

WELLNESS CONNECTION

Live well. Work well.

MAY 2020

IN THIS ISSUE

► INSPIRE TO MOVE

Mindfulness

► NOURISHING YOU

*Healthy Peanut Butter
Energy Bites*

► HEALTHY HARMONY

Mental Health 101

► GOOD DECISIONS

*Employee Assistance
Programs can Improve
Mental Health in the
Workplace*

► EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

*Taking Care of Mental
Health During COVID-19*



Photo Credit: Nghia Le on Unsplash

Mental Health During COVID-19

System Wellness Committee Member, Seth Yoder, recently had the opportunity to speak with Bethany Bilyeu, Executive Director Student Support Services, Springfield campus, to discuss the importance of mental health during COVID-19. During their conversation he learned about how she came into her current role and some helpful information and resources on how we all can take a little better care of our mental health during this highly unusual time. To find out more about their conversation please read our interview on page 6.

► ILLINOIS MENTAL WELLNESS RESOURCES LINKS

Call4Calm – free emotional support text line; text TALK to 552020

Illinois Helpline for Opioids and Other Substances
1-833-2FINDHELP or HelplineIL.org

CARES Line – 24-hour Crisis and Referral Entry Services (CARES)
Call 1-800-345-9049

[Remote Patient Monitoring Program](#)

[National Mental Health Resources \(all on one page\)](#)

McKinley Wellness App - The Wellness Guide of UIUC

A letter from senior leadership:

["There are no words to express our gratitude and our pride in your remarkable work and dedication during the COVID-19 pandemic."](#)

► FEEDBACK



SOWellness@uillinois.edu

The System Office Wellness Committee does our best to site relevant information from reputable sources. Employees should always consult their physician before making any kind of health decision or change.



READ TIME:
3 MINUTES

Mindfulness

By Lydia Schillinger

Have you been outside walking, going for a run or a bike ride and your thoughts get lost in the smell of fresh air, the warm breeze on your face, the rustle of the leaves in the trees, the sun on your skin and the sound of the pavement? If so, your brain is promoting new thought patterns and you are being mindful. Being mindful is bringing awareness to the present moment. This presence and awareness are the foundation to changing a thought pattern. May is Mental Health month and Cycling month and we have many reasons right now for a need to stay happy, energized and focused. Getting outdoors to ride a bike is one way we may achieve mindfulness which is good for your mental health. For other ways to be mindful check out the [Mayo Clinic website](#). Below are a few mindfulness exercises:

- **Pay attention.** It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment.** Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.** Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing.** When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.

To help with mindfulness, try out a meditation app. I particularly enjoy the [Calm](#) app. It has a few free features, or you may choose to pay for more options. [Head Space](#) is another mindful app. Check them out! There are a lot of apps out there to help you sleep more, stress less and live better.

If you enjoy exercising as a way to be mindful, check out the article written by Selene Yeager, [Cycling is One of the Best Activities You Can Do to Banish a Bad Day](#). She references a cross-sectional research study that analyzed the association between physical exercise and mental health in 1.2 million individuals in the USA between 2011 and 2015.

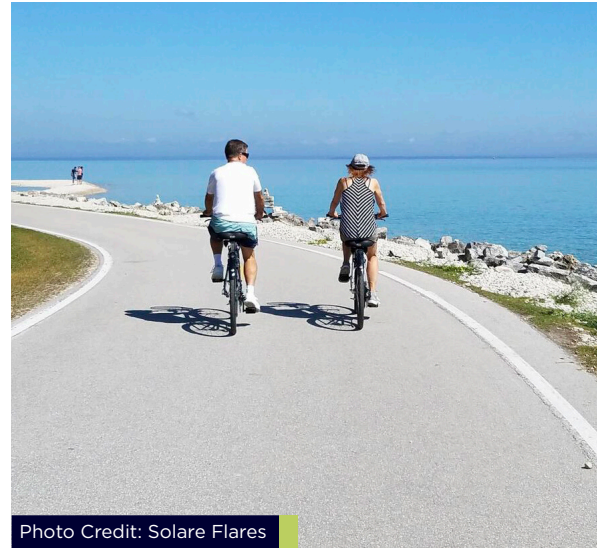


Photo Credit: Solare Flares

Of the 75 types of exercise studied to show an increase in mental health, playing team sports ranked first, cycling was second, the third was aerobic or gym exercising and the fourth was running.

Except for team sports, the other top three ways to improve mental health may be done alone or with others*. Cycling is one way to enjoy mindfulness. Cycling can sharpen your mood and improve your thinking. Repetitive movement has a relaxing effect on the brain. Whether you are going for a walk or cycling, the repetitive movement is good for your soul.

According to Bill Bones Bike Law, here are the Top 7 Mental Health Benefits of Cycling:

- **Reduces stress**
- **Reduces risk of depression**
- **Helps you sleep better**
- **Improves your memory**
- **Helps you feel good**
- **Improves creative thinking**
- **Helps boost productivity**

Which activity will you choose to achieve mindfulness?

