Set routines for better health

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted even the most basic daily routines that can help keep us healthy. However, with just a little planning, you can re-establish scheduled times for those activities that help bolster your health. Following routines offers these benefits:

Reduces worry and stress. Without routines, you simply run out of time, leaving you with the constant worry of all the things left undone.

Saves brainpower. Randomly jumping from task to task involves constant decision-making about what to do next, creating brain drain. Setting a routine and sticking to it helps you focus.

Increases your energy. Haphazard mealtimes or skipping breakfast altogether, for example, is a recipe for sluggishness. Even a quick but healthy breakfast can make a big difference in your stamina and outlook!

Keeps you in shape from head to toe. Committing time for daily exercise, for example, helps support the functions of your heart, brain, digestive and other organs—and helps control COVID-19 weight gain, too!

Promotes proper nourishment. Without scheduling time for grocery shopping/delivery with a prepared list of healthy food options, you’re likely to fill up on fast food, robbing you of nutrients that can help fortify your immune system.

Prevents worsening health. Forgoing daily flossing, not taking your meds on time, and forgetting to schedule routine check-ups may all lead to the need for sudden medical care.

Supports quality time with loved ones. A regular sit-down dinner routine ensures time to spend with household members at the day’s end.

Creates space for restorative activities. With an efficient daily routine, you can have room for a Zoom yoga class, nightly strolls with your spouse, reading your favorite book and more!

Routines help regulate your body clock! Disrupted body clocks (circadian rhythms), caused by a lack of a predictable sleep routine, for instance, has been associated with depression, diabetes, obesity and other conditions. If you’ve been going to bed and rising at the same time and still not sleeping soundly, talk to your doctor.
Reset after setbacks

Over the last year, you may have been hit with one or several roadblocks, possibly involving your livelihood, career goals, or in other areas of your life. Despite the nature of the setback, it’s possible to learn to manage changes, build resilience, and maintain a “never give up” attitude to find a way forward. Here are some ideas to help you get there:

Accept change. Remind yourself that life is unpredictable, change is inevitable, and the only thing you can control is your response to it. This may involve adjusting your goals or timelines.

Treat adversity as learning experiences. This can help you turn a negative experience into a positive one and become more open to new opportunities that could turn things around.

Think through problems rationally. Keep your emotions in check and quiet your mind. Overthinking can hinder your ability to overcome challenges and focus on identifying a solution, tapping into resources that could offer a detour around a roadblock.

Look at the big picture. Jotting down all your personal strengths as well as the positive things and people you are grateful for can energize you to move ahead. Realistic positivity can help you address hardships with a sensible outlook.

Develop a supportive network. Surround yourself with people who will cheer you on, remind you of your true worth as an individual, and help you feel strong enough to go forward.

Be mindful of your self-talk. Getting in the habit of saying “I can” and “I will” rather than “I can’t” or “I won’t” can help you become more open to new avenues, gain confidence and increase your chances of success in overcoming obstacles.

Need help to move forward?
Realizing when you need help is critical to building resilience. Talk to a licensed counselor or your doctor for a referral to a qualified professional.
Make a staycation a true getaway

Thinking of skipping vacations this year because of ongoing social restrictions? Think again. Taking time off—even without straying far from home—helps counter burnout, boosting your moods and productivity. So make a purposeful plan for an “escape staycation,” have fun, and recharge! Here’s how:

**Keep the benefits in mind.** Staycations can mean fewer planning decisions (and less spending) on travel/lodging arrangements, and often less worry about the weather and pet care, while finding refreshing ways to feel invigorated, bond with your kids or partner, and even support local and regional businesses, like those offering socially-distanced activities/events.

**Make the ordinary extraordinary.** Add a novel twist to a family backyard campout or nature walk, for instance, by having a scavenger hunt.

**Take care of your chores in advance.** Pay your bills ahead of time, for example, and attend to any scheduled home maintenance.

**Plan activities to keep you occupied during your downtime.** Some ideas: Line up books or TV series to catch up on, movies you’ve always wanted to see, or a hobby you’ve always wanted to try.

And don’t forget to disconnect once it’s vacation time. Avoid responding to any non-crucial texts, phone calls and emails during your staycation. Let friends and family know in advance that your responses may be delayed so they don’t worry about you!

**Create an itinerary of how to spend your time.**
It can be something different planned for each day, or the same activity over a span of days. **Check out resources such as:**
- Community event calendars for drive-in movies, pop-up concerts and outdoor markets
- Local, state and national park service websites for hikes, trails, tours
- The National Wildlife Federation for interesting outdoor activities
- Museums, zoos, theme parks, botanical gardens and archaeological sites, for virtual tours

For more help, talk to Health Advocate, your health practitioner or a licensed counselor.

Alcohol Awareness Month
If you’re thinking about cutting back on alcohol, understanding why and when you turn to alcohol can be the first step. A licensed professional counselor can help you identify your triggers and develop healthier coping skills for life’s challenges.