

## Non-Medicinal High Yield Interventions

1. **SLEEP**- inadequate sleep (less than an average of 7-9h/ night in adults, or less than 9-11 h/ night in school aged kids) is an independent cause of depression, anxiety, as well as for memory, learning and attentional issues. It is also a risk factor for high blood pressure, blood sugar dysregulation, obesity, and dementia. Addressing sleep issues is a high return on investment. CBT-insomnia can be done online and is evidence-based to improve sleep.

2. **DIET**- the equivalent of a palm-full of beet can make us sweat, cry and urinate reddish-purple for hours after, and a few pieces of asparagus can change the smell of our urine for the following 8-12 h. Junk food, processed and sugary unhealthy foods such as chips, candies, cake have an equally big impact on us- by impacting our mood, energy and anxiety levels for the worse. What we eat and drink impacts how often we get a common cold, our risk of cancer and how active we are as well as impacting how well we sleep. Any healthy changes you are able to make with your diet will pay off! Omega 3-Faty Acids in particular have been established as especially helpful in a range of mental and physical health ailments, and is recommended in treatment resistant depression, as well as for general memory, cognition and mood.

3. The role of **EXERCISE** in preventing the onset of mental health issues, preventing its progression and maintaining wellness once in remission cannot be over-stated. Exercise improves sleep, mood, anxiety, pain levels, quality of life measures, weight, blood sugar control and self esteem and protects against heart attack, stroke and dementia! It can be informal, such as taking the stairs or doing chair aerobics at home while following a YouTube video for 5-10 min/ day to start. Ideally, for optimal benefit, it is advised individuals have 20-50 min of aerobic activity (where their heart rate goes up and they break a sweat), 3-5x/ week. For best results, do it with someone! (See below). Exercise is recommended as a first line stand alone treatment for depression or as adjunctive treatment in treatment resistant depression in the National Canadian Guidelines for the treatment of Depression (CANMAT Guidelines). You may consider visiting

[www.HealthyNS.ca](http://www.HealthyNS.ca) for FREE ONLINE wellness programs for adults of all ages.

4. Get **CONNECTED**- who we spend most of our time with determines the majority of our health, wealth (how much money we have) and the quality of our lives. If you do not currently have a healthy team/ community where you feel SEEN, HEARD and ACKNOWLEDGED/ RESPECTED, it is very important you start looking for one. The best way to do this is to go to the places or do the things you actually enjoy doing, and other people with those interests will show up. If you like learning- go to the library; if you like chit chatting over coffee- start talking to people at Tim's; if you like art- go to the Art museum and talk to people there; if you can't find a group- look into the groups offered through Community Mental health or look at [www.Meetup.com](http://www.Meetup.com) (a social group site, NOT a dating site). Watch the TED talk on

YouTube called the "Lethality of Loneliness" for some sobering statistics about what happens when we just don't connect.

5. **MINDFULNESS**- Dan Harris summarizes this best in these two 5 min videos available for free on Youtube. "Meditation for beginners- Featuring Dan Harris & Sharon Salzberg", "Dan Harris: Hack your brain's default mode with meditation". Dr. Maria Patriquin is another resource specifically for people living in Halifax <http://www.livingwellihc.ca/>. YOGA is another source of mindfulness that is combined with physical activity and is also now listed as a first line stand alone treatment for depression or as adjunctive treatment in treatment resistant depression in the National Canadian Guidelines for the treatment of Depression (CANMAT Guidelines). There are many yoga studios and videos you can access for free online as desired.

6. **FILTERS & SELF TALK**- How we speak to ourselves and our beliefs about ourselves, about stress and the world, are known as our FILTERS or our attention biases. Understandably, if we are prone to believing we are going to be rejected, bad things always happen to us and we need to take care of everyone else before we take care of ourselves, it will impact our health physically and mentally. We now know that our attention biases have a physiological impact on us, with studies showing that they impact our immune function, cardiovascular risk, pain levels, mental health, cancer risk and how likely it is we have surgical complications as well as how long we live. It takes conscious effort to begin to change our filters, consider any one or more of the following:

- Watch TED talk by Kelly McGonigal on YouTube for 12 min summary about how our beliefs about stress impact how long we live, NOT our actual stress levels alone;
- Creating a Lessons learned journal- about what you have learned from the struggles you face or have faced;
- Starting a Brag book about the things you are proud of or that are positive in your life.
- A Gratitude journal, letter or better yet sharing 1- 3 things you are grateful for with a friend, in person or by social media. When done on a daily basis for 3 months this has been found to reduce blood pressure, headaches and improves anxiety and depression scores.
- Share your Best and Worst (or least favorite) parts of the day with someone daily (teaches us to be more balanced)