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PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
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Wellness Wednesdays
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WEEK 3

MENTAL WELLNESS & CANCER PREVENTION: The Mind-Body Connection

When it comes to cancer, most discussions focus on physical health—screenings, treatments, and lifestyle changes. But mental wellness is just as important. Research shows that chronic stress, anxiety, and depression can contribute to increased cancer risk by weakening the immune system and promoting inflammation.

For those diagnosed with cancer, maintaining mental well-being can improve treatment outcomes, increase resilience, and even extend survival rates. Understanding the relationship between mental health and cancer is key to prevention, early detection, and better long-term care for patients and survivors.

HOW MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS CANCER RISK

Stress is a normal part of life, but when it becomes chronic, it can take a toll on the body. Long-term psychological distress has been linked to increased levels of cortisol and inflammation, both of which can contribute to cancer development. Studies suggest that individuals who experience prolonged anxiety, depression, or social isolation may have a higher risk of certain cancers due to:

1. **Weakened Immune Function –** Stress reduces the body's ability to fight off infections and abnormal cell growth.
2. **Inflammation & Cellular Damage –** Chronic stress can cause long-term inflammation, which may increase cancer susceptibility.
3. **Unhealthy Coping Behaviors –** High stress levels are often linked to behaviors like smoking, excessive drinking, and poor diet, all of which increase cancer risk.

By prioritizing mental health, practicing stress management, and building strong support networks, you can take an important step toward cancer prevention.

FOLLOW THE MOUSE:
We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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Some professionals suggest that healthy habits – like doing activities you enjoy, or trying meditation or yoga to relax – can contribute to better quality of life during treatment.

BETTER TOGETHER

A cancer diagnosis brings emotional challenges that can be just as overwhelming as the physical ones. Anxiety about treatment, fear of recurrence, and depression are common among patients and survivors. However, addressing mental health during cancer care has been shown to:

Improve Quality of Life:
Emotional well-being can make treatment and recovery more manageable. Some professionals suggest that healthy habits like getting regular exercise, doing activities you enjoy, or trying meditation or yoga to relax can contribute to better quality of life during treatment.

Enhance Treatment Response:
Cancer patients who receive mental health support often experience better adherence to treatment and improved outcomes. One study found that cancer patients who attended support groups or went to therapy were more likely to continue their treatments compared to those who did not.

Increase Survival Rates:
Studies show that patients with strong emotional support systems tend to have better long-term survival rates. Last week we touched on the importance of early cancer screenings, and one study done on veterans shows that those who were in mental health treatment were 23% less likely to die after their cancer diagnosis, thanks to their increased rate of early screenings.

If you or a loved one is navigating cancer, know that mental health support is available. Speaking with a therapist, joining a support group, or finding stress-reducing activities can provide relief and strength during challenging times.

COPING STRATEGIES FOR CANCER PATIENTS & SURVIVORS

Managing mental health during and after cancer treatment requires intentional self-care and support. Here are some strategies to help:

1. **Talk to someone –** Whether it's a therapist, a trusted friend, or a support group, sharing your feelings can be incredibly healing.
2. **Practice mindfulness and relaxation –** Deep breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga can help reduce anxiety and promote emotional stability.
3. **Stay active –** Even activities like walking or stretching can improve mood and energy levels
4. **Seek professional support –** The **ComPsych EAP program** provides confidential counseling and mental health support tailored to those facing medical challenges. **Enter Web ID: BCBSILEAP.**
5. **Connect with others –** Finding a community of fellow survivors or caregivers can reduce feelings of isolation and offer a shared understanding of the journey.

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Caregivers often experience high levels of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. It's important for them to also seek support and practice self-care.

CAREGIVERS & LOVED ONES NEED SUPPORT, TOO

Caring for a loved one with cancer can be emotionally and physically demanding. Caregivers often experience high levels of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. It's important for caregivers to also seek support and practice self-care. Resources for caregivers include:

1. **Support Groups –** Many organizations offer dedicated groups for caregivers.
2. **Respite Care –** Temporary care services allow caregivers to take breaks when needed.
3. **Mental Health Counseling –** Therapy can help caregivers manage emotions and prevent burnout.
4. **Regular Health Appointments –** Make an appointment with your primary care provider for a check-up. Your health matters, too. If you don't have a PCP, you can call the Health Advocate number on your **BCBSIL member ID card or log on to Blue Access for Members℠ (BAM℠) bcbsil.com and use the Provider Finder**. This fast, easy-to-use tool improves members' experience when searching for in-network health care providers.

If you are a caregiver, remember that taking care of your own mental health is just as important as caring for your loved one.

HEALING THE WHOLE SELF

Holistic cancer care focuses on healing the body while nurturing the mind and spirit. Just as keeping up with routine check-ups with your primary care physician is essential, caring for your overall well-being is just as important. Whether through prevention, treatment, or survivorship, prioritizing mental health can enhance outcomes and improve quality of life.

If you or a loved one is seeking support, resources are available. **ComPsych EAP** and **BCBSIL Resources** offer counseling, stress management tools, and emotional wellness programs designed to help individuals navigate the challenges of cancer.

Mental wellness matters. Taking steps to care for your mind is just as important as caring for your body.

Found this week's edition of Wellness Wednesdays to be helpful? Spread the word to your colleagues so they too can take advantage of the mind-body connection in self care in 2025.

SOURCES: *Greta M Massetti, et. al*, *National Cancer Institute*, *Kaitlyn Gilham et. al*, *St. Luke's Health*