

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE



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The Heat's Impact on Mental Health



Health experts warn that extreme heat can significantly affect emotional and psychological well-being. Whether it leads to increased irritability or potential impacts on mental health conditions, excessive heat can be uncomfortable and dangerous.

High temperatures can disrupt sleep, increase stress levels and impair cognitive function. People often report feeling more agitated, anxious or unable to concentrate during heat waves. For some, especially those with preexisting mental health conditions, heat can trigger more severe symptoms.

One lesser-known condition is summer-pattern seasonal affective disorder, which is associated with too much heat and light. Symptoms can include insomnia, agitation, restlessness and depression.

In addition, heat can impact individuals who take certain medications for mental health conditions. For the 1 in 6 Americans who take psychiatric medications, summer poses additional risks. Many medications, such as antidepressants, antipsychotics and mood stabilizers, can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature. They may also cause dehydration and heat intolerance, making it more difficult to cope with hot weather.

Tips for Protecting Your Mental Health in the Heat

Consider these tips to protect your mental health during hot weather:

- **Know your triggers.** Pay attention to how heat affects your mood, energy and focus. If you notice patterns, plan your day to avoid peak heat hours.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink water regularly, even if you don't feel thirsty. Dehydration can worsen mood swings and fatigue.
- **Stay cool.** Use fans, air conditioning, or cool showers to regulate your body temperature.
- **Watch for warning signs.** Be alert to symptoms of heat-related illness, such as dizziness, confusion, nausea or extreme fatigue. Seek help if needed.

If you're experiencing worsening mental health symptoms during the summer, don't hesitate to reach out to a health care provider. Never adjust or stop taking prescribed medications without professional guidance.

10 Ways to Manage Summer Stress

While summer often brings a welcome change of pace with warmer weather, longer days, vacation plans and more time outdoors, it can also introduce new stressors for many individuals. The key is learning how to manage such stress.

Try these 10 practical tips for coping with summer stress:

1. **Stay hydrated and cool.** Keep a water bottle nearby and dress in breathable fabrics.
2. **Set boundaries with your time.** Be intentional about what you commit to and don't hesitate to say no to events or obligations that feel overwhelming.
3. **Maintain a routine.** Try to stick to regular sleep, meal and work times to help reduce stress.

4. **Create a comfortable work environment.** If possible, use fans, adjust lighting and take advantage of natural light to boost your mood and productivity.
5. **Take meaningful breaks.** Instead of defaulting to screen time, use your short breaks to get water, step outside, stretch or take a few deep breaths.
6. **Use vacation time wisely.** Don't let your paid time off go unused. Even a short break or staycation can help you recharge.
7. **Plan ahead for family and travel logistics.** If you're planning trips, get organized early. Clear communication with your team and family can help reduce last-minute confusion, tension and stress.
8. **Reconnect with nature.** Spending time outdoors, even just for a few minutes each day, can help reduce stress and improve mental clarity.
9. **Practice mindfulness or light exercise.** Incorporate short mindfulness practices or light physical activity into your day to lower stress levels.
10. **Limit alcohol and caffeine.** Too much caffeine or alcohol can disrupt your sleep cycle and increase anxiety.

For further guidance, contact a mental health professional.
