50 Good Mental Health Habits



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Good [**physical health**](https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/172167-rick-warren-pastors-your-physical-health-is-a-spiritual-matter.html) does not happen by accident. Physically healthy people make small, daily choices that contribute to their physical health.

It should be noted that even those who make healthy choices still get sick and injured. Choices don’t remove the possibility of illness or injury. But even when sick or injured, an individual’s daily choices still make a significant impact on their quality of life.

The same things are true for mental health. *Good mental health does not happen by accident. Mentally healthy people make small, daily choices that contribute to their mental health* (i.e., ability to regulate emotions, respond proportionally to disappointments, accurately weigh the significance of successes and failures, etc.).

Making the choices below won’t guarantee that you won’t experience seasons of [**depression**](https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/335245-christian-your-depression-is-real-so-is-gods-deliverance.html), [**anxiety**](https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/336797-you-are-not-your-anxiety.html) or other forms of mental unrest. But the kind of choices listed below, if made before-during-after a time period of mental unrest, will still make a significant impact on your quality of life.

Obviously, with 50 habits it would be overwhelming (i.e., mentally unhealthy) to try to implement them all at once. Pick a few that fit you best. Begin with those. When those are embedded in your rhythms of life, come back and see what would be good to implement in that season of life.

My goal in this post is to identify goals for each area of life that influences mental health: cognitive perspective, physical well-being, social context, spiritual vitality, general life management, emotional regulation, etc. *Sometimes we need to be reminded that no one area of life can completely account for our mental health.*

**1. Get Adequate Sleep** – The brain plays a dominant role in mental health. [**Sleep is vital**](https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/314306-the-gift-of-sleep-josh-buice.html)for brain health. Inadequate sleep is the equivalent of not changing the oil in your car. You can get away with it for a while, but it winds up being very costly.

**2. Eat Balanced Meals** – Where does your body get the raw material to create a balanced neuro-chemistry? From what you eat. Wanting neurochemical balance with an imbalanced diet is like asking your children to draw a color picture with only black and white crayons.

**3. Engage With Friends** – When we’re isolated, our most destructive thoughts tend to echo in our minds and the healthy ones get muted. [**Friendship is a context**](https://churchleaders.com/smallgroups/small-group-articles/301183-3-trademarks-growing-healthy-friendship-paul-tripp.html) that tends to facilitate many of the other good mental health habits on this list.

**4. Worship** – Life is overwhelming. It is easy to be awed by all that is required to live for 80 years. [Worship is a time when we are awed by the right things](http://bradhambrick.com/overcoming-addictionworship-awe-strategies-5-of-5/); how much God loves us, God’s continual presence, etc.

**5. Read a Good Book** – Poor mental health hygiene often results from getting stuck in the “same old” thinking ruts. Reading a good book is both a distraction and provides new perspectives. Also, reading is like exercise for the mind.

**6. Engage Cardiovascular Exercise** – Few things have been shown to be better for mental health than[30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise](http://bradhambrick.com/combatting-anx-dep-2-of-6-stewarding-your-body/) at least three times per week. Go for a jog, take a walk, ride a bike or swim a few laps and anything else you’re doing on this list will be more effective.

**7. Avoid Debt** – Imbalance does not stay contained to one area of life. [**If you go into debt**](https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/317424-give-getting-debt-chris-brown.html), you increase stress, have to work more, which means you sleep less, which contributes to emotional reactivity, and erodes the quality of your relationships. [Avoiding debt](http://bradhambrick.com/gcmfinancespc/) does a lot for your mental health.

**8. Be Wise About Unhealthy Relationships** – Relationships, for better or worse, have a significant influence on our lives. [Christians can be confused and argumentative about how to think about boundaries](http://bradhambrick.com/boundaries/). Part of being “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16) is knowing how to be a redemptive agent in unhealthy settings.

