

# *Aging and mental health*

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Mental health refers to our cognitive condition and includes our psychological and emotional well-being. Mental health is more than the mere absence of mental illness; it is a level of psychological well-being. It is a well-being that is encompassed in the apprehension or grasp of physical, intellectual, artistic, productive work, and social contribution. Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act and influences an individual's ability to enjoy life. Mental health influences a person's ability to create a balance between life's activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.<sup>[1]</sup>

Some of the factors that impinge upon thinking, mood, and behavior are biological and physiological factors such as brain chemistry or a family history of mental illness. Life experiences of trauma or abuse can also have a deleterious effect. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood, through adulthood and up to your last breath. It helps determine how you handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.<sup>[4]</sup> According to World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is a subjective state of well-being in which the individual realizes his/her abilities, has enough psychological resiliency to cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and rewardingly, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community".

There are both driving forces and strengths that contribute to a person's ability to maintain optimal mental health. These same fortes can be used to regain mental health after encounters with severe life stressors. A strong social network of family, friends, and community (your informal social network), in conjunction with primary and specialized care doctors and nurses, and social service programs such as Medicare/Medicaid and local area on aging programs (your formal social network) serve to mitigate aging burdens as well as meet and handle adversities.

Positive mental health indicators

- Apt mental health is displayed through emotional, behavioral, and social maturity.
- Self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential

- An appropriate balance of love, work, and leisure pursuits
- Abstract thinking skills
- Dimensions of inner strength
- Perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, and competence

#### Negative mental health indicators

- Inability to function at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioral regulation
- The presence of a mental or behavioral disorder
- Noticeable problems with attention
- Severe mood swings that cause relationship problems
- Persistent worry, fear, anger, hopelessness, or negative thoughts
- Mental lethargy, confusion, fugue states
- Hearing voices, believing things that are not true, hallucinations or seeing things that are not there
- Thinking of harming yourself or others

The dimensions that constitute mental health differ among individuals.<sup>[3]</sup> For some it is resilience, for others it is a sense of coherence. For some elderly, efficacious mental health is having a purpose in life and for others optimum mental health is a state of self-transcendence. Your psychological and emotional wellbeing, influences how you think, feel, and behave, affecting your daily life, your relationships and even your physical health. Mental health is extremely important because it affects a person's ability to experience and enjoy life. Research has shown that a healthy lifestyle (mental stimulation, socialization, good nutrition, physical activity, and spirituality) promote health and well-being while reducing the risks for cognitive decline and mood disorders.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### References

1. Nordqvist, C. (2015). What is mental health? What is mental disorder? <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/154543.php>
2. Nussbaum, P. (2017). Brain training: is it integral to cognitive health? *Aging Today*, 38(1): 4-5.
3. Nygren, B., Alex, L., Jonsen, E., Gustafson, Y., Norberg, A., & Lundman, B. (2010). Resilience, sense of coherence, purpose in life and self-transcendence in relation to perceived physical and mental health among the oldest old. *Aging & Mental Health*, 9(4): 354-362.

4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health/index.html>