



MENTAL HEALTH STARTS WITH THE WHOLE PERSON

WRITTEN BY Drew Rose, DO

It is no secret that mental health in the United States is suffering. According to the CDC, 90% of Americans agree that the general state of mental health and our healthcare system's ability to address these issues are in crisis. The statistics are staggering, with over two-thirds of Americans reporting a decline in their mental health:

- ▶ In 2024, roughly 23.4% (more than 1 in 5) of U.S. adults reported experiencing some form of mental illness.
- ▶ 42% of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, representing a 50% increase since 1999.
- ▶ The treatment gap for mental illness remains vast, with only 14-25% of affected individuals receiving care.
- ▶ Systemic failures and lack of accessible services have led to jails and prisons becoming some of the largest mental health providers in the country.

These statistics alone can evoke feelings of hopelessness. In today's world, social media, a constant barrage of negative news, polarizing politics, sedentary lifestyles, job insecurity, rising costs of living, and limited access to nutrient-rich, toxin-free foods can make simply stepping outside feel overwhelming. So, what can each of us do to change the tide? I believe context is key to understanding our own power within this broken system.

Understanding how mental health care has evolved helps illuminate where we stand today. In the Colonial Era, mental illness was labeled as "madness", often attributed to moral failure or spiritual imbalance. These individuals were frequently confined to jails or poorhouses. By the mid-1800s, a large-scale housing need led to the asylum boom. However, what was meant to be sanctuaries led to overcrowding and underfunded custodial care. The early 1900s were met with desperation to find a cure for this overcrowding, which led to extreme treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), lobotomies, and insulin coma therapy. For obvious ethical reasons, many of these modalities were abandoned by the 1950s, ▶

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when the medication revolution took over. Medications such as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), mood stabilizers, and anti-psychotics were introduced. While beneficial for many, side effects and stigma contributed to an “invisible population” struggling in silence, often cycling through homelessness, emergency rooms, and the prison system. Today, we face a paradox: increased awareness and openness about mental health, yet a fragmented system built in pieces over more than 150 years, rather than a unified mind-body model of care.

Growing up in the 1990s, I remember the stigma surrounding therapy. I had a childhood friend whose parents were going through a rather public divorce. After weeks of noticing my friend being pulled out of school, I gathered the courage to ask where he went. He was clearly embarrassed. Eventually, my friend reluctantly put his hand to my ear one day and whispered, “to the shrink.” At the time, all I knew of therapy was from TV, and it was usually in the context of advancing a comical storyline. I couldn’t believe someone my age in the real world was actually seeing a therapist. Nevertheless, I let it go, and we went on to completely destroy each other at basketball during recess (fun fact: this was the same recess that gave me my characteristic red spot under my left eye that is present today). Yet, the memory remained.

Years later, during my own health struggles, this memory resurfaced. In seventh grade, I was diagnosed with mononucleosis (Epstein-Barr Virus) with significant systemic complications. The chronic fatigue made it extremely difficult for me to get through the day, and finally, I was taken out of school for the entire second semester. Unsurprisingly, the isolation and constant malaise wore on my fragile adolescent mind. Depression set in, and I was put on an SSRI at the age of 13. Over the remainder of my teenage years, I cycled through multiple SSRIs, but medications rarely provided the effect I was promised. Then I remembered my friend: had he gotten benefit from therapy?



It wasn’t until my 30s that I sought therapy myself and found the answer to this question. The result was transformative! Therapy became the singular most effective intervention for my mental health. Early in the process, I learned to recognize how thoughts and emotions manifested physically, revealing the profound strength of the mind-body connection. This connection is stronger than I was

ever led to believe through my medical training, and it is what gives us tangible evidence of the suffering mental illness can inflict. Finding the right therapist is much like finding the right pair of shoes; it requires patience, and you might have to try on several before you find the right fit. Insurance limitations, scheduling challenges, and personal compatibility can make the process feel tedious. Occasionally, you may have to compromise what you thought therapy may look like and simply trust the process. It requires a commitment from you to yourself to invest time and perhaps money. In fact, my therapist did not accept my insurance, making it a significant financial investment, but one that has paid dividends many times over.

