



# May 2023: Mental Health Awareness Month & The Science of Happiness



***“Mental health is not a destination, it’s a process. It’s about how you drive, not where you’re going.” – Noam Shpancer***

Welcome to the May **2023 edition of TotalWellbeing**, your guide to the **8 dimensions of wellbeing**. This month we explore the science of happiness as well as celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month! Mental Health Awareness Month, a time to shed light on the importance of taking care of our mental health and well-being. Mental health is an essential part of our overall health, and we all deserve to prioritize it just as we do with our physical health. This month let's focus on raising awareness about mental health and reducing the stigma around seeking help.

One critical aspect of mental health is the science of happiness. Research has shown that happiness is not just a fleeting feeling, but it is also a vital factor in our overall well-being. The study of happiness has evolved over the years, and scientists have discovered many factors that contribute to happiness.

One of the essential factors in the science of happiness is gratitude. Being grateful for what we have and expressing gratitude has been linked to increased happiness and well-being. Taking time each day to reflect on the good things in our lives can help us appreciate what we have and find happiness in the present moment.

## ***This Month’s Focus***

### ***Free Webinar:***

[The Science of Happiness](#)

### ***MINESblog:***

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[Mental Health  
Awareness Month -  
Celebrating How Far We  
Have Come](#)

[Stress Awareness Month:  
Managing Your  
Fight/Flight/Freeze/Fawn  
Response](#)

[Counseling for  
Beginners: What Should  
You Expect from  
Counseling?](#)

### ***Important Links***

Remember that your EAP is here if you or a loved one is in need of support or just looking to improve your mental health. You have access to free and confidential counseling, wellness coaching, trainings, work/life concierge services to help find needed daily resources, and more! Plus, an online resource library full of proactive self-help tools! Visit [PersonalAdvantage](#) for helpful articles, personal development tools, a free mindfulness app, and more!

To your total wellbeing,  
The MINES Team

## ***Mental Health Awareness Month: Celebrating How Far We Have Come***

May is one of our favorite months here at Mines & Associates – Mental Health Awareness Month. At MINES, we’re passionate about changing the discourse around mental health and fighting back against stigma. Although stigma against mental health issues undeniably continues to exist, we also want to take a moment to celebrate just how far we’ve come. That doesn’t mean we’ll stop fighting against mental health stigma, especially in the workplace – but the wins we’ve all gained together over time deserve to be recognized.

### **How has mental health awareness changed over time?**

Although stigma, unfortunately, continues to be present against people who live with mental health conditions, we’ve come a long way in recent years.

As long as humankind has recognized mental illness, there has been a stigma against people who live with it. Before modern science was able to help people understand mental illness as just that – an illness – people with mental illness were believed to be suffering from a spiritual affliction, like being possessed by the devil.

Because of this, the suggested “cure” for people with mental illness was typically to find a way to let evil spirits out. The earliest procedure that we know of, called trepanning, involved chipping a hole in the person’s skull using stone tools. This was thought of as a way to release evil spirits, and for obvious reasons was very risky and dangerous.

For thousands of years, people with mental illnesses were ostracized by society. Typically, they were physically removed from their homes to be put in institutions or “madhouses.”

The mental health institutions that were prevalent between approximately the 1300s and 1700s typically functioned as mere prisons where people with mental illness could be kept away from the general public. Conditions were inhumane, and people were often locked up in small rooms. Suffering patients were even displayed to the public as a sort of “freak show.”

The 1800s brought about a revolution of sorts in the way people thought about and approached mental health. Institutions, which were now

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called asylums, had a higher focus on treatment and rehabilitation. The work of Sigmund Freud and his peers also brought about a better understanding of the causes behind mental illness.

The stigma against people with mental illness continues to this day, but we have a better collective awareness about the fact that mental health is something that affects all of us.

### **Mental health stigma in today's society**

Research has shown that stigma against mental health issues has decreased in recent years. We no longer lock people who live with mental health issues away in institutions. People with mental illness have the same legal rights as anyone else. And younger generations are undoubtedly more open to talking about mental health issues, with videos with the hashtag #mentalhealth on TikTok generating nearly 80 billion views.

One study found a clear decrease (over 22 years) of stigma against depression, and a more scientific understanding of what causes schizophrenia and alcohol abuse.

However, the same study found that there was an increase in the amount of people who associated alcohol abuse with bad character, and believed people with schizophrenia were violent or dangerous, during that 22-year period.

This shows us that we still have a long way to go. According to the American Psychiatric Association, up to half of people who need mental health support don't seek it. Even though the reasons behind this are complex, there's no doubt that stigma plays a role.

### **Mental health stigma at work**

Stigma against mental health issues continues to be particularly strong in the workplace. In one poll, only around 1 in 5 people felt completely comfortable talking about mental health issues at work. More than 1 in 3 were worried about retaliation or getting fired for seeking mental health care.

The good news is that this is changing with every new generation. People in Gen-Z were twice as likely as boomers to feel comfortable talking about their mental health at work.

In some ways, perhaps these words written by sociologist Erwin Goffman in 1963 remain true: "There is no country, society or culture where people with mental illness have the same societal value as people without mental illness."

But we also need to recognize – and celebrate – that we've come a long way.

Does this mean we stop fighting against the stigma that does still exist? Absolutely not. Research shows that one of the best ways to combat stigma is to expose ourselves and others to having relationships with people who have mental illness. The more open we are about our own mental health concerns, the

### **How to promote good mental health in yourself and others**

Another important point is that the discussion around mental health and stigma needs to go beyond talking about how we treat people with

mental illness. We need to also talk about the full continuum of mental health – and what it means to be truly mentally well beyond just the absence of mental illness.

