

health Issues

...in the workplace

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PART OF THE WORKING TOWARD WELLNESS
WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAM



KEEP HEALTH IN MIND

Our mental health is an important part of how we function in our daily lives. It relates to our sense of well-being, feelings of control in our lives, and our ability to interact with others in a positive manner. When we experience feelings of loneliness, stress, depression, or emotional pain, we often draw on positive coping strategies to help maintain our mental health. However, when these feelings continue, become more intense, or negatively affect our daily activities, it is possible that a mental illness may be present or developing.

Mental illnesses are on the rise in Canada. In 2002, Health Canada reported that 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental illness during their lifetime. Mental illness can affect anyone regardless of education, occupation, income, gender, or ethnicity. In many cases, education and career opportunities are negatively affected by mental illness, as are personal relationships. Mental illnesses can also have a major impact on the family who may have to deal with health care costs, treatment, hospitalization, housing decisions, and the potential stress from added caregiver responsibilities.

Why do mental illnesses develop? Genetics plays a role, as do personality and environmental factors. As well, certain physical illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes can interact and contribute to mental illness. For many individuals, however, mental illness may worsen as a result of not getting properly diagnosed and treated when it is needed, in part because of the stigma that persists about mental health. When problems are kept from family, friends, and co-workers out of embarrassment or fear, diagnosis and treatment may not be sought out until the situation is more serious.

While better screening and more effective treatments are required, there is also a need for strategies to reduce the likelihood of developing mental illness. Building friendships, strong relationships, and good parenting skills are all important. Meaningful employment, adequate income, and a supportive environment in both the community and workplace are also crucial. In addition, getting regular physical activity and eating a healthy diet, can help improve or maintain our sense of mental well-being. We all have a role to play in improving our own mental health and supporting those around us.

Key References:

Health Canada. (2002). *A report on mental illness in Canada*. (Catalogue No. 0-662-32817-5). Ottawa, Canada: Health Canada Editorial Board Mental Illnesses in Canada.

Canadian Mental Health Association. (n.d.). *Seniors and mental health*. Retrieved March 20, 2006, from http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/about_mental_illness/seniors.asp

WORKING TOWARD
Wellness
LIVE BETTER · LIVE LONGER

spring/summer 2006

inside this issue

- Find Help Across Ontario For Mental Health Services and Supports
- Bike to Work Any Day in June Contest
- Physical Activity: The "Feel Good" Prescription
- How to Achieve Positive Mental Health
- Play With Your Brain!
- Herbal Relief - A Closer Look at St. John's Wort
- Mental Health and Physical Health - Exploring the Connection
- Paging Dr. Fido
- The Numbers Game on Mental Illness
- Examples of Mental Health Disorders
- Aging and Our Mental Health
- Help is Out There
- Coping With Mental Illness at Work
- Local Events and more...



inside

Find Help Across Ontario for Mental Health Services and Supports.

Are you or someone you know looking for information about mental health services and supports in your area? Mental Health Service Information Ontario (MHSIO) can help. This service, funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, is a province-wide information and referral service that provides 24-hour access to information about mental health services and supports in local communities. The service is free, confidential, and is provided in over 140 languages to consumers, families, service providers and others.

The information can be accessed via their website at www.mhsio.on.ca or by calling the Mental Health Service Information Line at 1-866-531-2600. To access local services and supports about Windsor Essex County, click on "Finding Service" on the website and then click "Online Service Directory".



In June the Windsor Bicycling Committee, Health Action Windsor-Essex and the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit welcome back the 7th Annual Bike to Work Any Day in June Contest.

All those who enter the contest are eligible to win great prizes, including a complete bicycle package!

Give it a try this year. There are health, financial, and environmental benefits to enjoy when you choose to commute to work by bicycle.

Contest information and materials are now available. Please contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 258-2146 x 3100.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

THE "FEEL GOOD" PRESCRIPTION

The benefits of physical activity for our bodies are well known – a reduction in risk factors associated with high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, certain cancers, and more. We know that leading an active lifestyle is good for our bodies – but what about our minds?

The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that symptoms associated with mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, can be improved through regular physical activity.

