

Wellness Matters

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Healthy Habits That Can Lower Your Risk of Depression

A recent international study published in the *Nature Mental Health* journal found that certain lifestyle factors can reduce the risk of depression by 57%. This study, which examined data from nearly 290,000 people over a nine-year period, found that there are seven lifestyle factors associated with a lower risk of depression, and sleep was at the top of the list.

The study found that getting between seven and nine hours of sleep each night could reduce the risk of depression, including single depressive episodes and treatment-resistant depression, by 22%. Furthermore, the study revealed that participants with the lowest genetic risk for depression were 25% less likely to develop depression than those with the highest genetic risk, representing a much smaller impact than lifestyle factors.

The seven lifestyle factors that were linked to lower rates of depression included the following:

- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Keeping a healthy diet
- Engaging in regular physical activity

- Maintaining a healthy sleep schedule
- Avoiding smoking
- Minimizing sedentary behavior
- Having frequent social connections

Adopting a Healthy Lifestyle

You can reduce your risk of depression and boost your mental and physical health by altering your lifestyle. This may include eating a diet that's high in lean proteins and vegetables, reducing your alcohol intake, and getting 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

Additionally, you can encourage healthy sleeping habits by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, avoiding caffeine and nicotine before bed, putting your technology away prior to bedtime, and ensuring you have a dark, quiet place to rest.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the previously mentioned study, you can reduce your risk of depression and boost your mental health with healthy lifestyle choices, such as getting adequate sleep and eating nutritious foods.

Holiday Stress: Traveling

The holiday season is the busiest time of the year for long-distance travel. Flights are often overbooked and highways are overcrowded, which can add stress to the season.

To keep travel worries from ruining your holiday plans, reduce your stress by planning ahead. Use the following tips to help you stay in control during your trip.

If you are flying:

- Do not delay purchasing tickets. Make your reservations well in advance to make sure you have many flight times, prices, and seats to choose from.
- Travel on off-peak days and during early morning hours whenever possible. Airports tend to be less crowded during these times, which will make it easier to get another reservation if your flight is canceled.
- Call or check online to confirm that your flight is still on time before leaving for the airport.
- Check in for your flight online, if possible, to avoid waiting in line at the airport.
- Stay hydrated. Drink water frequently to avoid jet lag.
- Avoid checking luggage, but if you have to, keep

prescriptions, glasses, and other overnight basics in your carry-on bag in case your luggage gets lost.

- Fight boredom. Pack activities to help pass the time, especially if traveling with children.

If you are driving:

- Be prepared. Have a mechanic examine your vehicle before your trip. Also, be sure to pack emergency and first aid supplies in case your car breaks down.
- Plot out your route before leaving and bring a map. Make sure your phone is fully charged if you plan on using smartphone maps.
- Try to do most of your driving during non-rush hour times to avoid the bad traffic.
- Take a break. Rest every two hours and limit yourself to eight hours of driving each day. Stop at rest areas to walk around and stretch. Make more frequent stops if traveling with small children.
- Lay off the caffeine. Drink plenty of water and eat balanced meals. Drinking caffeine may make you crash a few hours later.

EMERGENCY ROOM OR URGENT CARE?



If you're faced with a sudden illness or injury, making an informed choice on where to seek **medical care** is crucial to your personal and financial well-being. Making the wrong choice can result in delayed medical attention and may cost hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars. In fact, Harvard University reported that 62 percent of personal bankruptcies are caused by medical expenses, making medical debt the leading cause of bankruptcy in America.

If you suddenly fall ill or become injured, how can you determine which facility is most appropriate for your condition?



Emergency Room

The **emergency room (ER)** is equipped to handle life-threatening injuries and illnesses and other serious medical conditions. Patients are seen according to the seriousness of their conditions in relation to the other patients.

You should go to the nearest ER if you experience any of the following:

- Compound fractures
- Deep knife or gunshot wounds
- Moderate to severe burns
- Poisoning or suspected poisoning
- Seizures or loss of consciousness
- Serious head, neck or back injuries
- Severe abdominal pain
- Severe chest pain or difficulty breathing
- Signs of a heart attack or stroke
- Suicidal or homicidal feelings
- Uncontrollable bleeding

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Urgent Care

Urgent care centers are not equipped to handle life-threatening injuries, illnesses or medical conditions. These centers are designed to address conditions where delaying treatment could cause serious problems or discomfort.

Some example of conditions that require a visit to an urgent care center include:

- Controlled bleeding or cuts that require stitches
- Diagnostic services (X-rays, lab tests)
- Ear infections
- High fever or the flu
- Minor broken bones (e.g., toes, fingers)
- Severe sore throat or cough
- Sprains or strains
- Skin rashes and infections
- Urinary tract infections
- Vomiting, diarrhea or dehydration

Choosing the appropriate place of care will not only ensure prompt and adequate medical attention, but will also help reduce any unnecessary expenses. Although urgent care centers are usually more cost-effective, they are **not** a substitute for emergency care.

