Lifestyle and Mental Health

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Abstract -It can often be overlooked that our lifestyle choices and physical health can have a massive effect on our mental health and emotional wellbeing. A lifestyle choice can have a major impact on a person's physical and mental health. Certain lifestyle factors may directly affect brain chemistry and contribute to mental illness. Mental illnesses are real health issues in the modern era. Healthy lifestyle choices along with appropriate treatment options will work more effectively and can help improve your mental health. Mental health includes social, psychological, and emotional wellness, as it affects the way of thinking, feeling, and behaving in an individual and also affects his social life and his decision-making. Mental health is not associated with a specific age, but rather is important in all stages of life from childhood to different stages of maturity. This article aims to provide information on how different lifestyle aspects can impact on our minds and to offer advice on how to make simple changes in order to feel happier and healthier both mentally and physically.

Introduction-Mental health is a state of wellness that allows the individual to realize his capabilities and adapt to regular stressful situations, and also enables him to work in producing, effective and contributing to his community and his environment. Mental health is not only free of diseases and disabilities but also a state of complete physical, mental, psychological, and social integrity. It is commonly known that leading a healthy life can be beneficial for one's well-being. But what exactly does a healthy lifestyle entail? According to the WHO, a healthy lifestyle means to engage in regular physical activity, to refrain from smoking, to limit alcohol consumption, to eat healthy food in order to prevent overweight. These behaviours should lead not only to better physical health, but also foster mental well-being.

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Mental health is recognized as a critical component of public health. The need for health promotion, prevention, and treatment programs for mental disorders is one of the primary health challenges of the twenty-first century. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental health as a "state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community". In line with this definition, mental health researchers increasingly acknowledge that the absence of mental illness does not necessarily imply a state of psychological well-being. Mental health problems can be defined as the presence of psychopathological symptoms (e.g., depressive mood, excessive anxiety, or compulsive behaviour) that indicate mental disorders defined in the classification systems of the American Psychiatric Association or the WHO.

It can often be overlooked that our lifestyle choices and physical health can have a massive effect on our mental health and emotional wellbeing. Whilst therapies and coping strategies are always helpful they can be limited if our lifestyle habits are not particularly healthy. Making changes in sleep, diet and exercise can be instrumental in both improving our emotional wellbeing but also in preventing future mental ill-health. Mental health's affect on physical health having issues around mental health and emotional health often have lots of knock on effects on our physical health.

Stress is one of the common causes of low mood and anxiety in particular. Stress itself can make our immune systems less effective and so cause us to get poorly more often. Long term stress can eventually affect our heart as well. Motivation - Often when we feel low we have very little motivation to take care of ourselves and are far more likely to call for a takeaway, put things off, not go out or lounge on the sofa. Whilst on occasion this is ok, if we do it too often it can lead to extra issues such as issues around blood pressure, weight gain, feeling tired, not getting enough nourishment, getting overwhelmed by tasks that have been put off or feeling isolated. Isolation often with feeling low or anxious we can feel like being on our own and not spending time with friends and family, by not socialising we are more likely to miss out on support and help. Sleep also affects our physical health with mental health. is on our sleep, feeling low can make us feel like sleeping a lot more which can be bad for our help.

On the other hand, issues around anxiety or anger may cause us to be hyperactive and then we cannot get enough sleep which is also bad for us. Diet - Feeling low can often cause us to 'comfort eat' which again in moderation is ok but if we feel low for a long period of time we can end up with issues around weight gain, high blood pressure, poor skin and blood sugar issues. Others may under-eat which can leave us tired, malnourished and can cause other health problems. Physical Appearance - As a result of many of the other effects on our physical health we can end up with changes in physical appearance such as poor skin, weight gain, weight loss, duller hair and paler skin. The relationship between mental health and physical health works both ways and so how we are physically can affect us emotionally and mentally. If we feel physically unwell this can cause us to feel angry, low in mood or to feel worried about what the illness is, whether it will interrupt with school or friendships and whether it is something serious or long term. Long term conditions can be even more stressful and can offer cause emotional distress. Conditions may cause us to not be able to do things that others can do or make us feel different which can be frustrating, confusing and upsetting.