During physical activity, our brain produces endorphins, which are chemicals that provide relief from stress and pain. High intensity exercise is not required to experience this relief. For some people, a brisk walk is all that is needed. Physical activity can also release muscle tension and improve sleep, both of which can contribute to better mental health.

Psychologically, being active can:

- Give a sense of accomplishment and a boost in self-confidence.
- Improve self-esteem and body image.
- Provide positive social interactions.
- Help reduce feelings of anger, fatigue, and stress.

Knowing that an active lifestyle is good for you doesn't necessarily make it easier to do. Dealing with depression and anxiety can make it even more difficult to get started. To increase your odds of success, be sure to:

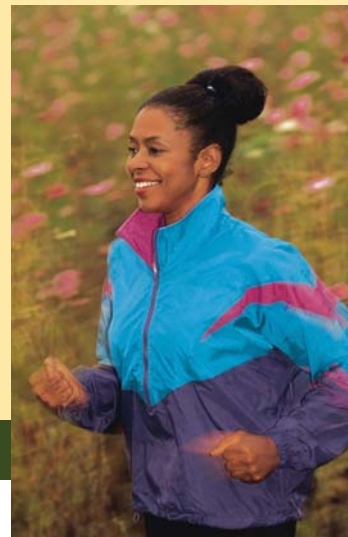
- Find a convenient activity that you enjoy and will be more likely to do.
- Set reasonable and realistic goals for yourself.
- Ask a friend, co-worker, or family member to join you. You can help each other stay motivated and stick to an active lifestyle.

The good news is that you do not have to be an elite athlete or member of a gym to experience these benefits. Try walking, cycling, in-line skating, jogging, curling, swimming, cross country skiing, or joining a house league sport at your local community centre. With very little planning, money, and time, you can experience the physical and mental benefits of being physically active.

Key References:

Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.) *Exercise for well-being*. Retrieved March 6, 2006, from http://www.cmha.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=2-267-354&lang=1

MayoClinic.com (n.d.) *Depression and anxiety: Exercise eases symptoms*. Retrieved March 16, 2006, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/depression-and-exercise/MH00043/METHOD=print>





HOW TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Play

with your brain!

Mental health is just as important to your quality of life as is your physical health. Just like physical health is not only the absence of disease, mental health is much more than just the absence of a mental illness. The World Health Organization defines health as: “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” However, the challenge of achieving mental health is to actively engage in activities that promote positive mental well-being. While many people are active to improve their physical well-being, often they wait until they develop a mental illness before taking steps to improve their state of mental health. In other words, positive mental health is feeling good about yourself, feeling in control, being able to face life’s challenges without becoming overwhelmed, and feeling that your life is meaningful and worthwhile. Here are some tips to help you practice positive mental health.

- Build a healthy self-esteem. Be positive about yourself and avoid harsh self-criticism.
- Take a daily break from your worries and concerns. It helps you relax.
- Manage stress effectively. Delegate and learn to say “no”. Be polite but firm.
- Acknowledge and express your emotions. Try not to “bottle-up” things inside.
- Develop positive relationships with family and friends. Respect, support, and stay in touch with one another.
- Create a reasonable budget and live within your means. Plan ahead and set goals.
- Enjoy nutritious foods and regular physical activity. They fuel your body, mind, and spirit.
- Create strategies to cope with changes. Control what you can.
- Volunteer. Helping others makes us feel good about ourselves, broadens our social contacts, provides new experiences, and can help us balance our lives.
- Laugh more. Enjoy life’s humorous moments and share them with a friend.
- Have a spirituality to call your own.

Key References:

World Health Organization. (2001). *Mental health: Strengthening mental health promotion*. (Fact Sheet No. 220). Geneva, Switzerland: Author.

B.C. Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. (2004). *Achieving positive mental health* [Electronic version]. Retrieved March 22, 2006, from <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/positivementalhealth.shtml#top>

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2001). *The 2001 Canadian Mental Health Survey COMPAS Inc.* [Electronic version]. Retrieved March 22, 2006, from http://www.cmha.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=5-34-212-213&lang=1#_Toc512618117

We need our minds to complete daily tasks, enjoy activities, and carry us safely into old age. As you age, you may notice changes in your mental sharpness and memory. This is a normal part of aging, but there are ways to prevent decline and improve brain power. When you use your brain in new or challenging ways, more neural pathways become established in the brain which improves memory, mental fitness, and concentration.

