

May 2024

# Benefits News

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## Boost your mental health

The challenges of life can have a negative impact on our mental wellbeing. May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Here are some general strategies and resources to improve your mental wellbeing.

- [Health benefits of being happy](#)
- [Understanding and managing anxiety](#)
- [Understanding depression](#)
- [Ten ways to manage stress](#)
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### Have you completed OEGB's Wellbeing Survey yet?

We want to hear from you! Please provide your feedback **by May 15**.

[Go to the survey](#) and enter your E number to begin.

If needed, contact OEGB staff at 888-469-6322 to request the assistance of a free and confidential interpreter.



# Health benefits of being happy

Happiness, optimism, gratitude, a sense of purpose, wellbeing, and satisfaction in life may lead to better heart and brain health.

Here are strategies that may improve your happiness:

- ✓ **Get creative**—Try a fun hobby. Join a virtual book club. Play a new video game. Learn to play an instrument.
- ✓ **Move more**—Find an activity you enjoy, such as walking, bowling, or chair yoga. Try a new sport like disc golf.
- ✓ **Be grateful**—Every day, write down things you're thankful for. Studies say it can make you feel happier.
- ✓ **Limit time on social media**—Don't compare yourself to others, especially on social media. If people are only sharing positive things, that's because they are choosing to. However, no one is perfect.
- ✓ **Get some sunshine**—Let the sun hit your bare skin for a few minutes. It helps your body produce vitamin D, which can improve your mood.

Source: Healthline, Aug. 17, 2021; Healthline, July 16, 2020; American Heart Association, Feb. 25, 2021; PsychCentral, April 25, 2022.



## Seven foods that can help you feel happier

These foods contain serotonin, a chemical that can boost your mood and help you sleep better:

- Eggs, including the yolk
- Cheese
- Pineapple
- Tofu
- Salmon
- Nuts and seeds
- Turkey

Source: Healthline, Feb. 16, 2023

# Understanding and managing anxiety



Feeling worried or nervous is a normal part of daily life. Everyone feels anxious from time to time. Mild to moderate anxiety can help you focus your attention, energy, and motivation. If anxiety is severe, you may feel helpless, confused, or very worried. However, your emotions might not accurately reflect the seriousness or likelihood of the feared event.

## How your body responds to anxiety

Anxiety can cause physical and emotional symptoms. A specific situation or fear can cause some or all of these symptoms for a short time. When the situation passes, the symptoms usually go away.



### Physical symptoms of anxiety

- Trembling, twitching, or shaking
- A feeling of fullness in the throat or chest
- Breathlessness or a rapid heartbeat
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Sweaty or cold, clammy hands
- Feeling jumpy
- Muscle tension, aches, or soreness
- Extreme tiredness
- Sleep issues, like difficulty falling or staying asleep, waking up too early, or not feeling refreshed upon waking



### Emotional symptoms of anxiety

- Feeling restless, grouchy, or on edge
- Worrying too much
- Fearing that something bad is going to happen; a feeling of doom
- Not being able to concentrate or feeling like your mind has gone blank

## Ways to manage anxiety

You can start with home treatment, using the tips listed below. If anxiety continues to be an issue, consider getting professional help.

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**Know your anxiety.** Recognize and accept your anxiety about specific fears or situations. Then make a plan for dealing with it. For example, if you're worried about finances, set up a budget or savings plan.

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**Don't dwell on past problems.** Focus on things that you can change and try to let go of the past.

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### Be kind to your body.

- Relieve tension with exercise or a massage.
  - Try stress-relief techniques that relax your mind and body. Stretching, yoga, and meditation can be calming.
  - Get enough rest. Aim for seven to eight hours of sleep each night.
  - Practice healthy thinking. Focus on helpful thoughts and try to block out the negative ones.
  - Avoid alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, and nicotine. These items may make you more anxious.
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## Engage your mind.

- Get out and do something you enjoy. For example, go to a funny movie or play golf with a friend.
- Plan your day. Try not to overpack your schedule.
- Keep a diary of what's on your mind. Discuss your fears with a good friend. Confiding in others sometimes relieves stress.

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**Do things with others.** Get involved in social groups. Volunteer to help others. Sign up to take a class. Being alone can make things seem worse than they are.

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**Get support.** If you try some of these tips and aren't seeing a difference, consider getting professional help.

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Source: Healthwise, June 24, 2023.



## Help is just a phone call away

If anxiety is interfering with your life, try talking with a counselor (virtual or in person) through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or your medical plan. Your EAP is completely confidential, available to you 24/7, and is no additional cost to you as part of your benefits. It's completely confidential.