Through therapy, I was introduced to the 8 pillars of health and wellness: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, environmental, financial, occupational, and spiritual. Balancing these pillars finally made me feel like an adult. This ongoing self-reflection guided my personal journey towards health, and ultimately influenced my professional path, including a meaningful career opportunity with a 50-year-old innovative clinic in my hometown of Wichita. Being an individual who suffers from chronic fatigue and feeling the link to mental health issues has given me a unique perspective with my co-learners. It has shown me the importance of nurturing the mind AND body. Therapy is one of the best ways to nurture the mind, but nurturing the body is a completely different arena.

Optimal mental health begins with proper nutrition. The body cannot self-regulate without the necessary biochemical building blocks. Our culture of convenience (fast food, delivery services, and highly processed meals) often prioritizes productivity over personal well-being. Yet, there is no substitute for preparing a nutrient-dense meal with whole foods. What we choose to eat is one of the most significant predictors of how we feel each day. Taking ownership of our day-to-day decisions is sometimes the hardest part of beginning the journey to health. Emphasizing whole foods not only improves nutritional status, but it also requires a time commitment. More time in the kitchen, or in planning and executing a successful grocery run, means you have to sacrifice time elsewhere. The best place to start is cutting down the screen time. The average American spends more than 7 hours looking at a screen, whether it be a smartphone, TV, or computer. Using the time away from your screens to be in the kitchen preparing or planning your nutrition for the week promotes mindfulness and, coupled with eliminating sugar and processed foods, decreases sympathetic tone in your body (i.e., fight-or-flight).

Exercise is another cornerstone of mental health. Since the pandemic, average sedentary time rose to approximately 8.7 hours per day, with a significant increase in prolonged sedentary behavior exceeding 6 hours per day. This inactivity promotes inflammation, impairs methylation efficiency, and decreases mitochondrial function, creating a cascade of negative health effects. An adequate combination of cardiovascular and resistance training is the best way to optimize your energy levels and mood. Mobility at work is beneficial but does not replace structured



exercise. When you work out to the point of sweating, not only are you helping to detoxify your body, but you are also releasing chemicals in your body like endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine. These neurotransmitters act as pain relievers and mood elevators. Consistent resistance training reduces inflammation associated with mood disorders. Furthermore, exercise is a wonderful way to reduce and manage stress by managing cortisol and adrenaline levels. All these effects have been proven to decrease levels of anxiety and depression within a matter of 2 weeks, whereas some SSRIs are not even considered to be therapeutic until 6-8 weeks after beginning the medication.

Consistent exercise and proper nutrition play huge roles in regulating sleep. Sleep is the body's "reset button".

While we sleep, our brains process the extraordinary amount of information we take in on any given day. Sleep hygiene refers to behaviors, especially during the 2-hour window before bedtime, that can support a balanced circadian rhythm. Examples are avoiding backlit screens (smartphones, TVs, computers, iPads, etc), keeping to a consistent bedtime and routine, turning off bright overhead lights, and avoiding eating 2 hours before you lie down. Restorative sleep is crucial for hormonal regulation, which is what is required for a balanced circadian rhythm.

Women, in particular, may experience hormonal imbalances during peri- and post-menopause. From the thyroid to the adrenal glands, the balance of hormones is critical for both sleep regulation and mood stability. Advances in bioidentical hormone replacement therapy (BHRT) have significantly improved the quality of life for many. Ultimately, comprehensive testing is essential for optimizing any hormonal axis. And while men are not immune to hormonal dysregulation leading to mood impairment, they are less likely to speak up.

The journey toward mental health is a deeply personal one. No one else gets to live in your mind except you. Yet, the first step to finding that health is speaking up. Sharing experiences with trusted individuals and engaging in therapy is important because words give thoughts and feelings

meaning. It is how your brain can take the subconscious and process it in the conscious mind. Yet, the work does not stop there. This is why "pushing it down" never works! You must nurture that mind-body connection. Optimizing nutrition, exercise, sleep regulation, and hormone balance will equip the body with all the tools it needs to self-regulate. This approach restores a sense of control, counteracting the overwhelm created by constant external stimuli. We, as humans, are not meant to feel the weight of suffering on a global scale as we do today. Give yourself grace!

One last piece of advice: nurture your spiritual health. However, the way you define 'spirit' is entirely unique to you. It is deeply personal and requires no explanation to anyone else. One of the simplest ways to nourish your spiritual well-being is by connecting with nature. Access to green spaces has been shown to reduce the prevalence of mood disorders, lower cortisol levels, and enhance memory and creativity. Time in nature can even help rewire the brain, decreasing activity in the regions associated with rumination and negative self-talk.

