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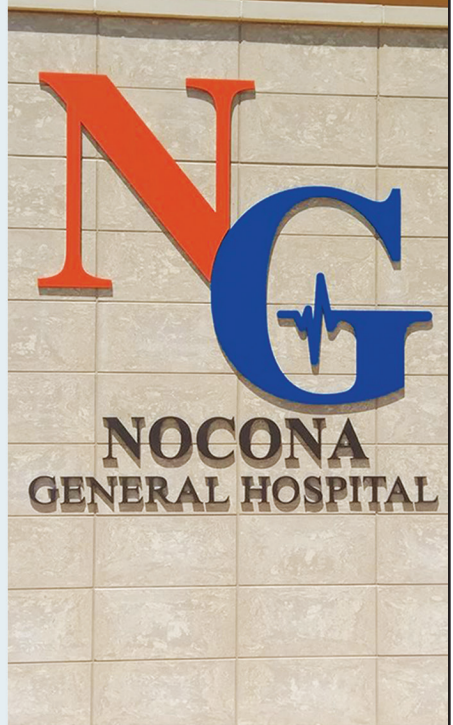
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3 ways people can boost mental health every day

Mental health issues have garnered considerable attention in recent years, but the scope of the global mental health crisis may be even greater than people realize.

A recent study co-led by researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University of Queensland that was published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* in fall 2023 concluded that one out of every two people in the world will develop a mental health disorder at some point in their lifetime. That makes mental health disorders a more common problem than cancer, heart disease and other physical ailments that tend to garner more attention than mental health issues.

Anyone experiencing mental health issues is urged to speak with a medical professional who specializes in such areas. Mental health issues may not manifest with symptoms like broken bones that common sense suggests require the assistance of a licensed medical professional, but that does not mean issues affecting the mind or a person's outlook do not require the help of someone trained to deal with them. Much like people can heal from a broken bone after seeing a medical professional, individuals confronting mental health issues have much to gain from working with a mental health specialist.

A 2021 study from the United Kingdom-based Mental Health Foundation published in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* found 29 strategies people can em-

ploy to protect their mental health. The study considered mental health research and the views of mental health experts, but also input from the general public regarding ways they confront mental health issues.

It's important that anyone dealing with mental health issues not conflate these strategies with treatment. Though they can help protect mental health, they should be seen as a supplement to treatment overseen by a licensed mental health professional. A rundown of the 29 strategies can be found at [mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk), but the following are three recommendations that anyone can apply in their daily lives.

1. Spend more time in nature. The calming effects of nature have been noted for centuries, if not longer. The American Psychological Association notes that spending time in nature benefits both physical and psychological well-being in humans. Perhaps that's one reason why participants in the MHF study reported walks in nature was their preferred way to cope with stress stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The Japanese practice of forest bathing has been noted for its positive effects on mental health, but even those without ready access to wooded areas should know that simply spending more time outdoors each day can positively affect mental health.

2. Avoid using drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism. The MHF notes



Courtesy photo

Spending time in nature has been found to be beneficial to psychological well-being.

that any relief offered by drugs and alcohol is temporary and can even exacerbate existing mental health issues. The American Addiction Centers reports that coping mechanisms are compulsions or habits formed over time that serve to help people manage particular situations or issues, including stress. However, the AAC also notes that not all coping mechanisms are beneficial and some, including drug and alcohol use, are maladaptive and destructive. After a particularly stressful day, or during times when people are experiencing anxiety and/or depression, avoid looking at drugs or alcohol as means to coping.

3. Get enough sleep. The MHF notes that adults need between sev-

en and nine hours of sleep per night. Some may see seven hours or more per night as a luxury, but it's important that such an outlook changes. The Columbia University Department of Psychiatry notes that there is now robust evidence to support a link between sleep and mental health. Insufficient or even poor sleep has been found to increase negative emotional responses to stressors.

Perhaps even more noteworthy is that poor or insufficient sleep decreases positive emotions. So it's vital to recognize the important role that adequate, good-quality sleep has on mental health.

These are just a handful of approaches individuals can take to boost their mental health each day.

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