Learn a new language, pick up a new hobby or engage in friendly debate – all of these help to stimulate your brain. Other ideas include: read a challenging book, use your other hand to comb your hair or brush your teeth, or take a different route to work.

Puzzles are also a good way to exercise your brain. Crosswords, logic puzzles, and math puzzles are all great! Here are a few brain teasers to get you started.

Questions

1. How much dirt is in a hole that is 3'x 2'x 1'?
2. What is the beginning of eternity and the end of space and time?
3. If you count from 1 to 100, how many 7's will you pass on the way?
10 11 19 20 21
4. The same three-letter word can be placed in front of the following words to make a new word:

LIGHT BREAK TIME

Key References:

Mensa International. (n.d.) *Mensa workout*. Retrieved March 24, 2006, from <http://www.mensa.org/workout2.php?>

Answers
1. None. It's a hole. 2. The letter "E". 3. 20 4. Day



Herbal Relief?

A CLOSER LOOK AT ST. JOHN'S WORT

According to Health Canada (2005), 71% of Canadians regularly take supplements of vitamins, minerals, and other natural health products. The growing use of self-selected herbal supplements to treat mood disorders raises questions about their effectiveness and safety.

For example, St. John's Wort (SJW) is a popular supplement claimed to alleviate depression and promote emotional well-being. St. John's Wort is traditionally taken in doses of two to four grams daily for up to six weeks in its dried form to help provide relief of anxiety and sleep disorders. While it may be useful for treating *mild to moderate* depression, a review of recent studies demonstrates that it has no benefit in treating *major* depression. Furthermore, SJW has been found to limit the effectiveness of several medications and has other possible side effects including dizziness, nausea, fatigue, and increased sensitivity to sunlight. St. John's Wort should not be taken by pregnant or breastfeeding women.

Evidence on the effectiveness and safety of using many other herbal supplements to treat mood disorders is inconclusive. A physician should always be consulted before taking any herbal supplement to help ensure that the best possible treatment is received. For further information on other natural health products, visit the Natural Health Products Directorate at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/index_e.html

Key References:

Health Canada. (2005). *Baseline natural health products survey among consumers, March 2005*. Retrieved March 22, 2006, from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/pubs/natur/eng_cons_survey_e.html

Linde, K., Mulrow, C.D., Berner, M., & Egger, M. (1996). St. John's Wort for depression – An overview and meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials. *British Medical Journal*, 313, 253-258.

Mental health and physical health – exploring the connection...

Most people recognize that anxiety, depression, and stress may have serious effects on their mental health. But did you know that your mental health and your physical well-being are also strongly connected?

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2003), mental health conditions may negatively affect your physical health. For example, anxiety and stress are often associated with severe headaches, stomach ulcers, and hypertension. In a 2005 review by Chapman, Perry and Strine, anxiety and stress have also been reported to aggravate asthma symptoms. In addition, excessive stress may heighten the likelihood of developing arthritis, and people who report chronic anxiety are often also at greater risk of developing heart disease. Further, mental health conditions may weaken the immune system, which greatly increases the likelihood of developing chronic physical illnesses.

Likewise, physical illness may have a negative impact on your mental health. According to recent research completed by the University of Washington School of Medicine (2003), patients with chronic physical illness have a high prevalence of major depressive illness. Indeed, patients with cancer, arthritis, asthma, diabetes, and heart disease may experience intensified feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress.

All this research and evidence suggests a strong connection between body and mind. Given that this connection exists the good news is that leading a healthy lifestyle can have a positive impact on both mental and physical health. Therefore, making healthy choices such as being physically active, eating healthy foods, not smoking, going for annual medical examinations, and developing appropriate coping strategies may prevent many physical and mental health conditions. Truth is, good mental health promotes a healthy body...and that should provide some peace of mind!