So, the next time you're feeling low, lack energy, or are caught in a cycle of negative thoughts about yourself or your life... literally go touch grass and hug a tree. Doctor's orders. ■

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BUILDING STRENGTH: CARING FOR YOUR BONES AFTER CANCER

WRITTEN BY Stacy Dunn, ND, LAc, FABNO, FABORM

Taking care of your bones matters at every stage of life. But it becomes especially important after cancer treatment. Ongoing care involves more than monitoring for recurrence; it is also about rebuilding strength and protecting long-term health, including your bones.

For many people, bone loss begins quietly during or soon after treatment. Certain therapies can accelerate this process. Chemotherapy reduces bone mineralization and may induce early menopause, while hormone-blocking treatments, such as aromatase inhibitors or androgen deprivation therapy (ADT), reduce the protective effects of estrogen and testosterone. The result is a perfect storm: faster bone breakdown, slower bone formation, and increased fragility. Because bone loss often occurs without noticeable symptoms, many people do not realize there is a problem until a fracture occurs or a scan shows significant changes.

The goal is not simply to get enough calcium. It is to build—and maintain—strong, resilient bones.

How Bone Is Built

Bone is living tissue that is constantly being broken down and rebuilt through a process called “remodeling.” Specialized cells coordinate this process: osteoclasts remove old bone, osteoblasts build new bone, and osteocytes sense mechanical stress and signal when repair or strengthening is needed.

Bone strength depends on more than just calcium. It relies on a coordinated system involving a collagen framework, mineral deposition, and hormonal regulation.

At its foundation, bone is built on a flexible scaffold made primarily of collagen. This framework allows bone to absorb impact without breaking. Minerals, mainly calcium and phosphorus, are then deposited onto this scaffold to provide hardness and density. This process depends on adequate vitamin D for calcium absorption, as well as magnesium and vitamin K2 to help regulate and direct mineral placement.

Hormones, particularly estrogen, help maintain the balance between bone breakdown and formation. When estrogen levels decline, this balance shifts toward bone loss, increasing fracture risk.

If the collagen framework is weak, bones may still appear dense but are more brittle and prone to fracture. Likewise, without proper coordination, minerals may not be effectively incorporated into bone.

While it's a common assumption that more calcium automatically leads to stronger bones, you can see that bone strength depends on how well the entire system works together. Bone strength is not just about raw materials.

Steps to Support Bone Health

Step 1: Know Your Baseline

The first step in protecting your bone health is understanding where you stand. A DEXA scan measures bone density and provides a baseline for tracking changes over time. Blood tests, including vitamin D levels, can help identify nutritional gaps that may affect bone strength.

These tools allow you and your healthcare team to make informed decisions and monitor progress.

Step 2: Eat for Bone Strength

Nutrition plays a foundational role in rebuilding and maintaining bone. Think of food as the raw materials your body uses to rebuild bone every day.

Focus on daily habits:

- ▶ **Protein:** Aim for about 20–30 grams per meal to support the collagen framework
- ▶ **Mineral-rich foods:** Leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and legumes provide magnesium and other key nutrients
- ▶ **Whole-food calcium sources:** Vegetables and small fish with bones, such as sardines, can help meet calcium needs naturally



Step 3: Use Supplements Strategically

In addition to calcium, the following are key supplements to support bone health:

- ▶ **Vitamin D3:** to support calcium absorption
- ▶ **Magnesium:** for bone mineralization and vitamin D metabolism
- ▶ **Vitamin K2:** to help direct calcium into bone
- ▶ **Melatonin:** promotes bone growth while inhibiting bone resorption

Step 4: Build Strength Through Movement

Exercise is one of the most powerful, and most underutilized, tools for strengthening bone. Bones respond to mechanical load. When you challenge them through movement, they adapt by becoming stronger.

Research shows that strength training and balance exercises can significantly reduce fracture risk, even when changes in bone density are modest.

