



Healthy Everywhere

A guide to building better
mental health at work and home



Contents

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

As you read, use the charts and checklists within this guide to gather information and take mental notes.

You can also use your findings to start conversations with your physician, family members or friends and further explore opportunities to grow your mental health and well-being.



Your guide



Keep your body and brain healthy



Facing mental health's main challenge



Common chronic stress triggers



Recognize the symptoms



Practice self-care, everywhere



Find the right support services



Make the most of your treatment



How to support others



Track your progress



Resources

Your guide

Our personal health and well-being follow us everywhere we go: Challenges at home may impact how we perform at work, and stress from the workplace may follow us home, overflowing into our relationships with partners, family or friends.

That's why it's so important to practice and promote habits that help us be **healthy everywhere**.

This guide outlines ways you and your loved ones can strengthen mental health, no matter where you are in your well-being journey. Learn how to boost brain health, identify and manage chronic stress, find the right support services and connect with beneficial mental health resources. Our tools and resources will help assess your and your loved ones' mental health, so you can identify ways to improve, track your future progress and be your happiest, healthiest self for many years to come.



Keep your body and brain healthy

Just like any other organ in your body, your brain needs healthy habits to stay well and operate properly.

We've been taught to:



Eat nutritious foods to benefit our hearts.



Avoid smoking to keep our lungs healthy.



Exercise regularly to strengthen our muscles and bones.

But what do we do for our brains — the master organ that powers us all?

The answer lies in how we approach brain health and what we do every day to strengthen our overall mental health and well-being.

BUILDING YOUR BRAIN'S HEALTH

To maximize our minds and mental health, we must first understand what good mental health looks like.

Most people would say positive mental health is a collection of healthy thoughts, feelings and emotions.

But, it is more than that: The brain is the hardware that allows us to experience those thoughts, feelings and emotions. So, if our brain isn't well cared for — our mental health can suffer.

Luckily, there are many behaviors you can adopt to maintain a healthy brain. Review the report card below and consider the following questions, as you grade yourself:

- 1 Where are you doing well?
- 2 What areas could you improve on?
- 3 Are there areas you're currently managing well, but would like to do even better?

Use this brain health report card to rate your personal well-being. Put a check in which box best matches how you feel.

YOUR BASIC BRAIN HEALTH REPORT CARD			
	GOOD	OKAY	NEEDS WORK
SLEEP Aim to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.			
DIET Stay hydrated and eat balanced meals including fruits and vegetables.			
EXERCISE Stretch daily to strengthen your muscles and raise your heart rate.			
SOCIAL TIME Regularly spend time with people you enjoy.			
RELAXATION Build time into your day to rest and reflect.			
PURPOSE Have something outside of work and home that gives your life meaning.			

Facing mental health's main challenge



Anyone can experience mental health challenges.

Some people are more likely to experience these challenges because of heredity and family medical history (issues like depression and anxiety tend to run in families).

Other individuals struggle due to early childhood or more recent traumas. And some people are simply born prone to experiencing mental health challenges.

While we all may have different mental health concerns or vulnerabilities, the triggers that bring those issues to the surface are almost always from the same source:

STRESS.

KNOW YOUR RISK

Certain factors may put you at higher risk for mental health and well-being concerns — but you can reduce risk factors by learning to identify common triggers. Do any of these describe you or a loved one?

- Chronic high stress
- A history of mental health challenges in a blood relative, such as a parent or sibling
- A past brain injury, such as a blow to the head
- Military combat
- Traumatic experiences, like assault or the death of a loved one
- Few friends or healthy relationships
- Overuse of alcohol or recreational drugs
- A childhood history of poverty, abuse or neglect
- A previous mental health challenge
- Certain ongoing medical conditions, including cancer, diabetes, hypothyroidism, hypertension, coronary artery disease, asthma, arthritis and stroke recovery

Common chronic stress triggers

A little stress can be a good thing; it often inspires that helpful push of extra motivation for you to do well.

Short-term stress jump-starts your body's fight-or-flight response. This can help you focus on the task at hand — like when you're running a race or preparing for a speech.

