
- To enhance the experience, think about enrolling in nature-related groups or classes.
- Go on excursions to natural places such as forests, mountains, or beaches.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative" by Florence Williams, discusses the scientific basis of the numerous benefits of nature on mental health.
- The website "All Trails" helps you find nearby trails and outdoor activities.

10. Seeking Professional Help

85% of people with mental health issues in low and middle-income nations do not receive any treatment at all. A key initial step to improve mental health is to seek help from a mental health expert, such as a therapist or counsellor. These experts provide evidence-based solutions, support, and guidance catered to specific needs.

"Therapy is an effective method to improve mental wellness. It provides a caring and collaborative atmosphere for healing and personal development," says Dr Lisa Anderson*, a licensed therapist at XYZ Psychiatric Clinic. It provides a private and secure space to examine emotions, address problems, and come up with ways to deal with them.

Sales manager Edward*, age 37, was experiencing extreme stress and anxiety at work. After receiving therapy, he learned important lessons about coping with stress and developing resilience, which helped his professional performance and his relationships with others.

To seek help from experts,

- Recognise that you may be facing mental health issues and that opting to get help from a professional is a positive and good move.
- Find a licenced mental health professional who specialises in your area of concern by doing some research.
- Set up an initial appointment to talk about what you're seeking and see whether therapy is a good fit
- Share your thoughts and feelings honestly and openly throughout therapy sessions.
- Make a commitment to the therapy process and implement what has been suggested.

Some helpful resources:

- The book "Maybe You Should Talk to Someone: A Therapist, Her Therapist, and Our Lives Revealed" by Lori Gottlieb deals with how therapy may change people from both ends of the couch.
- The website "Psychology Today" helps you look for therapists and counsellors in your area.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (H3)

1. Why is it important to improve mental health? (H4)

It is essential to improve mental health for a better quality of life and overall well-being. It builds resilience, develops healthy relationships, boosts productivity, and helps in dealing with challenges in life.

2. What are the factors that affect mental health?

(Normal Text) Mental health can be affected by a person's genetic behaviour, experiences in life, stress, trauma, relationships, lifestyle choices, surroundings and physical health can influence mental health. The interaction between these factors can have a positive or negative effect on someone's mental health.

3. What can you do to protect yourself against mental health problems?

To protect yourself against mental health problems, prioritise self-care, adopt a healthy lifestyle, manage stress, communicate openly, work on mindfulness, be physically active, build meaningful relationships, and learn to see early signs for timely help.

4. How serious is poor mental health?

One should take their mental health seriously because it has a significant influence on their quality of life and general well-being. It may lead to emotional distress, poor interpersonal relationships, decreased productivity, and, in extreme cases, can lead to suicidal thoughts or self-harm.

5. How can you observe mental health issues?

Signs of mental health issues include constant mood swings, sadness, changes in sleep or appetite, social withdrawal, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, substance use, and trouble carrying out everyday work.

The Bottom Line (H3)

(Normal Text) In this article, we discussed 10 science-backed techniques to improve mental health. These can help with both mental health and general well-being. Effective methods that improve mental health include mindfulness practices, physical exercise, cultivating social connections, nourishing diets, quality sleep, creative expression, gratitude, goal setting, embracing nature, and seeking professional help. These methods can help you boost emotional resilience, reduce stress and anxiety, and live a happier, more fulfilled life.

Remember, prioritising mental health is a process that takes time and effort. Never hesitate to seek help when you need it. Use the linked helplines to get in touch if you or someone you know needs immediate support. Feel free to post comments and questions. We're happy to interact and help. Together, let's prioritise our mental health by fostering an atmosphere that values compassion and understanding.

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*These are fictional characters. Quotes from real individuals will be shared during actual work.