

4 THINGS LIKELY AFFECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, AND 4 THINGS YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Relationships or the pressures of performing at work or school are things we all know can have an impact on mental health, but sometimes it's less obvious when the world around you is what's causing problems. Whether you realize it or not, one or maybe all of these four things are probably affecting your mental health in some way right now.

CURRENT EVENTS

Violent events impact people across the world. Maybe you have family in a conflict zone, are worried about increases in identity-based hate, or have no personal ties to a particular news event but are constantly seeing graphic images online. A 2022 study found that 73% of American adults reported being overwhelmed by the number of crises going on in the world.

LONELINESS

Recent survey data show that more than half of U.S. adults (58%) are lonely, with those who are low income, young adults, parents, part of an underrepresented racial group, or living with a mental health condition experiencing even higher rates of loneliness. Loneliness increases the risk of developing anxiety and depression, and has been associated with psychosis and dementia. A low level of social interaction was found to have an impact on lifespan equivalent to smoking nearly a pack of cigarettes a day or alcoholism, and was twice as harmful as being obese.

TECHNOLOGY

Having the internet at your fingertips can be a fantastic thing – you can learn, connect with healthcare providers, keep in touch with friends and family – but it isn't without its downfalls. Exposure to constant [bad] news coverage and contentious political campaigns can make anyone's mood sour and cause anxiety about what lies ahead. In fact, almost 60% of young people (ages 18-25) expressed considerable worry about the future of the planet. Social media can cause FOMO (fear of missing out), depression, and reduced self-esteem as a result of comparison. Furthermore, the lines between work and personal time are blurred by working from home and after-hours email notifications on your phone, increasing the likelihood of burnout.

SOCIAL DRIVERS

Social drivers (also called social determinants) of health are the conditions in which you live, work, learn, and play. These include economic status, education, your neighborhood, access to resources (nutritious food, health care, green space, transportation, etc.), and social inclusion, and can have a far-reaching impact on not just your physical health, but also your mental health. One social driver that seems to be on everyone's mind is the economy.

Research shows a strong connection between worrying about money and mental distress, and for many people, salaries can't seem to keep up with rising inflation and cost-of-living expenses. A 2023 Gallup poll found that 42% of Americans are worried that they don't have enough money to pay their normal monthly bills.



WHAT CAN YOU DO IF THE WORLD IS WEIGHING ON YOU?

FIND YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Having people around you to support your mental and emotional health can make all the difference. Finding those who lift you up, provide a listening ear, and help you through stressful times can make all the difference for your mental health. There are many places to seek support, including friends and family, online support groups, or community spaces. Therapy and counseling can also provide you with an extra layer of support. Seeking out groups where you have similar interests, such as a book club, running group, crafting class, or spiritual community, can offer comfort and connection. Ultimately, you want a support system that suits your needs and provides a safe space for healing.

SET TECH LIMITS/BOUNDARIES

You can create space for a healthier relationship with technology by setting boundaries. Do some research to figure out what works best for you to limit screen time. Some things to try are blocking social media use between certain hours, putting time limits on apps, checking your phone settings, or downloading a website/app blocker. Decide your reason for logging on before you do, and sign off when you've finished doing what you need to do.

CHANGE WHAT YOU CAN

With the state of the world, life can feel overwhelming, and as if nothing you do will make a difference. The good news is there are some things you can do. Taking action and advocating for causes important to you can be therapeutic in its own way. Advocacy and action as a form of healing can be powerful. Knowing you are doing what you can to make a difference can give you hope for the future. Try getting involved in causes near you, join advocacy groups, get out and vote, do your part in helping the planet, or stay informed and speak up on topics that need support.

FIND HEALTHY COPING SKILLS

It can be tempting to ignore your feelings or numb them with substances, but this doesn't help anyone in the long run. Invest some time into figuring out what works best to help you manage your feelings. You may have to try a bunch of things until you find something that works, but it will be worth it. Check out MHA's list of coping skills in our [Building Your Coping Toolbox article](#).

Sometimes trying to manage your mental health by yourself is too much. Seeking professional help shows strength and can provide you with the support you need to manage life's stressors. Talking to a counselor or therapist can help you identify what might be affecting your mental health and how to best cope.

If you're taking steps to help yourself but still feel like you're struggling, take a mental health test at mhascreening.org, and check out MHA's book "Where to Start" for tips on how to take action.

In crisis? Help is available! Call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting HELLO to 741741.