But when stress becomes chronic, the body can't turn off the fight-or-flight response. Unable to recognize that a threat isn't present, your body is flooded with stress hormones. Over time, chronic stress can damage your brain and body and contribute to issues like depression, anxiety and serious, long-term health conditions (like heart disease, digestive issues, weight gain or stroke).¹



COMMON CAUSES OF CHRONIC STRESS

Stress comes from a multitude of sources — and often we experience not just one, but several stressors simultaneously. Are you living with any of the following common triggers of chronic stress?

- Job worries
- Loneliness
- Financial troubles
- Chronic illness or injury
- Relationship problems
- Major life changes
- Taking care of a sick or elderly family member
- Death of a loved one
- Loss of a pet
- Major world events
- Harassment, discrimination or bullying
- Technology overload
- Perfectionism
- Unrealistic or rigid expectations
- Uncertainty
- A crisis of faith or purpose

¹ *Stress in America 2023 (apa.org)*

Recognize the **symptoms**

Damage to your body is typically easy to spot.

If you twist your ankle, you'll see swelling and feel pain. If you get an infection, you'll experience redness, discomfort and heat under your skin.

Even though you often can't see or feel stress, you can learn to recognize it.

Chronic stress can be responsible for a variety of symptoms that may seem unrelated — until you know what to look for.

TAKE THE CHRONIC STRESS TEST

Have you or someone you cared about experienced the following symptoms?

Physical

- I have no energy.
- I can't concentrate.
- I'm nervous or restless.
- My chest feels uncomfortable.
- I have stomach discomfort.
- My joints or muscles hurt.
- I get a lot of headaches.
- I have trouble forming my thoughts.
- I'm moving or talking slower than usual.

Feelings

- I feel sad for no reason.
- I feel bad, even if good things happen.
- I'm irritable.
- I easily get angry or snap at people I care about.
- I feel guilty about everything.
- I feel worthless.
- I feel like everyone is better than me.
- I feel like other people don't want me around.

Behaviors

- I'm sleeping too much or not long enough.
- I stay in bed or on the couch all day.
- I can't sit still. I must always be doing something.
- I avoid people and isolate myself.
- I don't enjoy things I used to.
- I call in sick a lot.
- Sometimes I can't motivate myself to shower, brush my teeth or shave.

Thoughts

- This will never get better.
- I never do anything right.
- I deserve this pain.
- Nobody cares about me.
- Nothing ever works out for me.
- Nobody is trying except me.
- Nothing good will ever happen.
- There is no hope for me.



Practice self-care, EVERYWHERE

If you're experiencing any of the symptoms from the chronic stress test on page 7, it's time to consider adding self-care to your daily routine.

BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS SELF-CARE?

The phrase may inspire pictures of a spa day complete with fluffy robes, an afternoon spent on the golf course or staying in bed with your favorite book. These ideas may feel indulgent or even a bit selfish. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Self-care is any activity you do deliberately to take care of your mental, emotional and physical health. It's the embodiment of the saying, "You can't pour from an empty cup". Or, "Please secure your own mask before helping others."

Self-care can be practiced almost anytime and anywhere. Listening to your favorite podcast on the way to and from your workplace, taking a 10-minute walk between appointments, sipping a cup of your favorite tea or coffee at your desk or spending a lunchbreak with friends are all easy ways to integrate more self-care into your life.

SELF-CARE BENEFITS GO FAR BEYOND YOUR PERSONAL HEALTH

Scheduling time for self-care — wherever, whenever and however it feels right for you — helps you be your best self. Plus, the benefits of regularly scheduled "me time" can extend far beyond your own health and happiness, positively impacting your family, friends and coworkers, too.²

² *How to Claim Some 'Me Time'* (WebMD.com)

Feel-good TIPS TO TRY

When you feel stressed, it's essential to slow down and take proper care of yourself — no matter if you're at work or at home.

SLEEP

Try for at least eight hours of sleep each night to help you manage stress and feel your best every day. Your mental and physical well-being can suffer if you're operating on a sleep deficit, especially when you're trying to juggle the demands of work and home.

NUTRITION AND EXERCISE

Minimize processed foods in your diet and instead focus on whole foods, like fruits and vegetables. Consider packing a lunch or healthy snacks as you prepare for your workday. Drink plenty of water and get your body moving. A quick walk around your neighborhood or up-and-down the office halls can clear your mind and deliver a fresh outlook.

STILLNESS

Devote time to yourself each day. Meditate, pray, write in a journal or spend time in nature. Even a minute or two of stillness during the workday can help; simply sitting for a moment in a quiet, sunny

spot or practicing mindful breathing at your desk can work wonders.