**9. Get Out of Toxic Friendships** – Some relationships go from being unhealthy to being toxic, destructive or abusive. When this is the case, then we honor the other person best by limiting the amount of destruction they can do. [This means we apply Matthew 7:6 when Matthew 7:1-5 has been ineffective](http://bradhambrick.com/counselors-always-side-with-the-crying-woman/). Here are some [red flags](http://bradhambrick.com/manipulative-repentance-8-red-flag-phrases/) to look for.

**10. Laugh** – “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones,” Proverbs 17:22. [**Laughter**](https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-blogs/175610-leadership-and-laughter.html) is an important part of mental health. We have a hard time bearing up under the demands of everyday life when everything is serious all of the time.

**11. Look for Reasons to Say “Thank You”** – There is a direct correlation between how often you say “thank you” and whether you are focused on the good or hard things in your life. Gratitude may be one of the most significant dispositional qualities that influence our mental health.

**12. Pray** – What do you do with the hard things? Pray. Gratitude doesn’t mean we ignore the hard parts of our life. When we see the good things God has/is doing in our life, we are more prone to bring him the hard things with the confidence that comes from knowing He cares.

**13. Meditate on Scripture** – The content of our thinking has a significant impact on our mental health. When we meditate on lies and insecurities, it negatively impacts our mental health. When we [**meditate**](https://churchleaders.com/pastors/290629-6-truths-every-christian-meditate-every-day.html) on the timeless truths and character of God found in the Bible, it positively impacts our mental health.

**14. Consider Medication**– If you have acutely hard struggles in your life, talk to your physician. Have an idea of how a [conversation about medication is a part of your overall life management plan](http://bradhambrick.com/medication/). If medication is a part of pursuing a full and satisfying life, don’t feel any shame about it.

**15.**[**Journal**](https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-blogs/175662-journal-as-a-pathway-to-joy.html) – When we fail to reflect on where we’ve been, who we are and where we’re going, life can begin to feel meaningless. [Journaling](http://bradhambrick.com/journal/) is a good way to cultivate a greater sense of direction and context for your day-to-day life. It is easier to endure hardship when life has meaning.

**16. Learn Something New** – A growing mind is healthier than a stagnant mind. Learning is like cardio for the brain; new neural connections are forming and existing connections are being strengthened. As you learn, you also give yourself more fruitful things with which to engage your thought life.

**17. Confide Your Secrets** – Shame is toxic to both our mental and social health. Secrets are the currency of shame. Confiding secrets in trusted friends is a way to break the bonds of shame with the power of eye contact from someone who truly knows us.

**18. Serve/Volunteer** – An excessive self-focus is not healthy. When we only focus on our struggles, it makes our struggles seem increasingly large in our eyes. Serving others gives us perspective, becomes a source of wholesome joy, and reminds us that we can make a difference with our lives.

**19. Avoid Intoxicants** – There is a high correlation between substance abuse and mental illness. Whether this correlation is cause or effect can vary from person to person, but if you are concerned about your mental health, it would be wise to avoid recreationally impairing your mental state with alcohol or drugs.

**20. Regularly Attend Church** – People were created for community. In western culture we have too individualized our mental health. Isolation, or only surface relationships, is a negative influence on our mental health. Church is a place for deep fellowship, reinforcing other spiritual habits on this list, and being reminded that we are all broken and in need of the same Savior.

**21. Get Outside** – Air conditioning (keeping us inside) may have had as much of a negative influence on mental health as the light bulb (allowing us to stay up later and sleep less). These inventions aren’t the problem. Our habits are. Get outside in the sunshine. Walk. Experience God’s creation.

**22. Improve Your Posture** – The body influences the mind. Facial expressions influence mood. Body posture impacts attitude. Slouched shoulders and droopy demeanor both reveal and cultivate a down mood. A straight back, solid eye contact and intentional movement both reveal and cultivate confidence. Try it for a week and see.