Key References:

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2003). *Mental health - The connection between mental and physical health*. Retrieved March 30, 2006, from http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/about_mental_illness/mental_health.asp?clD=3963

Chapman, D.P., Perry, G.S., & Strine, T.W. (2005). The vital link between chronic disease and depressive disorders. *Preventing Chronic Disease Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy*, 2(1), 1-10.

Katon, W. J. (2003). Clinical and health services relationships between major depression, depressive symptoms, and general medical illness. *Biological Psychiatry*, 54, 216-226.





PAGING DR. FIDO



Most pet owners in Canada consider their furry friends to be an essential part of the family. But, can pet ownership make us healthier people? There is some evidence to suggest that long-term pet ownership can actually improve cardiovascular health through activities such as walking. However, of greater importance is the companionship, unconditional loyalty, and non-judgmental behaviour they provide - especially during stressful times.

In addition to companionship, pets encourage their owners to be more socially active and to develop a greater sense of community. In a 2005 study, 41% of pet owners reported getting to know people in their neighbourhood because of their pet. Feelings of loneliness were also lower among pet owners. It is these feelings of social connection that foster a sense of well-being. Similar to diet and physical activity, having meaningful social relationships is a very important part of maintaining good health.

So should everyone adopt or buy a pet? The answer is "no". People who don't like animals, travel often, or can't make the financial or time commitment needed for a pet shouldn't get one. Also, be aware that pets can aggravate allergies and asthma. Consider the pros and cons carefully before making a decision. If you do decide to get a pet, do your homework first. You may want to speak to a veterinarian about the best type of pet for you and your family.



Key References:

- McNicholas, J., Gilbey, A., Rennie, Ahmedzai, S., Dono, J., & Ormerod, E. (2006). Pet ownership and human health: A brief review of evidence. *British Journal of Medicine*, 331, 1252-1254.
- Virués-Ortega, J., & Buela-Casal, G. (2006) Psychological effects of human-animal interaction: Theoretical issues and long-term interaction effects. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 194 (1), 52-57.
- Wood, L., Giles-Corti, B., & Bulsara, M. (2005). The pet connection: Pets as a conduit for social capital? *Social Science & Medicine*, 61, 1159-1173.

The Numbers Game on Mental Illness

#1 Mental/Emotional problems are now the leading cause of worker absenteeism, exceeding physical causes in Canada.

35 million Total number of workdays lost/year in Canada due to mental health conditions.

9,022,382 Total number of days/year that Canadians spent in the hospital due to a mental illness.

16% The percentage of health care expenditures that are related to mental health disorders in Canada.

\$14.4 billion A conservative estimate of the direct and indirect costs of mental illness in Canada.

Key References:

- BC Partners for Mental Health and Addiction Information. (2003). *The economic costs of mental disorders and addictions*. Retrieved on March 30, 2006, from <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/economiccosts.pdf>
- Global Business and Economic Round Table on Mental Health. (2006). *2006 business and economic plan for mental health and productivity*. Retrieved on March 30, 2006, from <http://www.mentalhealthroundtable.ca/20060328/2006BusinessPlan.pdf>

Register now for...

Our Executive Breakfast Series Forum, "Building Healthy Workplaces: One Conversation at a Time" featuring keynote speaker, Dr. Louise Hartley, Clinical Psychologist.

Who should attend? Key workplace wellness program decision-makers and implementers

When: 7:30am – 9:30am Wednesday, June 14

Where: Ciociaro Club, Salon C


Cost: One registration - \$50

Each additional workplace registration - \$40
Table of six - \$200

Call: (519) 258-2146 Ext., 3100 for more information

Hosted by: Health Action Windsor-Essex
Windsor and District Employee Assistance Program Council
Windsor-Essex County Health Unit

Aging and Our Mental Health



Examples of Mental Health Disorders

Mental illnesses can affect anyone, regardless of age, education, income, or culture. The causes are complex and include genetic, biological, personality, and environmental factors. Symptoms vary from mild to severe and are usually treated with medications and/or psychotherapy. More common types include mood, anxiety, and eating disorders.