SOCIAL TIME

One of the best predictors of a healthy life is strong social connections. Recent studies show that friendships boost mental health and longevity.³ Look for workplace clubs or organizations to join to meet people who share similar interests. Check your local community center to find activities, clubs or gatherings. Or schedule meetups and phone calls with friends and loved ones to stay connected.

PURPOSE

Having a purpose outside of work and home gives life meaning, clarity and joy. You can find purpose when you enjoy hobbies, learn new skills, help others and work to improve your community. Not sure where to start? Try volunteering at a community center, your child's school or a local animal shelter.



THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

No matter which self-care tip you try, you can find a free or low-cost app to support your journey. Search your preferred app store for help with:

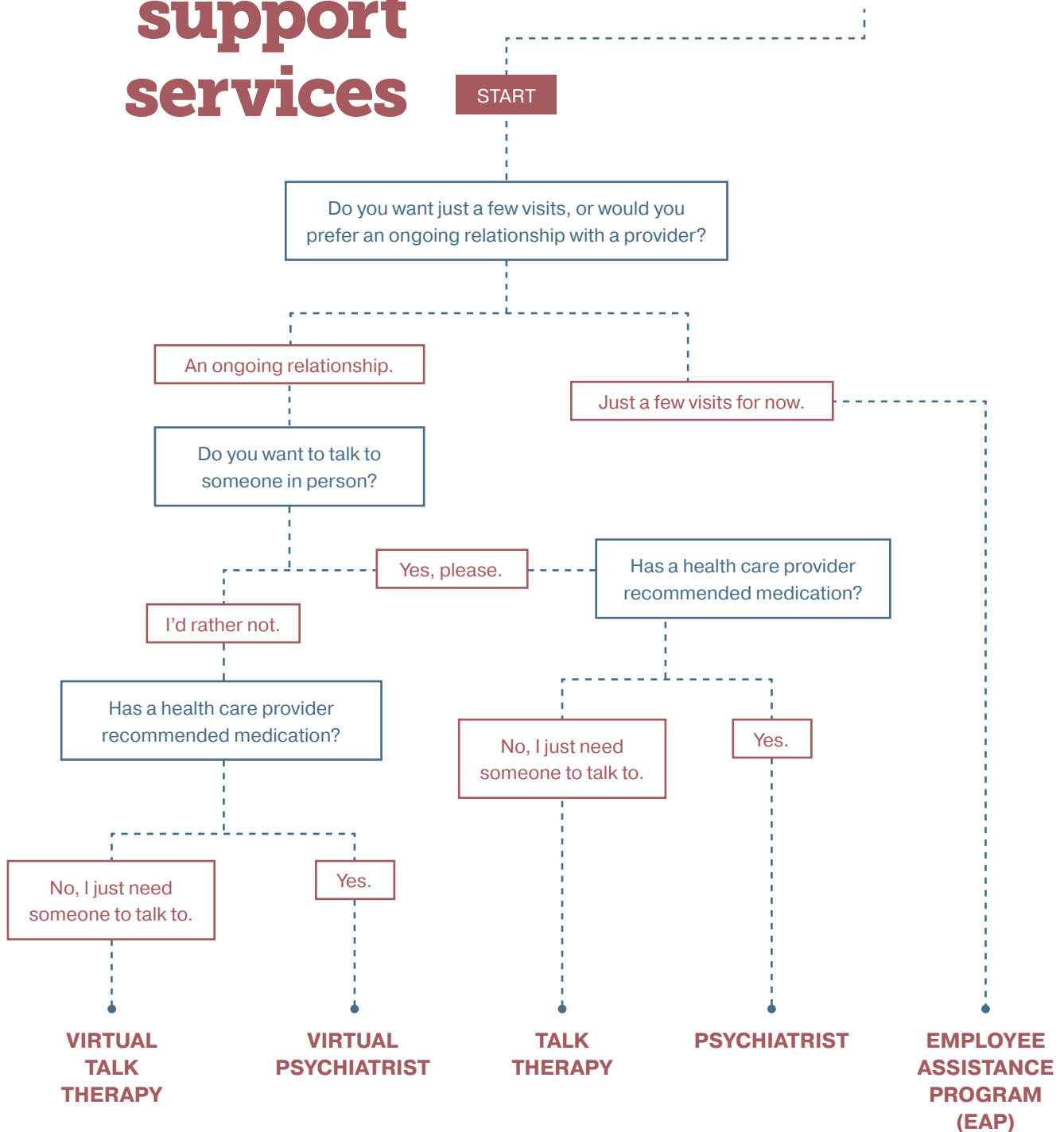
- Self-care
- Sleep
- Exercise and nutrition
- Decluttering and organizing
- Mood tracking
- Breathing exercises
- Communication and relationship support
- Personal and professional development
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Anxiety and panic relief
- Addiction support