### Through your EAP (available 24/7 at no cost to you):

- **Uprise Health** Call 866-750-1327 or text "Hi" to Tess the chatbot at 650-825-9634. Access code: OEGB

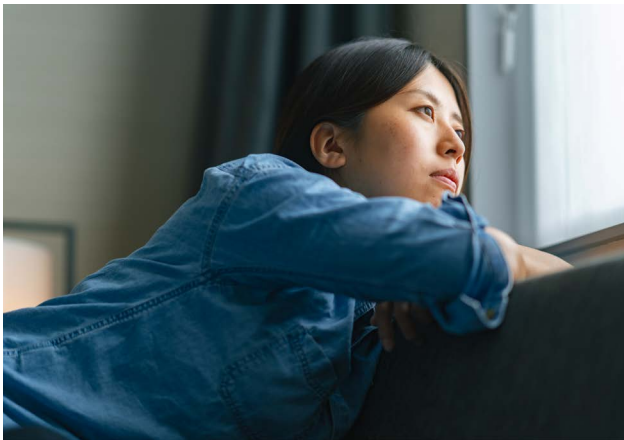
### Through your medical plan (you pay a copay or coinsurance):

- Kaiser members: **Kaiser Permanente** behavioral health consultants
- Moda members: **Meru Health** behavioral health consultants

# Understanding depression

It's part of the human experience to occasionally feel sad. But depression is different and lasts longer. The most common symptoms of depression are:

- Feeling sad, hopeless, or tearful
- Losing interest in daily activities
- Changes in appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Changes in sleep habits
- Feeling tired and lacking energy
- Feeling restless or grouchy
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of suicide or death



## **You're not alone**

Depression is very common.

According to [Mental Health America](#), roughly 20% of American adults and 15% of youth aged 12 to 17 are affected by depression.

## **What causes it?**

When you have depression, there may be problems with activity levels in certain parts of your brain. Chemicals in your brain called neurotransmitters may be out of balance. Most experts believe that a combination of family history (your genes) and stressful life events may cause depression.

If you think you may be depressed, tell someone. Get help and enjoy life again! The process of diagnosing and treating depression is summarized on the next page.

## How is depression diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you questions about your health and feelings. They may also do a physical exam and tests to make sure your depression isn't caused by another condition.

## How is depression treated?

Many people don't get help because they think they'll get over depression on their own. But some people don't get better without treatment. Doctors usually treat depression with medication and/or counseling.

- **Antidepressant medicine** can improve the symptoms of depression in one to three weeks. Sometimes it can take up to eight weeks to see improvement. Your doctor will likely have you keep taking any medication for at least six months.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** is done by licensed mental health providers, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. This kind of treatment deals with how you think about things and how you act each day. Studies show that CBT can be more effective than taking medication to treat depression. Check with your EAP or medical plan to find a counselor.

Sources: My Health and Wellness, 2024; Psychology Today, Feb. 26, 2021.



## When it might be time to seek help

If you're experiencing any of the following symptoms, consider calling your doctor:

- Difficulty performing daily activities and taking care of yourself.
- Withdrawing from social activities and isolating yourself from others.
- Feeling guilty or worthless.
- Experiencing changes in behavior, such as increased substance use or reckless behavior.
- Experiencing unexplained physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches.

If you're thinking about harming yourself, call the 24/7 **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 or 800-273-TALK (8255)**.

# Ten healthy ways to manage stress



Occasional stress is part of life. But chronic stress can lead to health problems, such as:

- Anxiety and/or depression
- Heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure, and stroke
- Memory and focus issues
- Headaches and muscle pain
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain and digestion issues

Try these options to manage your stress better:

- 1 Do more physical activity.
- 2 Consume less sugar, highly processed foods, and caffeine.
- 3 Eat more fruits, vegetables, beans, fish, nuts, and whole grains.
- 4 Reduce screen time.
- 5 Take time for yourself by going for a walk, soaking in the bath, reading a book, stretching or doing yoga, or working on a hobby.
- 6 Start a journal to write down your thoughts and emotions.
- 7 Spend time with friends and family.
- 8 Say no to invites or requests when you're feeling low on energy.
- 9 Avoid putting things off.
- 10 Try meditation.



# Let's go outside!



The average American spends 90% of their life indoors. Each day, many of us spend more than 10 hours looking at a screen. It's not surprising we're spending less time outside as we rely more on technology. This is called nature-deficit disorder.

Not spending enough time outdoors can make you feel sick and sad. You might be easily distracted, gain weight, have low vitamin D, or other issues. Research proves that being in nature helps our bodies and minds:

- Think better
- Understand life better
- Feel happier
- Worry less

Remember to spend time outside in nature whenever you can. Eat lunch in a park. Hike a nearby trail. Stroll along a river or beach. Clear your mind and enjoy the break from your computer or phone.

