

May is Mental Health Awareness month, so now is an excellent time to refresh our understanding about our mental health. First, it's important to remember that general guidelines can help people only so far. Naturally, individual circumstances require individual recommendations. So, let's begin.

Symptoms are normal

Let's begin with emotional symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, grief, anger and fear. Many people simply want their symptoms to disappear--as quickly as possible--often thinking of themselves as *inferior* because they have symptoms. Emotional reactions are *very normal and very human*. To *not* have symptoms would be unusual. This is important to remember. Now, what to do about symptoms, and what might they indicate?

Honestly examine your circumstances

The mind, or the psyche, will generate emotions to self-regulate or self-correct the life of the individual. That is to say, the mind will compensate (or correct) specific attitudes or circumstances in one's life. For example, if someone is spending too much money on unnecessary things, it would be normal for that person to become anxious, perhaps even depressed. Naturally, it is really important to evaluate one's attitudes and circumstances to understand the presence of emotional symptoms. In this example, spending less money would be a wise move to ease the intensity of one's anxiety, decreasing the chances for becoming overwhelmed.

Change and growth

Reflecting on your circumstances may cause you to think about changes. This is healthy. Trust your instincts and intuition to lead the way for change. Be careful not to indulge negative thinking that tells you that change is impossible, or that it's too late to change. Human thought is far from perfect, displaying errors fairly regularly for most of us. Change is a real option, especially if it's healthy and growth-oriented.

Positive and negative coping

Sometimes we're not ready to change. In this situation, our coping can be helpful or harmful. We all get stressed, and the world is currently in great conflict. This can take a psychological toll. Positive coping strategies are well known: *proper sleep, exercise, healthy diet, talking to a trusted friend or family member, volunteering, being in nature, creative work—painting, writing*. Of course, seeking professional help from your primary care provider or a behavioral provider can be a wise option. Fortunately, healthy activities can help us cope, and they don't create additional problems for us.

On the other hand, negative coping can take the form of: addictions, unhealthy compulsions, cruelty, social isolation, and avoidance of normal--healthy activities. These coping strategies can create new problems, diminish us, and sometimes lead to self-destruction.