Lifestyle Choices and Mental Health

Good mental health provides a sense of well-being and inner strength and it helps you to enjoy life and cope with problems. A healthy lifestyle can be beneficial for mental health. Healthy lifestyle choices along with appropriate treatment options will work more effectively and can help improve your mental health. Thus, identifying healthy lifestyle options that enhance mental well-being and reduce psychological problems are beneficial for preventing major psychiatric disorders. Eating healthy foods can improve mood and restore the structural integrity of brain cells needed for cognitive function. Getting enough sleep improves your mental health and makes your body more able to recover from diseases. Exercise can be very effective in treating mental health problems. Meditation and relaxation techniques can help improve your ability to control your temper, tolerate frustration and manage stress and anxiety. Quitting smoking and avoiding drug use may be one of the best things to do for your mental health. A healthy relationship can help people avoid depression, anxiety and neurotic personality traits

Lifestyle Factors Affecting Mental Health

There are several factors that affect a person's mental health, way of thinking, behaviour and feeling. Certain lifestyle factors may directly affect brain chemistry and contribute to mental illness, including:

Unhealthy Eating Habits: Unhealthy eating habits such as insufficient intake or high intake both have negative effects on our physical and mental health. Therefore, it is preferable to stay away from fatty and low-nutritional meals and go to a balanced diet, nutritious food, and focus on foods that stimulate brain activity, which can positively affect the mood. Healthy eating lifestyle and quality of food affect human physical health and thus the psychological and mental health.

Lack of Physical Activity: Not getting enough physical activity or lack of exercise may affect our mental health and can cause psychological problems such as dementia and depression. Exercise actively contributes to solving mental health problems and helps improve and adjust the mood and relieve depression, anxiety, and stress as well. Exercise or physical activity is not only important for physical health and weight loss, it is also highly important for mental health. It is important for the individual to try to move as much as possible, such as going up the ladder instead of using the elevator and going out to practice walking from time to time instead of using the car. Studies indicate that workout and exercising regularly helps improve brain function, protect memory as well as improve thinking skills.

Lack of Sleep: Poor sleep can have a negative effect on your mental health. Lack of sleep can dramatically change your mood and provoke relapse and mania. Sleep deprivation causes irritation and anger and may reduce your ability to deal with stress and depression. Getting enough sleep needed by the human body and organizing sleep times improves mental health and makes the body more able to recover from diseases and even makes the challenges of the day less effective.

Poor Physical Health: Poor physical health may lead to an increased risk of developing mental health problems. Physical injuries or symptoms can affect what you think, how you feel, and what you do. Physical illness increases the risk of developing severe depressive episodes. Some physical health conditions such as infections, genetic disorders, congenital abnormalities, gluten sensitivity, brain injury, spinal cord injury, nerve injury can lead to specific types of neurological and psychological

disorders. Making healthy lifestyle changes can help you improve your physical health as well as your mental health at the same time.

Smoking: About half of the people who suffer from psychological problems are smokers. The health problems caused by smoking, such as problems of the heart, lungs, and colds, may lead to mood problems and changes in mental health, so stopping smoking is one of the best steps to improve mental health.

6. Exposure to Abuse: Exposure to abuse, whether psychological, physical or sexual, is one of the most important factors that motivate psychological problems to emerge. Therefore, a safe and healthy family and social environment contributes effectively to achieving mental health.

Social Interaction: Social isolation has long been known as a key trigger for mental illness and can lead to feelings of loneliness, fear of others, or negative self-esteem. Remember! Having a bad company may ruin one's happiness and life. Having a good friendship shows that you can trust your friends so that they can support you, spend time with you, and be honest with you. Spending time with people you care about and engaging in community and volunteer work that makes you feel important and influencing others, are the most important things that are recommended when talking about mental health. Spending time with friends significantly improves mood and the love of others makes it easier to deal with the challenges of daily life.

Emotional Attachment: It's natural to love and want your partner or things. Excessive emotional attachment is unhealthy when it begins to disrupt your life. In the case of relationships, an unhealthy emotional attachment can also disrupt your partner's life. Bad emotional relationships negatively affect mental health, and it is best to get rid of them and end them and stay with a partner that makes life look better and more beautiful. A healthy emotional relationship can improve mental health and mood, and contribute to easing nervous features in the individual's personality.

Work Environment: Work is good for mental health, but staying in a job you hate affects your mental health and can make your life miserable. A negative work environment can lead to physical and mental health problems. Employees, both men and women, who report workplace stress, work pressures, bullying and lack of ability to make work-related decisions can be more at risk of developing depressive symptoms. A positive work environment makes employees feel good and excited about

coming to work and understanding their work roles and responsibilities and this provides the motivation to sustain them throughout the day. When employees are happy and excited, they invest all their energy to ensure the best results.

Wrong Meditation and Relaxation Techniques: Practicing a wrong meditation technique could be a harmful experience for you and can lead to waves of anger, fear, or jealousy that were sitting deep inside you, and this will make you feel uncomfortable. Unhealthy relaxation techniques can result in poor concentration, uncontrollable thoughts, worrying, and difficulty in making decisions. The continuous practice of different relaxation and meditation techniques actively contributes to increasing the ability to endure frustrating situations, deal, control emotions, and manage anxiety experienced by the individual.