³ *The science of why friendships keep us healthy (apa.org)*

Find the right mental health support services

Sometimes basic self-care isn't quite enough to help you feel better. When that's the case, a little extra support can improve your mental health and strengthen overall well-being.

Your primary care physician (PCP) is a good place to begin exploring options. In addition to having a conversation with your PCP, your State of Iowa benefits also offer several services to consider. Use the decision tree below to find an option that's right for you.



Read more about each of these five mental health service options on page 11.

Understanding your support service options

To help better understand the State of Iowa mental health services available to you, review the following benefits:

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

The State of Iowa's EAP program delivers free, confidential support to help you manage life's biggest stressors and get you started on your mental well-being journey.

State of Iowa's EAP services are administered by Acentra Health®. For more information, call 800-833-3031.

YOUR PRIVACY IS OUR PRIORITY

All of the mental health services outlined here are completely confidential — no one at the State of Iowa will be alerted if you reach out for support.

VIRTUAL TALK THERAPY*

If you prefer to video chat with a licensed therapist in the privacy of your own home, many therapists now offer virtual visits. Contact a provider's office to find out if they offer the service.



FIND A PROVIDER

Once you know what type of care you're looking for, visit [Wellmark.com/finder](https://www.wellmark.com/finder) to search for in-network providers.

VIRTUAL PSYCHIATRIST*

Video chatting with a psychiatrist is a convenient way to manage medications for depression and find support for anxiety — all from the comfort of home. Many psychiatrists offer virtual visits.

TALK THERAPY

In talk therapy, you have conversations with a trusted provider who can help you overcome negative thoughts, reframe personal challenges, improve relationships and generally feel better. Psychologists, counselors, social workers (LISW/LCSW) and advanced psychiatric nurses can all provide talk therapy.

PSYCHIATRIST

Psychiatrists prescribe and manage medications that can help treat symptoms of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues — especially when combined with talk therapy and other healthy habits.



Doctor On Demand® offers on-the-go support

You and your covered family members can quickly and easily schedule talk therapy and medication consultation with mental health professionals. Virtual visits with licensed psychologists and psychiatrists take place wherever you are, whenever you need an extra helping hand. Plus, you can connect via your smartphone or tablet.

Visit [DoctorOnDemand.com](https://www.doctorondemand.com) or download the app to get started.

*For zero-dollar cost share, be sure to explore your free options with Doctor On Demand virtual talk therapy and psychiatry.

Make the most of your treatment

Scheduling an appointment with a trusted health care provider is an important first step in your journey to better mental health. But remember that traveling this path will take some time — and change won't come overnight.

Use the following tips to help you take control of your care and feel better faster.

WAYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR TREATMENT

Have patience. All mental well-being treatments need time to take full effect.

Use all your tools. Self-care, therapy and medication are tools in a bigger treatment toolkit. Be open to combining the ones that work best for you.

Be okay with setbacks. You'll have good and bad days. But if you stick with it, the bad days will be fewer and farther between.

TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF YOUR THERAPY SESSIONS

Relax. It's okay to be nervous. If you're not sure what to say, your therapist can help drive the conversation.

Make a connection. Treat your first few sessions like dating. Do you like your therapist? Do you feel understood? If not, find a different therapist.

Be completely honest. Nothing you say will shock or surprise your therapist. The more open you can be the sooner healing can begin.

Use what you learn. Take what you discuss in your sessions and apply it to the rest of your week.

Engage and enjoy. Therapy is like a class, and you're the main subject. If you're curious and open to doing the work, it can be very rewarding.

UNDERSTAND YOUR MEDICATIONS

Know when the time is right. If you have worked with a doctor or therapist but still struggle, medication may be right for you.

