

Science for Mental Health

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Introduction

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely absence of disease. That is how the WHO defined health in 1946 and it has not been amended since 1948.



psychologist Carl Jung

Mental health refers to a broad array of activities directly or indirectly related to the mental well-being component of the above definition. It is related to

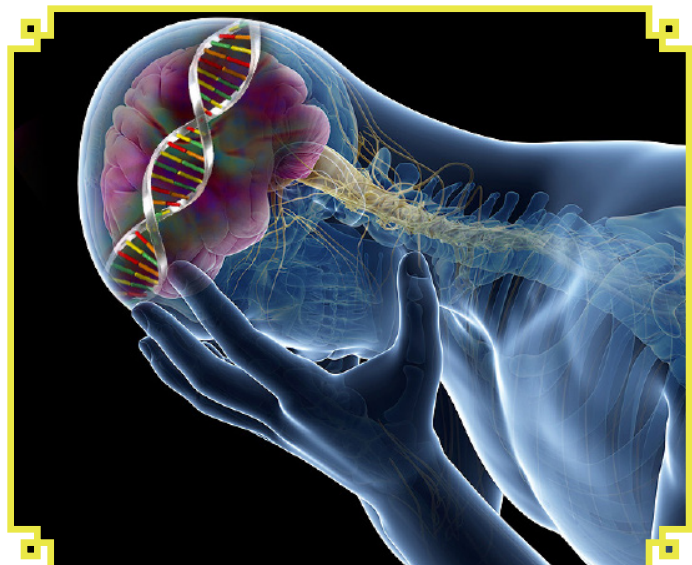
the promotion of well-being, in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. It also includes prevention of mental disorders and the treatment and rehabilitation of the people affected by mental disorders.

The government of United Kingdom adopted the strategy “no health without mental health” to bring mental health to mainstream in 2011.

Mental health is how we face and overcome our psychological, emotional and social problems as we go through life. As we all know, we face many problems during our lives, some

pleasant and easy to solve, some unpleasant and difficult to solve. Some call these, ‘stresses’ which is a very popular term. It is our mental health which helps us to get over them. However, as the psychologist Carl Jung said “Man needs difficulties, they are necessary for health”. We learn from the difficulties we face and emerge better equipped to face new ones. However, we also know that some of us ‘stumble’ mentally when we face problems.

So how does Science help us to





poor school and later academic performance, problem behavior and aggression. Bad parenting is lack of affection or love from the parents and lack of caring by the parents. Overprotection is also bad parenting as children should be given appropriate freedom to make their own decisions.

A good parenting style would be to show love and affection, to be caring without overprotecting the child and allowing him to realize his potential.

gain better Mental Health?

Early life

Long time ago William Wordsworth the English poet stated that “child is the father of man?”. This is very true. Our childhood experiences are extremely influential in shaping our strengths and weaknesses when we become adults.

Actually it is not only the mental health that is influenced by many factors in childhood, many physical diseases like obesity, heart diseases and illnesses like diabetes have their origins in childhood. Sometimes even early death in adults is due to factors that started in childhood. It is now accepted that physical abuse in the form of beating a child, sexual abuse where children are used in sexual activities by adults, emotional abuse when children are not cared for, not receiving the love they should get and poverty in the family, all lead to mental and physical illnesses when such children become adults. In fact things start even before we are born. That is, when we are in



the wombs of our mothers. If the mother does not have adequate food, that is she has poor nutrition, or she gets physically or mentally ill, the baby will be affected. The effects will be seen either in childhood or later in adult life. The mother should have acceptable obstetric care during the pregnancy, during childbirth and in the period after the birth of the baby. Difficult childbirths with birth injuries to the baby could lead to brain damage and poor mental health later. Research also shows that bad parenting is associated with

So these are some scientifically proven factors that affect mental health early in life.

To sum up, things start before a person is born. Good nutrition for the mother, reasonably good physical health, a stable mental state free of unnecessary problems are important at that stage. Birth of the child should take place with adequate obstetric care to prevent birth injuries.

The child should have adequate love and care from the parents



without over protection which is good parenting style. There should not be any child abuse, physical, sexual and emotional.

