

Tools for Life – Weekly Health & Safety Meeting



Home Healthy - Home Safe

Date: February 2022

Physical Health and Risk of Suicide

A strong relationship exists between well-being and physical activity, sports activities, and level of fitness. Physical activity and sports activities are considered protective lifestyle behaviors against stress, depression and other unhealthy behaviors linked to medical illness. Physical activity could be effective in reducing mental health disorders and suicidal behaviors through biological and psychosocial mechanisms; for example, releasing endorphins, increasing serotonin and norepinephrine synthesis, increasing the sense of mastery, self-esteem, and social interaction.

Unhealthy lifestyle behaviors may impact mental health and suicidal behavior by influencing emotions and judgement. Studies have demonstrated that adolescents with first-episode psychosis have a high prevalence of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use, selective dietary habits, lower physical activity, and lower level of activity during leisure time. A recent meta-analysis showed that in adults, low physical activity was associated with higher suicide risk and demonstrated that vigorous/moderate physical activity was associated with a positive perceived health and modestly associated with psychiatric symptoms and suicidal ideation reduction, confirming the link between physical activity and well-being.

If we know that what we eat and do can affect how we think and feel, wouldn't healthy choices make sense in feeling good. Moods have been proven to be regulated by hormones which can be subject to what you eat, how much you move, and the interactions you have with people daily. As stated above, a sense of mastery can come from taking on new physical challenges (running your first 5k or learning a new self-defense method) which can lead to a great sense of accomplishment. Social interaction, feeling accomplished, consistent hormone and dopamine levels that help "highs and lows" regulation, along with other byproducts created by exercise all have been proven to hedge the defense against suicide and suicidal risk factors.

Individuals struggling with mental illness or depression should still seek professional help. Although exercise can help regulate some of those risk factors, medical professionals are needed to help evaluate and provide professional treatment based on individual basis. Exercise is one step of the many one must take when caring for the mental wellness.

HEALTHY OR SAFETY REMINDER: Harvard Medical School recently released study findings linking gut health to mental health. Neurons located in your stomach communicated directly with neurons in your brain therefore a person's stomach or intestinal distress can be the cause or the product of anxiety, stress, or depression.

Discussion Points/Quiz Questions:

1. True or False: How much you move has no biological affect on how you feel?
False: Physical activity is linked to serotonin and dopamine release inside of you brain.
2. True or False: A person struggling with mental illness or depression doesn't need professional help, they just need to exercise.
False: Individuals are always encouraged to seek professional help when struggling with depression or mental illness. Sometimes talking to a professional will help individuals identify feelings of depression. Exercise can help but is not the only answer.