

Words of Wellness



March 2021

Emotional Wellness

While emotional wellness is related to mood, it's really much more than how we feel today. Emotional wellness includes the ability to recognize and express our feelings. This helps us adjust to challenges and to cope with life's stressors. When we are emotionally well, we feel able to take on new challenges, such as taking a look at who we are and setting goals for growth.

Emotional wellness is also about how we treat others. Peace and harmony come from tolerance, awareness, and acceptance of a wide range of feelings in ourselves and others.



For many people, especially as we hit the one year mark dealing with COVID, planning self-care activities is essential to create and maintain emotional balance.

We will be more successful in all our endeavors if we can let go of the habit of running all the time, and take little pauses to relax and re-center ourselves. And we'll also have a lot more joy in living.

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Sleep and Emotional Wellness

Daylight Savings Time begins on March 14, 2021.

Around the country, in places where the clocks are adjusted, people find their sleep routines disrupted. Sleep issues spill over into other areas of our lives, including emotional wellness.

Good quality sleep (and enough sleep) is critical for physical health, including a well-functioning immune system. Sleep promotes emotional wellness and mental health and has the potential to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.

Poor sleep habits have been related to obesity, pain disorders, headaches, mood disorders, addiction relapse, and difficulty managing PTSD.

Many of us have found that the pandemic has affected our sleep, in addition to the other ways it has caused changes in our lives. You can learn more about steps you can take to promote better sleep on the [Sleep Foundation](#) website, *Guidelines for Sleeping Well During the COVID-19 Outbreak*. Here's a quick summary:

- Establish a consistent routine for waking up, winding down, and bedtime.
- Reserve your bed for sleep—not working or checking your phone or watching TV.
- Control your light exposure. Get outside during the day (especially in the morning). Avoid screen time for an hour or so before bed.
- Limit naps. If you must nap, keep it to 10-20 minutes.
- Stay active but avoid intense exercise late in the day. Eat a healthy diet. Avoid caffeine and alcohol—both can disrupt sleep.
- Practice kindness and support others.
- Use relaxation techniques before bed.

The Arts and Emotional Wellness

By Corey Kuebler

Emotional wellness has an important relationship to both creating and engaging with the arts. The arts refers to works produced by human creative skill and imagination, and often expresses an idea, an emotion, or a world view.

We don't need to consider ourselves an artist to benefit from the arts. We can each get the benefits of engaging with and creating art for our own emotional wellness and mental health, to control substance use, and even physical pain. Art doesn't have to be a painting or a sculpture; it can be a movie or a book. Watching a movie can reduce anxiety during stressful moments and also increase psychological well-being. Reading recovery narratives can lead to feelings of interconnectedness, and reading fiction can even help us live longer lives!

Writing or journaling as an art form also improves our emotional wellness. When we ourselves write or journal, we are creating a form of art that can help us cope with mental health challenges and improve a depressed mood for those of us that have chronic illness or physical pain. Some writing prompts can jumpstart the writing process, like writing about the feelings, smells, tastes, and other aspects of a positive memory. Writing can also be a tool to process the emotions around and recover from traumatic experiences. Choosing to write through difficult situations or feelings makes those feelings easier to explain to the people we love and care about. We can use the tools of both writing and reading to support our emotional wellness whenever we have the opportunity.

Another way to create art is to doodle, paint, or draw. Drawing mandalas for emotional wellness was popularized by Carl Jung and can tune us into our current physical, emotional, and spiritual condition in the moment.

Mandala drawing has been shown to reduce anxiety. Mandala is the Sanskrit word for 'sacred circle,' and humans have been drawing them for thousands of years. You can also explore adult coloring books, which have gained popularity in the last decade. Coloring exercises (with and without mandalas) reduce negative feelings and lower anxiety and depression symptoms.

We can also remember that art therapy has benefits as a clinical therapy. Art therapy in the treatment for substance use, in visual and other forms, can help bypass resistance, find a creative outlet for the expression of difficult feelings, and find deeper understanding of creative and spiritual meanings of addiction and of life.

Art has been shown to have benefits for emotional wellness such as increasing well-being. These positives for emotional wellness can happen during our telehealth sessions with our providers or on our own time.

Making music can be another place where emotional wellness and art meet. Dance and dance therapy can ease a number of mental health conditions and symptoms, so we can dance to the music we already love or the music we make!

In the pandemic, we can create and enjoy many of these art forms by ourselves to buoy our emotional wellness. Gayle Bluebird explains that art can be used as a powerful healing tool to explore deep emotions - the sorrows, the struggles, and the joys.

We can take the first step to create or enjoy art today. Just by writing, reading, drawing, watching a movie, or dancing to a favorite song, we can feel the benefits of art for our emotional wellness. If you need a sign for how or when to start to art, here is your sign and encouragement!



Staying Positive

It has now been a full year since we began to feel the effects of the pandemic, and we are still prevailing! Every day, more people are getting vaccinated. However, pandemic fatigue continues, Zoom is wearing us down, and we miss spending time face-to-face with the people we love. It can be hard to stay upbeat. What can you do?

We continue to draw from our basic toolkit of favorite techniques, which have helped us in the past year. There are many resources available.

Mindfulness

You can support your mindfulness practice through guided meditations. For example, [Dr. Ron Siegel](#) has a series of recordings based on his book, *The Mindfulness Solution*. If you like the [UCLA meditations](#) (some available in Spanish), you might consider downloading their app.

Kindness

Be kind to others and to yourself. One of our favorite resources, *The Random Acts of Kindness* website, now offers a [Kindness Calendar for Work](#), in addition to their blog and other tools.

Kristen Neff recommends a series of [exercises](#) to develop self-compassion (kindness to yourself) and lists many other resources on her website.

Gratitude

Check out the [Gratitude Toolkit](#), available as a free download from the *Calm* website. In it you will find a series of exercises and prompts to help you reflect on what you are grateful for.

We hope these help you have a positive month!

List of links:

- <https://drronsiegel.com/recorded-meditations/>
- <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations>
- <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-at-work>
- <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#exercises>
- <https://blog.calm.com/gratitude-resources>



I Am Here

Mandala Art by Corey Kuebler

Reasons to Celebrate in March

It's National Color Therapy Month!

<https://www.aurahouse.com/color-therapy-month>

It's Nutrition Month!

<https://www.eatright.org/food/resources/national-nutrition-month>

It's National Caffeine Awareness Month!

<https://www.silverhccenter.com/caffeine-march-national-awareness-month>

It's Irish American Heritage Month!

Search for "Irish traditional music" on YouTube, then sing and dance along!



Art Tips

- You can find free movies on platforms like Tubi and YouTube if you have an internet connection.
- A good first stop for finding books is your local library. The staff there may have a pandemic preparedness plan so you can check out a book and start reading. Some libraries also rent movies! If you prefer to own a book, inexpensive used books are available at Thriftbooks and Abebooks, two alternatives to Amazon, or ask if your local independent bookseller can find a used copy.
- Here's another idea for a calming art form: <https://zentangle.com/>

References

Thanks to Corey Kuebler for his contributions this month. Unless otherwise credited, illustrations are listed online as free for reuse without attribution from pixabay.com

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- **Music:** Lauren's article "Being 16 in the Midst of Covid-19," featured in the January 2021 issue of *Words of Wellness*, captures how song writing can increase emotional wellness. Writing music helped Lauren cope with the stress of the pandemic quarantine when she missed and lost friends and family to Covid-19.
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