Mid life

It is important for people to have good social support, as humans are sociable creatures. We establish relationships, first with our family, then with other associates like friends, workmates and partners. Satisfying relationships are essential for good mental health. We have observed that in our Sri Lankan culture, the relationship of an adolescent girl or a young woman with her mother is extremely important. If this is fractured, the young woman tends to go through many psychological problems.

There is scientific evidence which shows that exercise is really helpful for physical health, it reduces pulse rate, blood pressure and improves the capacity of the lungs.

Research also supports a positive and lasting relationship between regular exercise and mental health. Exercise is good for mental health. If you are not used to regular exercising, it is common sense to start slowly and gradually build

it up. Any form of exercise is good for us. It should be an

activity that you enjoy. Otherwise there is a risk of dropping out of the activity as people tend to get bored with exercise, unless they are highly motivated. It is now generally agreed that walking, jogging, running, even stationary running and swimming are good for us. It should be done at least for 30 minutes and preferably five days a week, but even three times a week is acceptable if continued regularly. Health benefits occur within about four months. There is scientific evidence that some chemicals are released in the body and the brain due to exercise, that makes us feel better. While exercising, we forget our problems and the stresses and those who may be feeling that they have lost control of their lives, gain some sense of mastery and happiness.

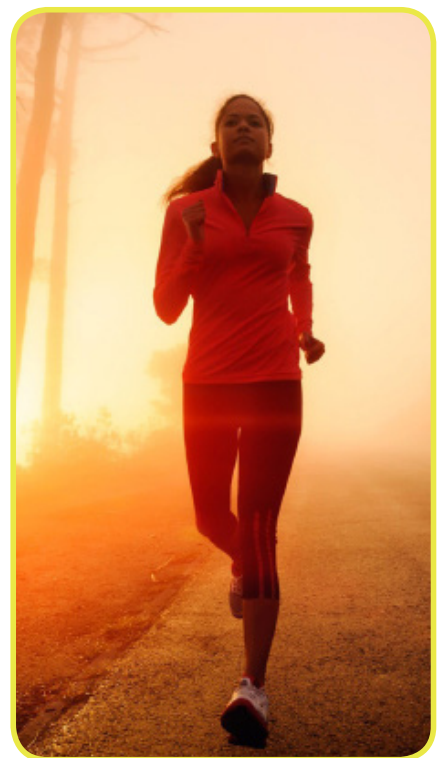
Use of alcohol and other drugs like heroin and cannabis almost always destroys our mental health. There is a lot of scientific evidence to show that they cause severe physical and mental disorders.

Spirituality is also important to many people. It is not just holding on to a religious belief and belonging to an established religion. Spirituality is a deep seated sense

of meaning and purpose in life together with a sense of belonging and of harmony with the universe. It helps people to form a new sense of meaning which fosters hope and peace of mind. Spirituality is good for mental health.

Late life

Loneliness is now recognized as a real problem, especially in older adults. Depression occurs in the lonely, and the two are a lethal combination. Suicide is common among the lonely.





There is some recent evidence to show that even in later life, taking up leisure activities like reading, board games like checkers and chess, playing musical instruments, dancing, exercise and walking are linked with a reduced risk of developing dementia. Regular checking of blood pressure and getting treated if indicated, would reduce the occurrence of dementia due to high blood pressure.

Loneliness could be social or emotional. Social loneliness occurs when the number of relationships and their quality are less than what he desires. Emotional loneliness is where the intimacy of the relationship is not satisfactory. So for good mental health, loneliness should be avoided.

Depression or the illness where people become very sad, which affects their appetite, sleep and enjoyment of life is common in older people. There is scientific evidence that those who are active physically and mentally, have social connections, belong to a group and are helpful to others, have less chance of developing depression. Effective treatments are available

for those who develop this illness.

Another major problem in old age is the development of memory failure. As we tend to live longer, we get more and more memory problems leading to a condition called dementia. About 5% of the 65 year old population and 20% to 40% of those aged 85 years have dementia, mostly Alzheimer type, called Alzheimer's disease. Another less common type of dementia occurs due to uncontrolled high blood pressure.

Can science help to prevent or effectively treat Alzheimer's disease and other dementias?



Medications are available to stop the progression of memory failure in dementias. More research is currently under way to find a cure i.e. to reverse the process once started.

These are some of the more prominent scientific advances that would help in promotion of mental health at present.



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