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Healthy People
2020

Improving the health of Durham
& NC communities since 1989

December 2017

Healthy Sunday Topic: Mental Health

Let's Talk About Mental Health

1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime, and African



Americans are no exception. In fact, according to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 20 percent *more* likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population.

Why are African Americans less likely to seek treatment for mental health?

- 1) Lack of Information and Misunderstanding about Mental Health

In the African American community, many people misunderstand what a mental health condition is and don't talk about this topic. This lack of knowledge leads many to believe that a mental health condition is a personal weakness or some sort of punishment from God. African Americans may be reluctant to discuss mental health issues and seek treatment because of the shame and stigma associated with such conditions. Many African Americans also have trouble recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, leading to underestimating the effects and impact of mental health conditions.

- 2) Faith, Spirituality and Community

In the African American community, family, community and spiritual beliefs tend to be great sources of strength and support. However, research has found that many African Americans rely on faith, family and social communities for emotional support rather than turning to health care professionals, even though medical or therapeutic treatment may be necessary. Faith and spirituality can help in the recovery process but should not be the only option you pursue.

- 3) Reluctance and Inability to Access Mental Health Service

Some people are reluctant or less likely to go to a specialist due to mistrust of the health care system. In addition, being poor, homeless, or not having health insurance. Fortunately, the Affordable Care Act is helping to ensure more people have insurance.

Elaine Hart-Brothers, MD and Board President of Community Health Coalition says, "If you are feeling lonely...YOU ARE NOT ALONE! There is always someone who understands and cares. Talking about your concerns is healing. Seeking advice from others is healthy. Call a friend, go to church, if possible, surround yourself with good, positive people."

Tips to improve your mental health

1. Value yourself: Treat yourself with kindness and respect, and avoid self-criticism. Make time for your hobbies and favorite projects, or broaden your horizons. Do a daily crossword puzzle, plant a garden, take dance lessons, or learn to play an instrument.
2. Take care of your body: eat nutritious food, stop smoking, drink plenty of water, exercise at least 30 minutes every day, and get enough sleep.
3. Surround yourself with good people: People with strong family or social connections are generally healthier than those who lack a support network. Make plans with supportive family members and friends, or seek out activities where you can meet new people, such as a club, class or support group.
4. Learn how to deal with stress: Practice good coping skills: exercise, take a nature walk, play with your pet or try journal writing as a stress reducer.
5. Quiet your mind: Relaxation exercises and prayer can improve your state of mind and outlook on life.
6. Avoid alcohol, nicotine and other drugs: Keep alcohol use to a minimum. Sometimes people use alcohol and other drugs to "self-medicate" but in reality alcohol and other drugs only make problems worse.
7. Get help when you need it: Seeking help is a sign of strength — not a weakness. And it is important to remember that treatment is effective. People who get appropriate care can recover from mental illness and addiction and lead full, rewarding lives.

REMEMBER

Always exercise regularly as this may help in minimizing stress. Be willing to seek professional help, and Control your stress and anxiety by talking to someone, breathing deeply, laughing, and meditating.

Duke Energy Safety Tips

- Make sure all extension cords and electrical decorations used for outdoor decorating are marked for outdoor use
- Keep all extension cords and light strings clear of snow and standing water.
- Always unplug electrical decorations before replacing bulbs or fuses

If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#). You can also text HELLO to 741-741 for free, 24-hour support from the [Crisis Text Line](#).

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