*During this pandemic if you are enjoying the great outdoors with others be sure to follow state guidelines for social distancing. ■

► NOURISHING YOU



READ TIME:
3 MINUTE



CONTENT SOURCE:
[CLICK HERE](#)

Healthy Peanut Butter Energy Bites

Recipe by Leana Coffey

When you need something sweet to eat, reach for a few easy to make no-bake energy bites. Made with wholesome pantry ingredients, they contain a good combination of protein, carbs, fiber, and healthy fats that can help you get through a busy day. Eaten in moderation, they are sure to satisfy your sweet tooth and not derail your healthy diet. Modify ingredients based on your preferences and dietary needs or allergies.

Ingredients

- 1 cup old fashioned oats
- ½ cup natural creamy peanut butter
- ¼ cup honey
- ¼ cup unsweetened coconut (optional)
- ¼ cup mini semi-sweet chocolate chips (or dark chocolate chips, if preferred)

Instructions

1. Stir all ingredients in a large mixing bowl until thoroughly combined.
2. Chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes - 1 hour.
3. Roll mixture into 1 inch balls.
4. Enjoy immediately!

Tips

- Double the recipe, balls can be stored in refrigerator for up to 1 week or frozen for up to 3 months.
- If you have trouble getting the balls to stick together, add more peanut butter to make the mixture a bit stickier.



Photo Credit: blessthisessplease.com

- Can also press the mixture into a square baking dish to make energy bars instead of balls.
- Can add raisins or dried cranberries for additional sweetness, and vanilla protein powder, flax seeds, or chia seeds for additional protein.
- Additional recipe combinations can be found at tosimplyinspire.com. ■

► FOOD FOR THOUGHT



What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when you bring what is within out into the world, miracles happen.

- Henry David Thoreau



READ TIME:
2 MINUTES
(NOT INCLUDING QUIZZES)



CONTENT SOURCE:
[CLICK HERE](#)

Mental Health 101

By Jackie Billhymer

According to a 2017 national [survey](#) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), nearly one in five adults in the United States live with a mental illness. Everyone faces challenges in life that can affect their mental health. Mental health is key to overall health and wellbeing because it can help you

- Cope with the stresses of life
- Be physically healthy
- Have good relationships
- Make meaningful contributions to your community
- Work productively
- Realize your full potential

Mental illness is common and there are treatments available. It is important that you are able to recognize your feelings and identify your emotions. Journaling is one way to do this. Write down at least three feelings you had over the course of the day and what caused them. Life has many ups and downs and it is important to remember that even good or desired changes can cause stress.

Connecting with each other is what human beings do. Talk it out with someone you trust. Check out the website [Make Sure Your Friends Are Okay](#) for resources on how to have meaningful conversations. Create a health routine that is best for you and, if needed, get rid of toxic influences. You can [improve your mental health](#) by gradually making small changes and using mental health tools, like practicing gratitude and using meditation and relaxation techniques.

The way you think, feel, and act can affect the way your body responds to change. Your emotions can directly affect your physical and mental health. Some warning signs of a mental health problem are

- A change in your eating or sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from the people and activities you enjoy
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains



Photo Credit: Zane Lee from Unsplash

- Feeling of helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Having severe mood swings that cause problems in your relationships
- Thoughts and memories that you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Not being able to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

If you, or someone you know, is experiencing any of these signs, or if you think you have a mental health problem, get help immediately. You can contact the University's [employee assistance program \(EAP\)](#) and there are [national programs](#) available as well. ■



READ TIME:
5 MINUTES



CONTENT SOURCE:
[CLICK HERE](#)

Employee Assistance Programs can Improve Mental Health in the Workplace

By Christina A. Worthington

It is not easy for people with a mental health issue to come forward and talk about it, especially in a formal environment like the workplace. Though the stigma is wearing away, conditions like depression and anxiety are still perceived as signs of weakness. Luckily, the University of Illinois offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in its package of benefits to employees. EAPs provide assessment and services for addressing a range of personal problems and concerns that interfere with employees' well-being and work performance. Utilizing the EAP is a good decision because it is not only cost effective but also available to family members of the employee.

Here are some resources available through the State of Illinois Employee Assistance Program.

Counseling. With recent changes to the way we work, educate and live, it's completely normal to experience feelings of apprehension. Licensed professionals are trained to help with common challenges such as stress, anxiety, grief, marital/family relationship concerns, parenting, addictions and more. Counseling sessions are solution-focused; they can help you better understand challenges and determine helpful next steps to move forward.

Coaching. There are times when we can all use a little help, encouragement and insight to keep us moving forward. Coaching is a confidential program designed to help you define goals, keep accountable and achieve your desired end state. Coaches can help you work on solutions for a variety of issues including handling work stress, parenting, weight loss, not getting enough sleep and more.