Say what's working and what's not. An open dialogue will help your provider find the medication and dosage that fit you best.

Expect adjustments. Everyone responds to medication differently. You may try several before finding the right fit.

Watch for side effects. Most side effects will eventually fade. But if they are intolerable or upsetting, tell your doctor right away.

Never stop your medication suddenly. This can lead to relapse and serious withdrawal symptoms. Work with your doctor to slowly lower your dose.

Be kind to yourself. There is no shame in taking medication to be your mental best.





How to support others

It's hard and often painful to watch someone you care about go through a mental health challenge. But there are things you can do to support them as they work their way back to better health.

Use the following tips to help you take control of your care and feel better faster.

Be there. You don't have to have all the answers. But you can sit, listen and simply be present when they need to talk. Hold their hand. Hug them. Ask gentle questions and respond with encouraging statements.

Offer to help them find support. Finding the right therapist can be difficult — which means it's doubly hard for someone who is struggling. Offer to do the legwork. If they say yes, make the calls, book the appointments and drive them to their visits.

Get them out of their head. Mental health challenges can make us ruminate on our bad feelings and rob us of the motivation to plan activities we enjoy. Support your loved one by getting them out of the house — and their own head — with

low-stress activities like going for a bike ride, seeing a movie or taking a walk.

Remember: They are not their diagnosis. People who struggle with their mental health will often lash out at those they care about most. Remind yourself this is their condition talking, not them. However, maintain your boundaries. Mental health challenges are an explanation — not an excuse — for mean or cruel behavior.

Prioritize taking care of yourself. Many long-term caregivers end up experiencing burnout or even developing depression themselves. Take breaks when you need them, ask for help from supportive friends and family and find your own therapist to confide in regularly to ensure you stay healthy.

IF SOMEONE CONFIDES IN YOU ...

✓ Say this:

"I am here for you."

"How can I help?"

"What is the best way I can support you?"

"I love you."

"Your feelings are valid."

"That sounds hard. I'm sorry you're going through this."

"I may not understand how you're feeling, but you're not alone."

✗ NOT this:

"Think positive!"

"Snap out of it."

"I know exactly how you feel."

"It could be worse."

"It's just in your head."

"Why can't you get it together?"

"It's your fault."



TRACK

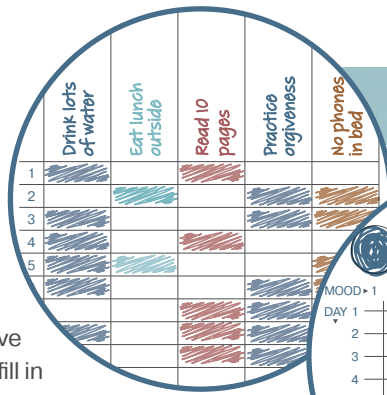
your progress

When you start exercising, it takes time to build stronger muscles. When you work on eating healthier, it takes a while for your clothes to fit better. Similarly, when you kick off a new mental health routine, it takes time to reach your goals.

Results are cumulative and are best measured in weeks and months rather than days. To stay motivated, track your progress. You'll spot trends and get a clear picture of what habits help you feel your best.

30-DAY HEALTHY HABIT TRACKER

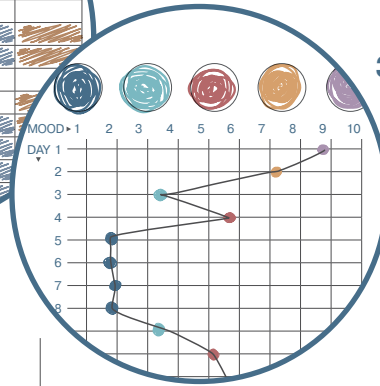
Use the empty spaces in the chart below to write down healthy habits you'd like to incorporate into your daily routine to improve your mental health. Then, fill in the squares to show which activities you've completed each day. What habits coincide with your best daily moods?



