

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](#)
- [Ten ways to manage stress](#)
- [Understanding and managing anxiety](#)
- [Healthy ways to handle conflict](#)
- [Understanding depression](#)
- [Get to know a PEBB Board member](#)



Have you completed PEBB's Wellbeing Survey yet?

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

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

If needed, contact PEBB staff at 503-373-1102 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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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):

- **Canopy** EAP (except OSU) 800-433-2320
- **Lyra Health** EAP (OSU only) 877-235-7812

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

- Providence members: **Providence** behavioral health consultants at 800-423-9470
- Kaiser members: **Kaiser Permanente** behavioral health consultants
- Moda members: **Meru Health** behavioral health consultants at 800-813-2000

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 [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.

Sources: Mayo Clinic, Aug. 1, 2023; WeightWatchers, January 2023.

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:

Start with respect	Keep an open mind	Practice active listening
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.
Take a break		Find common ground
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 a PEBB Board member



In this month's newsletter, learn about Board member and chair Siobhan Martin.

Siobhan Martin's career has revolved around social justice work, and for a very good reason.

Growing up in Arkansas, where poverty, especially in the state's rural areas, affects many people, she witnessed parents struggle to feed their families and get basic medical care. This was around the time Walmart, based in Arkansas, was just beginning to grow. The company adopted the practice of hiring only part-time workers so they would not have to offer health coverage, and other corporations followed suit.

Siobhan spent a summer working for a rural health clinic in the Mississippi Delta area of Arkansas, where infant death rates were high because so many people lacked access to medical providers, and preventive health care was practically nonexistent.

Leaving Arkansas to attend college in Pennsylvania, Siobhan was exposed to labor union work, something she didn't experience in the South. Even in a different environment, she realized that inequality and systemic racism were issues in cities just as much as in rural areas. Both study in economic policy and volunteering in the Philadelphia public school system helped her understand how the odds were stacked against everyday working people, and these combined experiences inspired her to make a difference.

She moved to Missouri to get a degree in social work and began working in labor relations there.

Her supervisor was asked to come to Oregon to lead a fight to defeat several anti-public service ballot initiatives. Siobhan followed his lead and landed at Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 in August 2000.

"I fell in love with Oregon — well, except for the rain," she says.

Fast-forward two decades, and Oregon has become Siobhan's forever home. And she is still with SEIU Local 503, having held a variety of positions at the union since her first job there. Siobhan is currently deputy executive director.

Since joining SEIU, she has enjoyed the direct contact she has with PEBB members as well as in-home care providers. After hearing their stories, especially about health care, she knows how important it is for working people have a voice in their health coverage. She joined the PEBB Board in 2017 and continues to work toward these goals:

- Increase the quality of health care for everyone
- Ensure members have access to the health care they need
- Provide great service to members

Siobhan is the vice-chair of the Board, and has served as Board chair in the past.

She enjoys working with a committed group of people on the PEBB Board to address complex issues. “The partnership between Board members is great – everyone works together rather than representing sides,” she says.

Having worked in counties across the state, Siobhan is in a unique position to have heard many perspectives and stories about health care. “I’ve seen the impacts of PEBB decisions in both cities and rural areas,” she says. Viewing things through that lens, she works diligently to ensure PEBB members have access to medical coverage they can afford.

Siobhan is a tireless advocate for working people. She does enjoy her free time, however, and when she’s not on the job, Siobhan enjoys cooking, walking in her neighborhood, and spending time with those who matter most in her life: her family and friends.

PEBB Board meetings are held on the third 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 PEBB website.

Benefits Questions?

Email: pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov

Phone: 503-373-1102