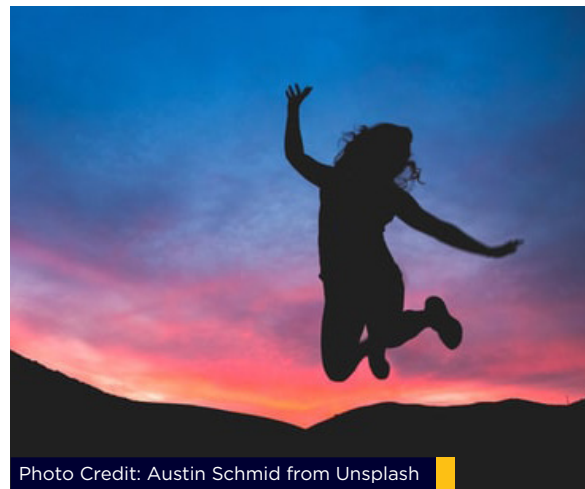


Photo Credit: Austin Schmid from Unsplash

Self-Care Programs. When it comes to your emotional health, finding the care and support you need can be hard. Online programs help you learn and practice skills so you can feel better on your own time. Programs are confidential and available to complete at your own pace, 24/7/365.

Financial Coaching. Whether you're planning for retirement, repaying student loans, buying a home, figuring out how to manage your debt, or dealing with any kind of financial issue, you can consult with a financial coach or take advantage of the financial resources library.

For more information on how you can access the University of Illinois' Employee Assistance Program, visit the [System Office Human Resources Employee Assistance Programs page](#). ■

Our Positive Experiences during this time of Uncertainty and Change

Being at home and not having to commute has allowed me more time to focus on my physical health. It's been a good thing for my family, too; I didn't realize until the shelter in place happened how much we were in a constant state of rush here, rush there.

- Jacqueline Bilhmer

I'm loving the impromptu hugs and cuddles from my kids and dogs throughout the day. It's been fun leading Zoom workout classes for my friends, too!

- Colleen Crawford

I love having the extra time in the mornings to get my workout in for the day. If the weather is nice, I can go for a walk on my lunch hour.

- Leana Coffey



READ TIME:
8 MINUTES

Taking Care of Mental Health During COVID-19

By Seth Yoder

Seth Yoder from the System Office Wellness Committee recently sat down with Bethany Bilyeu to discuss the importance of mental health during COVID-19. Bethany was hired as Director of the Counseling Center at the University of Illinois Springfield in October of 2018. In December of 2019 she transitioned into the role of Executive Director of the Counseling Center and Health Services, a role that supports the Office of Disability Services, Health Services and the Counseling Center.

Q. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has forced people to alter their lives suddenly and in some cases drastically. Are there certain stress indicators that we should be looking for that we may not be noticing?

A. We are all feeling a little out of sorts these days, but it is important to pay attention to when you are not feeling yourself because these are often the first signs of increased levels of stress. What types of factors could be contributing to your increased levels of stress? Are you not as active as you once were, are you not connecting with family, friends, and colleagues as you once were? Do you not have any personal time? These are all perfectly normal questions to ask yourself given what we are all currently having to endure. Recognizing atypical behavior is the first step in treating the stress you may be dealing with.

Q. During this pandemic many people are feeling a great deal of stress, anxiety, fear, and loneliness. It is important that everyone does a better job of taking care of themselves during this challenging time. Do you have

any recommendations on self-care strategies for our minds and bodies?

Here are a few key areas we can all be tuning into on a regular basis that will help us cope with some of the effects of COVID-19.

- Practice mindfulness activities
- Stay active mentally and physically
- Don't be so hard on yourself
- Dig into some hobbies you may have lost touch with
- Stay in touch with family and friends you may not regularly speak with
- Do your best to create a schedule and try to stick to that schedule

Q. Supporting children through the challenges presented by COVID-19 can be difficult, do you have any recommendation on how to help children coping with the stress brought on by the pandemic?

A. It is important that parents model the behavior they wish their children to display. Examples of this can be creating time for mindfulness, exercise, and hobbies. By spending this time to model this behavior hopefully these behaviors will continue even after we return to normal life. Parents should also acknowledge the stress their children are going through. Children are experiencing this event in much the same way adults are. It is important that parents provide the support and structure needed to endure this crisis.

Q. What are some things that we can do in our communities to help support those struggling to cope with the stress associated with the pandemic?

In times like this it's the little things that make the difference. Things like checking on a neighbor to see if there's anything you can do to help. Putting artwork in front of your house or on the sidewalk so people who are taking walks around the neighborhood can appreciate it. There are also opportunities to donate and work at your local food banks. While all of these things may seem simple they could make all the difference in helping those in our communities make it through this challenging time.

Q. What type of resources are available to individuals or individuals we know who think they may need support?

One of the silver linings to this pandemic are all the resources that have come out of it. On our computers and smart devices, we are connected to so many different resources. There are apps for mindfulness, movement, stress, brain teaser games, and many more (see below for a list of recommended apps). We will put a link to helpful resources on the System HR website. We encourage all staff to share with colleagues and friends any resources you think might be beneficial to them during this time of need.

Mental Health Wellness App: Youper

Journaling App: Daylio

Mindfulness App: Headspace

Mood Tracker App: Moodpath

**All of these apps can be found in the Apple and Google app stores*