

# My Health <sup>TM</sup>

MAY 2015

Healthy Heart, Healthy Mind, Healthy Living



## HEALTHY LIVING

### Green is Good

#### Green Space Improves Mood

We are all familiar with the recommendation to look at something green to help relax your eyes after a period of visual activity, such as reading or working on the computer. But did you know that greenery is also good for your mind?

A study led by Dr. Mathew White, an environmental psychologist at the University of Exeter, followed the data of 12,000 people over the duration of 18 years, and looked at how their own anxiety and depression levels changed as they moved to areas with more green space. To track the levels, Dr. White also included a general health questionnaire that is commonly used by clinicians and doctors to diagnose depression and anxiety.

What they found was that the participants showed less signs of depression and a greater subjective well-being as they moved to areas of more green space. What's even more surprising was that the mental health improvements occurred immediately!

Another positive finding is that the improvement isn't transient. Rather the positive effect lasted for years as levels of reported well-being remained high. Of course, this only applies to people in urban areas. For those

who live in rural communities, where there is a lot of green space, the study did not find the same connection.

What remains unknown is the required amount of green exposure to yield a measurable, positive effect. How much is enough? Further studies are also needed to understand why green space is beneficial to mental health.

For now, give yourself a boost by going for a walk in the park.

## HEALTHY MIND

### Mind Over Matter

#### Mental Health in the Workplace

What do you think of when you hear the term "mental illness"? Often people think of depression and anxiety disorders. However, a mental illness is not limited to just these two conditions; it is any health problem that affects the way we think about ourselves and how we are with others and the world around us.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, mental illness knows no boundaries as it affects people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures.

Stress and feelings of uncertainty are common triggers of a mental illness. Also to note is that mental illnesses are sporadic and not necessarily predictable.

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Recognizing signs of mental illness in the workplace is important as 20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime, which means it could happen during their employment years.

Relationships with co-workers and supervisors are also affected because the person experiencing a mental illness may take a lot of time off or appear to be "off" more than usual. Work productivity may also go through fluctuations reflecting the person's mental state.

If recognized early and seeking the right treatment, mental illnesses can be successfully treated. The Canadian Mental Health Association offers the following suggestions:

- **Utilize the Employee and Family Assistance Plan** if available through your group benefits program. EFAPs offer 24/7 telephonic counseling session with master's level counselors through a toll-free line. They also offer online and wellness tools as well as referrals to a network of community resources.
- **Tap into the right supports in your life.** This includes family, friends, counsellor, physician, co-workers, neighbour, etc. You may be surprised to know who is willing to offer a listening ear.
- **Talk to your human resource personnel.** They may have a policy set up for the creation of a mentally healthy workplace for all employees. You do not have to disclose your condition to your employer. However, you do need to say that you are experiencing health challenges and describe what you need to work well.



20% of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime.

Source: Canadian Mental Health Association



## HEALTHY HEART

### It's Qi Time

#### Understanding Traditional Chinese Medicine

As its name indicates, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) originated from China over 2,000 years ago and is still being practiced all over the world today.

The goal of all TCM is to promote the healthy flow of qi (pronounced "chee"), or vital energy that travels through our bodies. An illness could be caused by a dysfunction of the internal organs which is reflected on the body surface through the qi or diseases of the body surface affect the organs carried through the qi.

According to the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia (CTCMA), TCM, unlike Western medicine, has a holistic approach and the treatment of illness is based on the diagnosis and differentiation of syndromes.

For example, two people with the same disease but with different syndromes may have a different treatment plan. On the other hand, those with different diseases but share the same syndromes maybe be treated in similar ways. In both cases, TCM treatment starts with an analysis of the entire body and then focuses on healing the illness by readjusting the organs' functions.

The TCM treatments are designed to treat both the root of the disease and the symptoms. Typical treatments include acupuncture, herbal medicine, qi-gong exercises and tuina (Chinese therapeutic massage). Treatment using acupuncture is meant to stimulate certain areas of the external body, while herbal medicine concentrates on the internal organs. Qi-gong and tuina try to restore, regulate and promote the flow of qi in the body.