**23. Get a Regular Medical Check Up**– Health is a dynamic commodity; it changes over time. It is wise to learn how our bodies are changing as we age. Go to the doctor. Discuss changes in your physical, cognitive and emotional health. Learn which are common with the aging process and what can be done.

**24. Set a Goal** – Goals give us a future orientation; that is, a reason to live. In the absence of goals yesterday is no different from today, morning is no different from night, and weekday is no different than weekend. Life becomes one big “blah.” Have goals each day that connect with something you find meaningful.

**25. Strive for Contentment** – Goals and contentment are not antithetical. Be content with who you are in Christ. Have goals for what you want to do with your life. When your goals begin to make you feel discontent, put them on hold until your soul becomes settled with who you are in Christ again.

**26. Doubt Your Fears** – This is hard. Our fears aren’t always wrong. But our fears should have to prove themselves before we embrace them. If you listen to your fears like a sincere friend who is only right 50 percent of the time, it will probably improve your mental health.

**27. Put Unpleasant Emotions Into Words** – When all we know is we feel “bad,” we’re not sure what to do. Answer the question, “If my unpleasant emotion could talk, what would it say?” Personifying our emotions is a good way to clarify them. Once we articulate them, it is usually clearer what can/should be done next.

**28. Reflect on Your Growth** – How are you wiser, stronger or more mature than you were a year ago? What have you learned? How has your life has improved? These are questions we often take for granted when our mental health is poor as we just focus on what is bad, hard or we don’t like. The fact you have grown is evidence that you can continue to grow and that God is active in your life.

**29. Ask “What Is Good” About Each Change in Your Life** – Many of us don’t like change, so we initially interpret change as bad and find what we liked better “before.” If this is you, cultivate the habit of looking for the opportunities and advantages in each change that initially bristles you.

**30. Invest in Your Strengths** – It’s not prideful to know what you’re good at; it’s foolish not to. Many of us can get so caught up in shoring up our weaknesses that we stop building on our strengths. The result is that we develop a defeatist or defensive attitude toward life that is bad for our mental health.

**31. Reconcile With Your Weaknesses** – Weaknesses aren’t bad; they’re just weaknesses. Quit hiding what you’re not good at. That causes you to live with a fear of being found out; which is bad for your mental health. Nobody likes a perfect person anyway, they’re unrelatable and intimidating.

**32. Call a Friend** – Have a “just because” conversation. Non-purposeful conversation where the only agenda is each person’s interest in the other is good for our mental health. It is like social relaxation exercise.

**33. Take a Social Media Sabbath** – Oops. You’re reading this on a social media channel. [**Social media**](https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/321613-social-media-ripping-apart-society-andrew-t-walker.html) can be both over-stimulating and cause us to compete with the idealized versions of other people’s lives. If this is stressing

**34. Be Still** – Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that if we are still for a few minutes, the world will not fall off its axis. Stillness is a great reminder that we are not God and God is still in control. Having a felt sense that you don’t have to be sovereign or omnipotent is good for your mental health.

**35. Reduce Caffeine if You’re Anxious** – Caffeine is a stimulant. If you struggle with anxiety, then caffeine adds to your anxiety. Being aware of how our food and beverage choices aid or detract from our mental health goals is important. Similarly, alcohol is a depressant, so refraining from alcohol is wise if you struggle with depression.

**36. Create a Satisfying Morning Routine** – Set your days up to succeed. Wake up early enough to get done what needs to be done. Have an order in which the most important morning tasks get accomplished. Being settled as you transition from maintenance activities to your purposeful activities is good for your mental health.

**37. Prioritize a Weekly Sabbath** – God called us to rest because He loves us and wants what is best for us (Exodus 20: 8-11). In the same way your car would not work well if the engine was always running or your computer would overheat if it was always active, your mental health requires some downtime too.

**38. Try Something New** – When we try something new we accept the possibility of failure. This is a good thing. When we live as if failure is fatal, the weight of each endeavor becomes crippling to our mental health. You might enjoy the new things and it become a lifelong hobby or food-of-choice, but even if you don’t, the experience will have been good for your mental health anyway.