Of course, there should be no stigma against people who do live with mental illness. And it's important to recognize mental illness, when it is present, so that you can get the treatment you need.

But mental health is about a lot more than not having a mental illness. Just like physical health, mental health ranges from having a severe mental illness to having excellent mental health, and everything in between. The more we talk about this, the more we realize that mental health is a topic of discussion that affects all of us, whether or not you or someone you know lives with a mental illness.

Here are some tips to promote good mental health in yourself and those around you.

#### **Take care of your body**

Physical and mental health are intertwined. People with physical health conditions are more likely to experience poor mental health like depression and stress. Although physical health problems aren't the only factor that can heighten your risk for poor mental health, taking care of your physical health can be a great way to ward off things like depression and anxiety.

Physical exercise, in particular, has been shown to be a very effective intervention for depression and anxiety. You should also try to get 7 to 9 hours of restful sleep every night.

#### **Build strong relationships**

Another way to strengthen your mental health is to have a strong social support network. Poor social support can create a higher likelihood for loneliness and depression. Connect with the loved ones who are already in your life, and seek to build new connections if you feel lonely.

#### **Seek support**

We often think of counseling as something we seek only after we're having trouble with our mental health. But just like you'd go to your primary care physician for an annual physical or to a fitness trainer simply to improve or maintain your physical health, you can see a counselor as a way to maintain good mental health as well.

Going through your EAP is an easy way to get access to free and confidential counseling 24/7. Seeing a counselor could be the missing piece to your mental well-being. Give us a call or check with your employer to see what services you have access to on your plan.

### **It's Time to Think Positive**

Picture a rose bush in full bloom. What did you notice first: the roses or the thorns? A rose bush has plenty of both. But if you focused on the roses and overlooked the thorns, you were thinking positive. There is a lesson here.

Thinking positive is a choice. It's a decision to appreciate the roses in your life (loved ones, favorite activities, and relaxing moments) while letting go of the thorns (stresses, disappointments, and losses).

This doesn't mean pretending to be happy when you're not. If you're upset, it's important to deal with and talk about your feelings. Thinking positive means choosing to fill your mind with positive thoughts. Your reward will be a calmer, more hopeful attitude.

### **The Benefits of Staying Positive**

"A positive outlook is necessary to prevent depression, to get along with others, and to feel better about yourself and your life," says psychologist Norman Abeles, Ph.D., past president of the American Psychological Association and an expert on mental health in seniors.

If you have health problems, it's important not to get stuck down in the dumps. "A negative attitude makes you feel worse physically. It increases your stress, which worsens your pain and drains your energy," says Dr. Abeles. On the other hand, "a positive attitude helps you relax and feel more competent" when dealing with everyday challenges.

Dolores Gallagher Thompson, Ph.D., director of the Older Adults and Family Center at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto, Calif., says older adults dealing with health problems become sad that they can't do everything they used to. At that point, some decide they can't ever be happy again.

"I call thinking that starts spiraling downward 'pre-depression,'" she says. "When you start to feel this way, it's time to change your thinking. If you don't, eventually you will become depressed."

### **How to Change Your Mind**

If you tend to count your worries instead of your blessings, it's time for a fresh approach. Here's how to start thinking more positively.

- Reason with facts, not feelings. Changes in your life can make you feel uncertain and anxious. You may then fear the worst. "Step back and get the facts," says Dr. Gallagher Thompson. "Talk to an expert, such as your doctor, and find out exactly what you can expect. Then ask yourself, 'If this was happening to somebody else, what advice would I give them?'"
- Stay connected. Keep in touch with friends and loved ones and be open to developing new friendships. Volunteering your time and keeping active in clubs or faith-based groups will help you focus on others more than yourself. "Spend time with positive people who are living active, fulfilled lives," says Dr. Abeles.
- Plan for your happiness. Schedule time for pleasant activities as often as possible. Having something to look forward to will keep your spirits up.
- Become a problem-solver. Don't just wish problems would go away. Take steps to solve them as quickly as possible, asking for support and help from others.
- Find the silver lining. Give yourself time to adjust to change or loss. Change can bring new opportunities: Be open to them.

"Your life won't be the same, but it likely can be better than what you imagine," says Dr. Gallagher Thompson.

**Challenge Your Fear About Getting Older**

From the time we are young, many of us dread growing older. This is partly because negative images of seniors—as grumpy, disabled, and forgetful—are everywhere, from greeting cards to TV commercials, says Becca Levy, Ph.D., a Yale University psychologist and researcher of stereotypes related to aging. If you accept these negative images as true—and apply them to yourself—you may start believing you're less capable than you really are.

To fight these stereotypes, Dr. Levy suggests asking, "Does this idea really apply to me, or are there examples of older people who are different?" She adds, "Think about positive role models for successful aging, if not in your immediate circle, then in books you've read or movies you've seen."

Likewise, if you make a mistake or forget something, don't dismiss it as "just old age," advises Dr. Levy. "These negative phrases stay with us. The real reason for what you are experiencing could be only temporary, such as tiredness, hunger, or having a lot on your mind."

The bottom line: "Question your deeply held beliefs about aging and screen out the negative." You are what you believe you are. Give yourself credit for the wisdom and maturity you've gained through the years.

***If you or a member of your household needs assistance or guidance on any of these wellbeing topics, please call MINES & Associates, your EAP, today for free, confidential, 24/7 assistance at 800.873.7138.***

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