

Alternative Approaches to Mental Health Care *by Franchis Adam*

An alternative approach to mental health care that emphasizes the interrelationship between mind, body, and spirit can play an important role in recovery and healing. Although some people with mental health problems recover using alternative methods alone, most people combine them with other, more traditional treatments such as therapy and, perhaps, medication. It is crucial, however, to consult with your health care providers about the approaches you are using to achieve mental wellness.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is one of the alternative therapies that are getting a lot of attention for mental health. In this practice, your body is regarded as a system of energetic pathways. When one of these pathways is disrupted, it can cause mental health problems. When the acupuncturist identifies the blocked pathway, however, and then inserts a needle into the area, they can help to improve the energy movement, reducing the mental health symptoms. Though this was once dismissed as a false science, more studies are showing that these needle treatments do work - and they can work in the long term. You can find acupuncture practitioners in nearly every city by heading to your local phone book.

Exercise and Diet

While this may not be considered alternative, most people wouldn't think that lifestyle changes could contribute to their mental health. But it's true. Since your body is comprised of a vast number of systems that require the proper nutrition and blood flow in order to work properly, it stands to reason that taking on healthy habits will allow you to also improve the mental health of your body. Nerve cells that are well-nourished may be better able to stay balanced. An attempt to add thirty minutes of exercise to every day and eating a healthier diet is a great start.

Meditation

Used for centuries, the practice of meditation is still considered a great way to calm the mind and often still any mental health disorders. By sitting in a comfortable position and simply trying to clear the thoughts from your mind, people have noticed they feel more centered and serene. A person does not have to sit in a lotus position or even chant in order for this practice to work. Take about ten minutes a day to sit in a quiet place in your home (wearing headphones to drown out noises if you can't find peace and quiet) and simply let any thoughts that enter into the mind out again. Whenever you begin to think about something, just let it go and focus on your breathing. In time, you will have fewer and fewer thoughts, helping to relax your body as well as your mental issues.

Massage therapy

The underlying principle of this approach is that rubbing, kneading, brushing, and tapping a person's muscles can help release tension and pent emotions. It has been used to treat trauma-related depression and stress. A highly unregulated industry, certification for massage therapy varies widely from State to State. Some States have strict guidelines, while others have none.

Prayer

When you believe in something greater than yourself, research is shows that you might have a smaller chance of mental health issues. There seems to be something about recognizing the idea that you aren't in control of everything, so when you give that control to someone or something else through prayer, you can begin to find balance in life. By simply sitting down and praying each day, you can begin to establish your place in the world.

Music/Sound Therapy

It is no coincidence that many people turn on soothing music to relax or snazzy tunes to help feel upbeat. Research suggests that music stimulates the body's natural "feel good" chemicals (opiates and endorphins). This stimulation results in improved blood flow, blood pressure, pulse rate, breathing, and posture changes. Music or sound therapy has been used to treat disorders such as stress, grief, depression, schizophrenia, and autism in children, and to diagnose mental health needs.

About the Author

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