Mental health deserves real conditioning and taking care of just like the entire body. Some disregard a lot of mental issue to stress and simply choke everything up to the need to relax. The truth is that you need to have more consideration of these issues. And while there may be several treatment options that can be chosen, knowing the causes behind them in the first place can help you decide on the best approach to treat these issues. According to the National Institute on Mental Health, healthy lifestyle activities lead to psychological well-being. Lifestyle changes do not have to be drastic or traumatizing. Even small changes can make huge improvements in mental health.

Good lifestyle habits for better mental health

Our mental health can be significantly influenced by our own lifestyle. While professional help should be sought if you are suffering symptoms of a mental illness, there is much you can do to help yourself manage your condition by practicing good lifestyle habits along with any healthcare you may be receiving from a qualified practitioner.

Healthy diet: What we put in our bodies has a huge impact on what goes on for us emotionally and so being aware of how your diet might impact on your mental health may be really helpful in knowing where to make changes. It is really important to eat a variety of food in order to make sure we get all the nutrients and vitamins that we need. Meals should have a balance of protein, healthy carbohydrates and healthy fats. If we don't vary our diets then we can become deficient in important vitamins that help to keep us feeling healthy and happy. Eating regularly

also keeps our sugar levels steady which helps us with our energy and concentration. Unsteady blood sugars can make us feel uneasy, anxious and irritable. A balanced diet should look something like this; Regular eating - Eating 3 meals a day with one or two snacks or eating 4 or 5 smaller meals will help our brains as they need a steady and consistent flow of fuel in order to be able to work effectively. When we eat on an irregular basis we can struggle with poor attention/concentration, irritability and feeling low or moody. Also by skipping meals we can end up eating too much later or not enough overall which makes our bodies struggle to understand the signals of being full or hungry. Stay Hydrated - Not drinking enough water can make it difficult to concentrate or think clearly which are also quite common features of feeling anxious so by making sure we have had enough water will help with this. Dehydration also causes headaches, constipation, tiredness, mood changes, cognitive (thought) impairment and memory loss.

Physical activity: Living a sedentary lifestyle can be dangerous to your health, according to the National Centre on Health, Physical Activity and Disability. Physical Activity is no secret that being physically active is good for us; as well as being positive for our bodies it is also really good in helping improve our mental health and emotional wellbeing. So what do we mean by being physically active? Activity can be split into three categories; 1. Physical Activity - any movement we do on a day to day basis. 2. Exercise - activities that we do to specifically for fitness. 3. Sport - activities that we usually have a competitive element, can be done in a team or alone but are in general a bit more formal than exercise for example football, tennis, badminton etc. Physical Activity reduces the risk of health issues and diseases. It provides more energy which is especially helpful in issues such as depression as energy becomes very low and we can become withdrawn. Being active is scientifically proven to improve mood, lower anxiety and lower stress and here is why; you may have heard the line 'exercise is good because it releases endorphins', but what does this really mean? When we start exercising our brains recognise that this is a moment of stress and so our heart pressure increases and our bodies go into 'fight or flight' mode (our survival instinct). Our brain in response releases proteins that protects itself and acts as a reset switch; this is why we often feel more at ease after exercise. At the same time, other chemicals called endorphins are also

releases and their job is to reduce discomfort of exercise, block pain and can cause a feeling of euphoria and happiness.

Healthy sleep routine: Poor sleep can make mental health issues significantly worse. Sleep is a time for our minds and bodies to shut down; our brains are actually working very hard during sleep. Sleep is a period of time where a lot of processing, strengthening and restoration occurs (think of it as your brain resetting). One the vital role of sleep is to process our memories and all the information we have taken in throughout our day. Overnight our brains 'sort' pieces of information and transfer short-term memories into stronger long-term memories. Sleep also helps our bodies as during sleep our bodies restore and rejuvenate, repair tissue, grow muscle and balance hormones. A healthy sleeping routine can influence your mental health just the same as it affects how cranky you get in the morning when you didn't have enough sleep or how you feel frustrated when you struggle to get yourself out of bed. The real key in a healthy sleep include regular sleep schedule, seven to nine hours of sleep every night and a regular sleep-wake cycle.

Social activities: Your community and social activities are able to contribute to and affect your mental health. Research shows that the value of friendship when it comes to people with mental issues is highly valuable. Simple friendship makes a big difference in mental health condition since people in isolation are considered to struggle more with mental issues than people who have an active social life. In fact, simply going out with your friends once a week can improve your mood and contribute to a healthier mental capacity and this is even better when involved in larger communities. Here are some examples you can try when it comes to socialisation:

- Go to volunteer work with a large group of people to help you feel more connected since altruistic behaviour is considered to be effective in helping you cope with everyday struggles.
- If you are religious, visit places & functions regularly (Research shows that religious people are happier).
- Find the level of socialisation that is just right for you and makes you comfortable.
- Start with a small group or simply a friend if you find it hard to socialise with other people.
- Choose to be with people who makes you feel good about yourself.

