

# MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE



April 2023

## Managing Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

When times get tough, instinct often pushes people toward coping mechanisms. These mechanisms can help people feel like they're escaping reality by relieving stress or distracting their minds. While this is a standard response, it can become problematic when one turns to harmful, unhealthy coping mechanisms. Common unhealthy coping mechanisms include oversleeping, excessive substance use, over- or under-eating and impulsive retail spending.

It's expected to have feelings of wanting to escape from reality due to stress or anxiety. Healthy coping mechanisms can help you positively address such feelings and develop long-lasting habits. Consider these healthier coping alternatives:

- **Create task lists.** Unhealthy coping mechanisms can prevent you from reaching your short- and long-term goals. Making a task list of personal goals can help you achieve what you want and elevate your mood by physically seeing your accomplishments when they're checked off the list.
- **Talk about stress.** Find someone willing to listen to you, such as a close friend, family member or mental

health professional. Putting your feelings into words can help alleviate stress and anxiety.

- **Address negative feelings.** Negativity is a normal part of life. Trying to avoid it is called avoidance behavior, which can result in reaching for unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- **Learn your triggers.** Knowing what situations you negatively respond to can help you keep track of your triggers and be aware of how you react.
- **Pick up a new hobby.** Activities such as painting or running can be therapeutic for many. Designate a regular time and space to practice your new hobby.

Having negative or overwhelming emotions is natural, but it's important to lean on healthy coping mechanisms to help deal with stress and anxiety. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if you are experiencing ongoing emotional struggles.

## U.S. Faces Shortage of Mental Health Professionals

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened underlying mental health issues for many Americans. However, mental health care and treatment barriers have existed for some time. One of the most significant barriers is the lack of mental health professionals. Experts predict that within the next year, the United States will be short between 14,280 and 31,109 mental health professionals.

The latest Health Resources and Services Administration data estimates that 122 million Americans (37% of the population) live in areas with a mental health professional shortage. It would take an additional 6,398 mental health providers to fill those gaps. Mental health shortages range in severity across the nation but are most commonly found in rural areas.

Although many Americans are currently dealing with strained health care resources, there are still some ways to receive mental health support. Telehealth is a great place to start receiving virtual mental health care, especially if you live in a rural area. Additional support resources include:

- Primary care doctors who can suggest further mental health resources

- Work-based wellness and employee assistance programs
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Helpline, which is free, confidential and available 24/7 by calling 800-662-HELP (800-662-4357)
- SAMHSA's 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, a three-digit dialing code offering free, confidential and 24/7 call, text and chat options with trained crisis counselors

Remember to check in with yourself and reach out for help if needed.

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