Sources: Moda Health; 2024; Environmental Protection Agency, July 14, 2023; American Psychological Association, April 1, 2020.

# Healthy ways to handle conflict



Conflict is part of our daily lives. It seems like there are a lot of topics to disagree about in today's world. Arguments can impact our overall mental health.

While we can't always avoid conflict, here are some ways to disagree in a healthy way:

<b>Start with respect</b>	<b>Keep an open mind</b>	<b>Practice active listening</b>
Treat the other person as you would like to be treated. Show them that you care about them even if you disagree. Remember that you're on the same team.	The other person has good reasons for their beliefs. Try to understand their perspective. Instead of just thinking about your answer, ask them more questions to see why they feel that way.	Once the other person has shared their position, repeat it back in your own words to show that you've heard them.
<b>Take a break</b>		<b>Find common ground</b>
If things get heated, take a break from the conversation. You both might need a chance to cool down.		Instead of trying to win, look for things you both agree on. Maybe you both want the same thing but have different ideas on how to get it.

Thinking of conflicts as a way to understand each other can help you feel better and make things less tense. You might learn something new, even if it doesn't change your mind.

Source: Everyday Health, Sept. 3, 2023.

# Get to know an OEGB Board member



## Celebrating Dr. Tom Syltebo

The OEGB Board has been honored to have Dr. Thomas F. Syltebo as a member for the past eight years. He currently serves as the OEGB chair and will be retiring in May.

During his time on the Board, Dr. Syltebo has shared his wealth of knowledge and unique perspectives that have helped shape OEGB's benefit plans for the better. His life-long dedication to health care and

desire to represent the needs of all members have made a lasting difference. Over his lengthy career as a primary care practitioner, he has served as:

- OEGB's first medical director for the Kaiser medical plans
- Hospital chief of staff
- Operations medical director

Before he retires, we want to reflect on some of his Board contributions:

- **Helped bring in new plans and providers.** This includes VSP vision plans and expanding Kaiser Permanente to include Lane County, which gave members more choice.
- **Worked to enhance and modify our benefits.** This includes adding coverage for important services like fertility treatment.
- **Provided his medical expertise on big decisions.** When the Board was considering whether to make changes to the health plans, Dr. Syltebo conducted a detailed review and made recommendations to the Board.

## Dr. Syltebo's OHA Boards and committee work

- **Oregon Educators Benefit Board**
  - Chair: October 2023 – May 2024
  - Member: June 2016 – May 2024
- **OEGB Innovation Workgroup**
  - Chair: December 2023 – May 2024
  - Member: 2021 – 2024
- **OEGB Strategies on Evidence and Outcomes Workgroup**
  - Chair: 2017 – 2023
  - Member: 2016 – 2024
- **OHA Value-based Payment Compact Workgroup & OHA Health Plan Quality Metrics Committee**

- **Expanded the Strategies on Evidence and Outcome Workgroup's (SEOW) role.** SEOW began to regularly evaluate vendors and program performance. This has helped the Board identify trends in quality and how members are using the plans. It also identifies potential issues so the Board can create solutions in a timely manner.

It's clear that Dr. Syltebo's fellow Board members and colleagues have the utmost respect for him. Here's what a few have shared:

“ Tom always brings important concepts to the Board with a mild sense of humor mixed in with the serious nature of the work.

With his experience as a general practitioner discussing medical issues with patients, he knows how to bring knowledge to a boardroom with explanations that everyone can understand and appreciate.

His contributions to the OEBB Board over the last eight years in getting everyone in the room to a thorough understanding of medical issues has been invaluable.

– Bill Graupp, Board member

“ Tom set the standard for being chair of the SEOW. He was involved in all aspects from setting yearly workplans to ensuring that all members were equally represented in discussions.

His dedication and leadership were integral to SEOW's success in addressing a wide variety of topics and issues.

– Glenn Baly, OEBB SEOW staff support

“ Tom's legacy is to validate the value of a medical professional on the OEBB Board and to serve with heart and dignity.

Safe travels, Tom, as you continue to travel the world!

– Geoff Brown, former Board chair

We extend our gratitude to Dr. Syltebo for his tireless efforts to serve OEGB members. We echo Bill Graupp when he said, "I'm sure I speak for all OEGB Board members in thanking Dr. Tom Syltebo for his service to not only the OEGB Board and team, but to all members in the communities where Tom has served. His work in delivering quality health care to patients, and to improving the systems of health care delivery, is to be commended by all who have had the honor of working with him."

OEGB Board meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month and are open to the public. To learn more about upcoming meetings or to view recordings of past meetings, visit the [Public Meetings](#) page of the OEGB website.

### **Benefits Questions?**

Email: [oebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:oebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov)

Phone: 888-4My-OEGB (888-469-6322)