Romantic relationships: There are studies that show incredible advantages in mental health when a person is in a healthy romantic relationship. With a healthy romantic relationship comes the avoidance of anxiety and neurotic personality traits. Your relationship can give way to a sound and healing mental health. Healthy sex life can also provide positive effects on your mental health. In reciprocation though, mental health issues could also create sexual problems in men, and also among women. The key is to continuously find comfort in each other and try to ease your mental issues by using the factors that usually affect one's mental health. A loving relationship can help mental issues. It is also important that you know how to control your emotions.

Work environment: Your work environment is highly possible to affect your mental health either positively or negatively. Here are some of the questions you could ask yourself to evaluate if it is a positive or negative factor in your mental health:

- Are you able to genuinely connect with other people on your job?
- Do your supervisors and colleagues respect and value you?
- Can you handle the workload?
- What you can do in order to make a more positive presence at work is to combine mutual rapport to your very own personal drive.

Relaxation and meditation: One of the best methods in easing your mental issues is to use relaxation and meditation techniques. It is necessary to have a consistent meditation activity. Over time, meditation and other relaxation activities alone can help people heal their mental issues. In fact, simply breathing deeply can make a huge difference. Some of the positive effects of meditation are:

- Improves the ability to tolerate frustration
- Helps in controlling your temper
- Lends a hand in managing your anxiety

Find purpose and meaning in life: Everyone derives meaning and purpose in different ways that involve benefitting others, as well as yourself. You may think of it as a way to feel needed, feel good about yourself, a purpose that drives you on, or simply a reason to get out of bed in the morning. In biological terms, finding meaning and purpose is essential to brain health as it can help generate new cells and create

new neural pathways in the brain. It can also strengthen your immune system, alleviate pain, relieve stress, and keep you motivated to pursue the other steps to improve mental and emotional health. However you derive meaning and purpose in life, it's important to do it every day.

What gives you meaning and purpose?

- **Engaging work that provides meaning to yourself and others-** Partake in activities that challenge your creativity and make you feel productive, whether or not you get paid for them. Some ideas are gardening, drawing, writing, playing an instrument, or building something in your workshop.
- **Relationships-** Spending quality time where you give of yourself to people who matter to you, whether they're friends, grandkids, or elderly relatives, can support both your health and theirs, while also providing a sense of purpose.
- **Caring for a pet-** Yes, pets are a responsibility, but caring for one makes you feel needed and loved. There's no love quite as unconditional as the love a pet can give. Animals can also get you out of the house for exercise and expose you to new people and places.
- **Volunteering-** Just as we're hard-wired to be social, we're also hard-wired to give to others. The meaning and purpose derived from helping others or the community can enrich and expand your life— and make you happier. There's no limit to the individual and group volunteer opportunities you can explore. Schools, churches, nonprofits, and charitable organizations of all sorts depend on volunteers for their survival.
- **Care giving-** Taking care of an aging parent, a handicapped spouse, or a child with a physical or mental illness is an act of kindness, love, and loyalty—and can be as rewarding and meaningful as it is challenging.

Get a dose of nature: When the sun is shining, many of us seem to feel happier. Adequate exposure to sunshine helps levels of the mood-maintaining chemical serotonin. It also boosts vitamin D levels, which also has an effect on mental health, and helps at the appropriate time to regulate our sleep-wake cycle. The benefits of sun exposure need to be balanced with the risk of skin cancer, so take into account the recommendations for sun exposure based on the time of day/year and your skin colour. You might also consider limiting your exposure

to environmental toxins, chemicals and pollutants, including "noise" pollution, and cutting down on your mobile phone, computer and TV use if they're excessive. An antidote to this can be simply spending time in nature. Studies show time in the wilderness can improve self-esteem and mood. In some parts of Asia, spending time in a forest (known as forest bathing) is considered a mental health prescription.

Summary

Several areas comprise mental health, including one's social, emotional and psychological well-being. Lifestyle changes such as diet, exercise and stress reduction can all have a significant impact on improving one's mental health. A healthy lifestyle may help prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions. Several aspects of a healthy lifestyle can improve mental health, including changes in diet and physical activity. A number of lifestyle factors have been recognised to play an important role in positively modifying medical and psychiatric diseases and their associated morbidity and mortality. These include, eating healthy food, greater physical activity, cessation of smoking, avoidance of alcohol and illicit substances. Additional lifestyle factors for healthy living include safe and peaceful environment, optimal sleep, de-stressing and enjoyable activities, social connections/support and healthy mental activities.

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