**39. Make Sure Your Schedule Is Realistic** – If what you believe you “should” do each week won’t fit within the 168 hours God allotted for that week, then you’re going to feel like a failure. We often say “yes” to new things without saying “no” to old commitments. It is good to periodically do a life inventory to make sure you’re expectations aren’t undermining your mental health.

**40. Forgive** – When we refuse to forgive we insist on carrying the weight of bitterness. Is it fair? No. Is it healthy? Unforgiveness is not healthy either. [Forgiveness is actually a healthy form of self-care](http://bradhambrick.com/emotions-and-forgiveness-instructions-for-a-confusing-intersection/).

**41. When You Catch Yourself Ruminating, Do Something Else…Anything!** – Distraction is not always a bad thing. If you catch yourself ruminating on a past failure or offense, engage in any reasonably healthy activity (from video game to mowing the lawn) to take your mind somewhere else.

**42. Replace Your Self-Defeating Behaviors** – Make a list of the self-defeating patterns in your life. Find a replacement behavior for each. Tell a friend what it is you want to change and ask them to hold you accountable to follow through. Refuse to keep doing what is sabotaging your life.

**43. Repent** – Don’t carry guilt; Jesus did that for you. Too often we think of repentance as an icky, unpleasant conversation with God involving excessive emotion and wallowing. [When we understand what repentance](http://bradhambrick.com/follow-up-resources-for-a-sermon-from-amos-robust-repentance/) is, we realize it is liberating and healthy. Repentance is when we come to our senses and quit trying to make our dysfunctional choices functional.

**44. Make a List of Your Procrastinations and Do One of Them** – Just let it be a social experiment. Before you do that procrastinated task, take a moment and gauge the weight of dreading to do it. Put that weight on a 1-10 scale. Do the task. Gauge the weight of doing it on a 1-10 scale. Which was worse? Dread is bad for our mental health.

**45. Uni-Task More** – The distractedness of multi-tasking is experientially similar to many expression of poor mental health. So while uni-tasking is more efficient than multi-tasking (no really, it is, quit arguing), that is not my point here. The mental health benefits of mindfully focusing on one activity at a time is our goal in this habit.

**46. Take Yourself Less Seriously** – As C.S. Lewis famously said, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.” There is great liberty in this kind of humility. When we are less self-centered in our thinking, we will be less self-deprecating and insecure. It is unhealthy to measure ourselves against each person and experience in our life.

**47. Differentiate Solitude From Isolation** – Enjoy solitude. As Blaise Pascal said, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” When we fear being alone, we don’t allow time for our thoughts to settle like glitter in a Christmas snow globe.

**48. Write Out Your Worst Self-Talk and Re-script It** – What are the worst things you say to yourself? Write them out. Challenge them. Rewrite them to reflect the truth of who you are in Christ. Rehearse the new script, so that when the old self-talk emerges, you can counter it.

**49. Celebrate the Success of Others** – When we can’t celebrate the success of others, every good thing somebody else does becomes a standard for us to meet. We have to be as funny as the class clown, as smart as the valedictorian, as athletic as the football captain, as daring as the school rebel, as courteous as the teacher’s pet, etc. That is a mentally toxic way to live. Celebrate the successes of others and be free.

**50. Don’t Worry About Success or Failure. Be Content to Learn** – If you are content to learn, you will be free to live. When things don’t go well, create value in that situation by learning from it. When things do go well, be grateful for the abilities and opportunities God has given you. This posture of being a life-long learner is what will allow good mental health habits to be a blessing to you instead of a burden.

This list is not exhaustive (although reading it may feel exhausting). What would you add to the list and why?

Pick one or two items from this list that are a good fit for your life at this time and practice them until they become a habit. Once that happens, considering picking up a couple other items to focus on.

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