Mood Disorders

This group includes depression (Unipolar Disorders), or a combination of manic and depressive episodes (Bipolar Disorder). Individuals with depression often feel worthless and sad to the point where daily living activities are affected. They may also have sleep problems and low energy levels. During manic phases, individuals are overly energetic and may do things out of character such as spending large amounts of money and having an extremely short attention span.

Anxiety Disorders

This group involves excessive levels of fear and worry that cause the individual to avoid particular situations and/or to develop compulsive behaviours as a way to reduce the anxiety. Some types include Generalized Panic Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Eating Disorders

These disorders involve a serious disturbance in behaviours associated with eating too much or too little, and a disturbance in how the individual views their body size and shape. Some types include Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Binge Eating Disorder.

While the risk of developing one of these mental disorders may be reduced, once diagnosed, the recovery goal is to gain a sense of control over the illness and one's life, even though symptoms may still be present. For more information, visit www.cmha.ca

Key Reference:

Health Canada. (2002). *A report on mental illness in Canada*. (Cat. No. 0-662-32817-5). Ottawa, Canada: Author.

Aging is a natural process each of us will experience. It involves many changes that can affect our mental health both positively and negatively. Many will embrace their senior years, finding it very fulfilling with new opportunities, activities, and hobbies that were not possible while working and having family responsibilities. For others, these changes can lead to feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety, dependency on others, and even thoughts of suicide.

Mental health problems may be related to physical, social, and economic changes that sometimes occur as an individual ages. Physical illness, immobility, chronic pain, and cognitive/sensory impairments can make it very difficult for older adults to engage in the activities they once enjoyed. In addition, life changes such as retirement, widowhood, and death of long-time friends, can lead to a loss of purpose in life, emotional/social isolation, and added stress. For many of us who have older loved ones, it can mean new caregiving responsibilities, which could be stressful and impact on our own quality of life.

While many of these life changes are beyond our control, strategies can be developed to help maintain mental well-being in later years. Here are some suggestions for you or someone you care about:

- 1) Start planning early for retirement. Develop a healthy lifestyle before retirement by being physically active on a daily basis, eating well, drinking responsibly, not smoking, and getting an annual medical examination.
- 2) Keep a positive attitude about the physical changes you will experience as you age. You may still be able to do the things you love, but you might have to slow down and pace yourself.
- 3) Look to family and friends for emotional support to help you through the loss of a loved one.
- 4) Develop and maintain social networks of friends and activities to help offset feelings of loneliness.
- 5) Learn to recognize the signs of depression (loss of appetite, weight, energy, or motivation, lower quality of sleep, or thoughts of suicide). According to the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences at McMaster University, an individual should seek professional help if they experience at least three to four of the signs and symptoms of depression for more than two weeks.

Key References:

BC's Mental Health Journal (Summer 2002). *Senior and mental health promotion*. Retrieved on March 21, 2006 from <http://www.cmha.bc.ca/resources/visions/seniors>

Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.) *Aging and mental health*. Retrieved on March 20, 2004 from http://www.cmha.ca/bins/print_page.asp?cid=2-74&lang=1

PsychDirect.(n.d.). *Signs and symptoms of depression*. Retrieved on April 5, 2006, from <http://www.psychdirect.com/depression/dsigns.htm>





HELP IS OUT THERE

If you think you may have a mental illness, it is important to seek professional help. The first place to start is to speak with your family physician. Sometimes other medical conditions (e.g., hypothyroidism, nutritional deficiencies) have similar symptoms to mental illnesses and therefore need to be ruled out.

Once you have been diagnosed by your doctor with a mental illness, what comes next? Two of the most common treatments are medication and therapy, often used in combination.

Medication

There are many types of medication available, each with benefits and side effects. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors or SSRIs (e.g., Paxil, Celexa, Zolof) are some of the most commonly used antidepressants. These act on the chemical imbalances found in people with depression and anxiety. Along with asking your doctor, you can visit www.webmd.com/drugs/ for more information on medications.

