Managing Your Physical and Mental Health

Some quick tips for soundness of body and mind

June 1, 2022 By Tim Murphy

- DEVELOP A STRONG RAPPORT WITH YOUR PRIMARY PROVIDER. (These days it's often a nurse or nurse practitioner.) Don't be afraid to share everything with them—including the stuff you might be embarrassed about, like sex, drinking, drugs, domestic tension or bad moods. They need to know the whole you to best help you. And if they don't seem interested in the whole you, consider your options for other providers.

- BE HONEST ABOUT MED TROUBLES. Can't or won't take your meds as prescribed for HIV or something else? Don't be ashamed, avoidant or secretive. Tell your provider so that, together, the two of you—or maybe your whole care team if you have one—can craft a solution that works best for you.

- TAKE BABY STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFESTYLE CHOICES. Swap out fried and fatty foods for more fruits, vegetables and lean protein, like chicken, fish or tofu. Try ditching sugary sodas for flavored water. Move more—even if it starts with a mere 10-minute walk per day. And talk honestly with your provider about smoking, drinking and drug use so that you can get help to quit—or at least reduce the harm.

  The truth is, a huge chunk of your health and life expectancy is about what you do outside your provider's office. So when you're there, mention any issues you have in order to get the support you need to baby-step your way to wellness.

- MOOD MATTERS. How many days a week do you feel relatively calm, happy and purposeful? Or anxious, afraid and unable to experience pleasure? These are key indicators of your mental health, which is linked in countless ways to your physical health. (Case in point: See how much your mood lifts after a few weeks of walking as little as 10 minutes a day or cutting your intake of sugary sweets in half.)

  If your provider isn't asking you about your daily mood, they should be. Counseling, meds, exercise and diet are all ways to get to a happier, healthier you—so bring 'em up at your next visit.

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