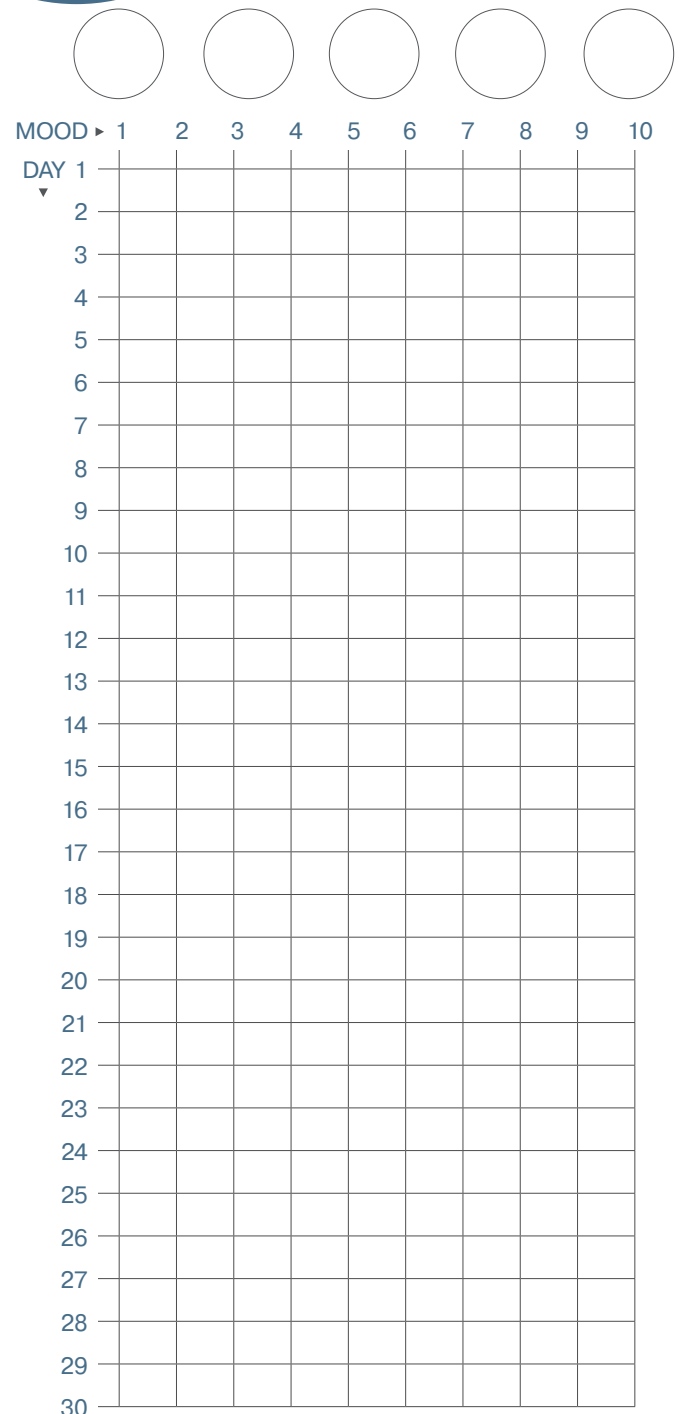
Tip: Download and print this page.

30-DAY MOOD TRACKER

Use this chart to rate your daily mood on a scale of 1 to 10. Plot it on the graph and draw a line to connect the dots. Then, watch for peaks and valleys throughout the month. You'll be able to observe how they coincide with the habits you track.



DAY	1	2	3	4
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Resources

Wherever you are in your mental health journey, the State of Iowa offers tools and benefits to support you and your family. Don't hesitate to reach out — you have a lot of resources ready to help.

WELLMARK RESOURCES

- FIND IN-NETWORK PROVIDERS
[Wellmark.com/Finder](https://www.wellmark.com/finder)
- DOCTOR ON DEMAND
[DoctorOnDemand.com](https://www.doctorondemand.com)
Doctor On Demand mobile app
(available in the App Store and
on Google Play)
- BE WELL 24/7®
1-844-84-BEWELL (239355)

STATE OF IOWA RESOURCES

- STATE OF IOWA EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)
Administered by Acentra Health
1-800-833-3031
[EAPHelplink.com](https://www.eaphelplink.com)
(Company Code: IOWA)
- YOUR LIFE IOWA
[yourlifeiowa.org](https://www.yourlifeiowa.org)
- VOLUNTEER IOWA
[volunteer.iowa.gov](https://www.volunteer.iowa.gov)

If you or someone you know is in emotional distress or suicidal crisis, text or dial 988 to connect with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Trained counselors are available **24/7** to speak with you and will connect you with additional services, should you need specialized care.

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