Therapy

As with medications, there are several types of therapy. Examples of talk therapy include:

- Psychotherapy: clients talk about their lives and past experiences to a therapist.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: a therapist helps a client change negative thought patterns.
- Group therapy: group members share with others, often reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

If you or your doctor decide that therapy would be beneficial, you have a number of options. Your doctor may refer you to a psychiatrist, or you may want to find someone yourself, such as a psychologist or social worker. When finding a mental health practitioner, be sure to choose a person who is licensed by a regulating association, such as the Canadian Psychological Association, Canadian Psychiatric Association, or the Canadian Association of Social Workers. For more information on each of these, see the website section in this newsletter. Therapy may be covered through your Employee Assistance Plan or Health Care Benefits Plan. Contact your EAP Representative or Human Resources Department for further information.

Key References:

- Health Canada. (2002). *A report on mental illnesses in Canada*. (Cat. No. 0-662-32817-5). Ottawa, ON: Author
- Silverstone, P. and von Studnitz, E. (2003). *Defining anxious depression: Going beyond comorbidity*. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 48(10), 675-680.

Coping with a Mental Illness at Work

The workplace can provide an important social support system to a person who is coping with a mental illness. This is vital when it comes to improving the affected person's sense of self-esteem, control, and self-worth.

When returning to work, the employee benefits by moving toward a healthier, more meaningful role. The workplace benefits by retaining valuable knowledge and experience, and avoiding the added costs of hiring and training a new employee. Accommodating workers returning from health problems also sends a clear message that the employer cares about the employees who work for them.

Accommodations should be based on an employee's needs and on resources available to the workplace. Some examples may include flexible scheduling, modified work, or a modified workspace.

Unfortunately, employees may not feel comfortable asking for accommodations or discussing their illness at work because of negative stereotypes related to mental illness. One way to help eliminate these stereotypes is to support friends, family members, or co-workers with mental illnesses in knowing that they are valued parts of our lives, and valued contributors to the workplace. Employees should work with their employer, Disability and/or Employee Assistance Program Provider, and their union to help make their return to work a positive experience for everyone involved.

Key Reference:

- Mental Health Works. (n.d.). *Employees*. Retrieved March 28, 2006, from <http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca/employees/index.asp>



WEBSITE SUPPORT

Interested in bringing wellness to your workplace? The Working Toward Wellness Program offers consultation and support to help workplaces start and maintain a wellness program that works. For more information call 258-2146 x 3100.

Bulimia and Anorexia Nervosa Association of Windsor-Essex
www.bana.ca

Canadian Association of Social Workers
www.casw-acts.ca

Canadian Coalition For Seniors Mental Health
www.ccsmh.ca

Canadian Collaborative Mental Health Initiative
www.ccmhi.ca

Canadian Health Network – Mental Health
www.canadian-health-network.ca
Type in “mental health” under the search area

Canadian Mental Health Association
www.cmha.ca

Canadian Psychiatric Association
www.cpa-apc.org

Canadian Psychological Association
www.cpa.ca

Centre For Addiction and Mental Health
www.camh.net

Health Canada - It's Your Health: Mental Health and Illness
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/mental_e.html

Here to Help - BC
www.heretohelp.bc.ca

Internet Mental Health
www.mentalhealth.com

Mensa International
www.mensa.org

Mental Health Works
www.mentalhealthworks.ca

Mind Your Mind
www.mindyourmind.ca

Mood Disorders Society of Canada
www.mooddisorderscanada.ca

Moods Magazine
www.moodsmag.com

National Eating Disorder Information Centre
www.nedic.ca


Public Health Agency of Canada –Mental Health
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/mentalhealth

World Health Organization – Mental Health
www.who.int/mental_health

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The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO) has launched a new website, www.checkupfromtheneckup.ca. The MDAO is offering an on-line self-administered mental health check-up over the next three months. In addition to this on-line check-up, the website includes fact sheets on mood disorders, community services, and links to other related mental health information. For more information call 1-888-486-8236 ext. 229.

Do you have suggestions for future topics?
Please submit your ideas to Meghan Toews
E-mail: mtoews@wehealthunit.org
Phone: 519-258-2146 x 3100 Fax: 519-776-6102

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