

Lifestyle habits are an essential part of maintaining good mental health.

Good lifestyle choices will improve your physical and mental health, decrease your stress levels, and help you get more out of life.

Recreation

Recreation is the activities that you engage in for enjoyment. There are many different types of recreation, including sports, games, movies, hobbies, and crafts.

It's important to take time to do the things that you enjoy – this helps keep your stress level down and allows you to feel good and have fun.

Many of the different recreational activities involve being with other people doing the same thing (such as many sports). Even if the activity does not require other people, it is often more fun to engage in recreation with others who also enjoy the activity.

You may find that with certain recreational activities, you prefer to be by yourself when doing them and this is good too because it will allow you to unwind and provides you with valuable time to yourself - just remember that it's important to maintain your social contacts and not become isolated.

Many people who have experienced early psychosis find that they have dropped many of the recreational activities they used to enjoy. If this has been

your experience, you may want to try to pick up some activities that you used to do, or you may want to try something new.

The main thing is to find something that you enjoy and that you have fun doing. If something you once enjoyed, no longer brings you pleasure – don't feel that you have to continue doing it. Try out new forms of recreation until you find something that you like.

Diet and Exercise

The more balanced and healthful your diet, the more healthy your body will be. A well-balanced diet also will give you more energy.

If you are eating an unbalanced diet, you may be causing your body to be under extra stress by depriving it of essential nutrients. If you eat a good, well-balanced diet then your body will be receiving all the nutrients it requires to function effectively.

Daily exercise, from walking to more vigorous aerobic activities, is good for your physical health. Exercise releases the body's natural endorphins, which provide you with a sense of well-being. Exercise will also provide you with more energy and help provide you with better sleep.

Getting regular exercise is probably one of the best physical stress-reduction techniques available. Exercise not only improves your health, it also relaxes tense muscles and reduces your feelings of stress.

An important thing to remember is that exercise should be fun - if you do not enjoy it, then you will probably not keep doing it. Think of creative ways of getting exercise. For example, make exercise part of your recreation by playing sports or learning how to rock-climb, or team-up with a friend for exercise at the gym or for walking or jogging.

Sometimes certain medications may cause weight gain as a side effect. If you are having difficulties maintaining a healthy weight or are concerned about your weight, talk to your EPI Clinician and Psychiatrist about this. They can help you by coming up with a weight management plan or they may suggest a different type of medication.

Both a balanced diet and regular exercise will help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

There is a lot of inaccurate and even harmful information about diet and exercise on the Internet and in many magazines and books.

The best place to get information is from your EPI Clinician or Psychiatrist, your family physician or someone who has specialized training in these areas, such as nutritionist. These professionals can provide you with accurate information and also help you come up with an individualized plan for making changes.

Sleep

Getting adequate sleep every night has a positive impact

on your mood and energy throughout your days. Poor sleep habits can lead to difficulties falling asleep or a poor night's sleep.

Significant problems with sleep can lead to problems with your ability to regulate your mood.

If you have experienced problems with your mood (either a depressed or manic episode), it is especially important for you to get adequate sleep every night and have good sleep habits.

Here are a few suggestions around how to develop good sleep habits:

- Try to keep a regular bedtime and establish a regular rising time in the morning, even on weekends and other days off from work.
- Avoid coffee, cola, tea, chocolate, alcohol, and tobacco after supper.
- Wind down for a period before sleep time. Quiet activities such as reading or relaxing in a hot bath help promote sleep.
- Avoid using the bed as a place for reading, watching television, doing paper work, eating, or other activities.
- If sleep does not occur after 30 minutes in bed, get up and engage in a quiet activity until sleepy again. Do not watch TV.

- Avoid taking naps during the day, especially in the evening. If you must nap, do so in the early afternoon for no longer than 30 minutes.
- Try to keep the room dark, quiet and at a comfortable temperature. Make sure that your mattress and pillows are comfortable.
- Heavy exercise should be avoided after dinner because it will delay sleep. However, engaging in gentle exercise after dinner or before bed (such as a slow walk) helps to produce fatigue before sleep.

If you have problems sleeping that are not helped by these suggestions, talk to your EPI Clinician and Psychiatrist. There are many available and effective treatments for significant sleep problems.

Sexuality

Regardless of whether you are sexually active with others or not, it is important that you feel good about your sexual life. It's also important that you are engaging in safe sexual practices to protect you from sexually-transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, or other risks associated with unsafe practices.

Many people experience problems with sexual functioning at some point and most people have at least a few

unanswered questions about sex that they would like professional answers to.

Unfortunately, many people never get the help or answers they could use, simply because they are hesitant to discuss these issues with their health care professionals. It's perfectly normal to feel this way, as this is a very personal topic that you don't usually discuss with others. However, if you are experiencing sexual problems or have questions, it is important to get past any embarrassment you may feel and talk to your EPI Clinician, Psychiatrist or family physician.

If you have noticed recent problems with your sexual function, this may be a side effect of your medication. There are a number of effective strategies that can help restore your sexual function to normal.

Most problems with sexual functioning can be treated and most of your questions answered. But only by openly communicating with a health care professional can you get the answers and help you need.

Remember, health care professionals hear about sexual difficulties and other sexual issues all the time and are usually very comfortable talking openly about this.