

# Physical health: taking care of your body helps care for your mind

Mental and physical health are closely linked – one often affects the other. Poor physical health can lead to poor mental health, and poor mental health can precipitate or worsen physical problems, causing a vicious cycle that may be hard to break.

## Chronic conditions

A chronic condition (defined as persistent or otherwise long-lasting in its effects) can [play havoc with your mental health](#). It is always stressful to learn that you have a disease like cancer, diabetes, or hypertension, and then have to manage the illness. There may also be problems such as pain, fatigue, or nausea (caused by the illness itself or by the treatments). These can all affect how you feel emotionally and perform mentally.

[What can you do to address chronic pain? Read more tips here >](#)

## Acute conditions

Illnesses do not have to be chronic to trigger anxiety or depression. An acute illness or injury (defined as having a rapid onset and/or a short course) can also affect your mental health:

- Back pain may keep you from participating in your favourite activities.
- A broken leg may make it hard to get out and about.
- A broken arm may keep you from preparing healthy meals or work on a hobby.
- A virus, like a stomach bug or the flu, may make you feel anxious, especially if you are alone.

## Helping yourself

It may be impossible to speed up the healing process or to [cure a chronic illness](#), but there are ways you can reduce the risk of the illness or injury affecting your mental health and well-being.

## Sleep

If you have had trouble getting the [recommended 7 to 8 hours of sleep](#), here are a few tips that may help:

- Set a schedule and have a bedtime routine, every night.
- Make your bedroom a “no electronics” zone.
- Exercise earlier in the day.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Alcohol may make you sleepy, but it does not allow your body to progress into a deep sleep.
- Do not smoke\*

[\\*Ready to quit smoking? Find the support for a smoke-free reality here >](#)

## Diet

What you eat and how often you eat may be even more important than ever when you are ill or injured. Eating healthy foods is essential for your body to function properly and to heal. If your illness is affected by your diet (such as diabetes or high blood pressure), there is an even greater need to eat well. [Canada’s Food Guide](#) is a good place to start to learn what your body needs and how best to achieve optimal nutrition.

[Achieve your nutrition goals! Connect with our Registered Dieticians today >](#)

## Exercise

Some people see the word “exercise” and think about the gym or running a 10K, but [exercise does not have to be that disciplined](#) or intense. Just a mild increase in physical activity helps promote a healthy body and, in turn, a healthy mind. Even people who have physical limitations, such as back pain or a broken limb, can move around – they just have to be more careful and choose their activities wisely. Some activities may include:

- Walking
- Gardening
- Dancing
- Using the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator

Your path to optimal well-being begins with a commitment to improve your physical health. Our program, Fitness Coach Connects, will help you understand and improve your physical and mental health through education, behaviour change and an increased level of fitness.

[Connect with our Fitness Coaches to get your free assessment today >](#)

Taking care of your physical health is an important part of taking care of your mental health. Not understanding that link between physical and mental health is one reason why so many of us fail in our attempts to make better lifestyle choices. If you are having trouble getting started, contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). The professional advice and services available with your EFAP will help you make the connection between your mind, your behaviour and your body, and increase your probability of making healthy changes.

[Read more on the link between mental and physical health here >](#)

For additional physical health support, click on the icons under the "Get in Touch" section to the right or call us 24/7/365 at 1.844.880.9137.