Helpful types of movement include:

- ▶ **Resistance training (2–3 times per week):** Builds muscle and stimulates bone formation
- ▶ **Weight-bearing activity (daily):** Walking, climbing stairs, or hiking
- ▶ **Impact exercises (when appropriate):** Small jumps or step-down movements
- ▶ **Balance training:** Helps prevent falls, a leading cause of fractures

If you are new to exercise, or if you have osteoporosis or a history of fractures, work with a qualified physical therapist or personal trainer experienced in osteoporosis to safely build strength while avoiding movements that may increase the risk of injury.

Moving Forward with Strength

Bone loss after cancer treatment is common, but it is not inevitable. Start by understanding your baseline. Build daily habits that support bone strength through nutrition and movement. Monitor your progress over time.

Bone is dynamic. It responds to the signals you give it—through what you eat, how you move, and how consistently you care for your body. Even small improvements in strength can significantly reduce fracture risk and improve quality of life.

Recovery from cancer is not just about eliminating disease. It is about restoring function, confidence, and independence. Protecting your bones is a powerful step in that direction.

STRENGTH STARTS WITH YOUR BONES

Bone is constantly being broken down and rebuilt. Supporting that process requires more than raw materials. It requires the right nutrients working together.



D3/K2 Liquid

Supports calcium absorption and bone mineralization

Bone health is not just about calcium. It is about how your body uses it.

Vitamin D3 supports calcium absorption, while vitamin K2 helps direct calcium into the bone where it belongs, supporting balanced bone remodeling.

May support:

- ▶ Calcium absorption and utilization
- ▶ Bone strength and density
- ▶ Healthy bone remodeling
- ▶ Cardiovascular health

Melatonin

Daily support for bone growth

Bone health depends on balance between building and breakdown.

Melatonin supports bone remodeling while also helping regulate sleep, a key part of recovery and repair after treatment.

May support:

- ▶ Healthy bone remodeling balance
- ▶ Antioxidant and cellular protection
Immune function
- ▶ Restorative sleep and recovery



Shop D3/K2 Liquid and Melatonin online, in-store, or by phone through the Riordan Clinic Nutrient Store at 1-800-447-7276 ext. 1464.



CELEBRATING OUR BIO-CENTER LABORATORY TEAM

On World Laboratory Day, we thank our Bio-Center Laboratory team for the care, expertise, and commitment they bring each day.

Since 1975, the lab has supported deeper insight through nutritional and biochemical testing. Today, as a CLIA-certified laboratory, it continues to provide reliable, detailed results for both clinical care and physicians nationwide.

Behind every test are skilled technologists and phlebotomists ensuring each sample is handled with precision. Their work helps co-learners understand what's happening beneath the surface and guides the next steps in care.

THANK YOU TO OUR BIO-CENTER LABORATORY TEAM



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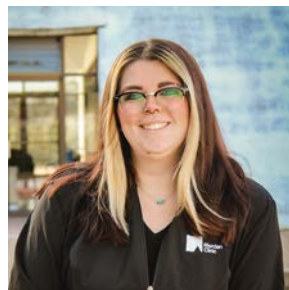
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Discover more about the
Bio-Center Laboratory



Riordan Clinic is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3), integrative health center with locations in **Wichita and Overland Park, Kansas**. The clinic was co-founded by Olive Garvey and Hugh D. Riordan. We intersect lifestyle and nutrition to help you find the underlying causes of your illness. Since our inception in 1975, the mission has been clear and unwavering to **"...stimulate an epidemic of health."**

To become a patient at Riordan Clinic, call 1-800-447-7276

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SMASHED EGG & SARDINE SALAD

Serves 2 | Takes only 15 minutes!

A creamy, briny salad packed with choline, omega-3s, and vitamin D — brain-nourishing ingredients for May Mental Health Awareness Month

Ingredients

- ▶ 4 large eggs, hard-boiled
- ▶ 1 tin sardines or anchovies in spring water (about 100g drained)
- ▶ 1 celery stalk, finely sliced
- ▶ 1 ripe avocado, roughly diced
- ▶ 1 tbsp capers, rinsed and roughly chopped
- ▶ 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- ▶ 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- ▶ Juice of half a lemon
- ▶ 2 tbsp fresh dill or chives, chopped
- ▶ Salt and black pepper

Please use organic ingredients and high-quality eggs and fish.

Directions

Hard-boil your eggs, peel them, and set them aside. Drain the sardines or anchovies and lift them from the tin. Whisk the mustard, olive oil, and lemon juice together in a large bowl. Season well.

Add the fish and break up gently with a fork, leaving some texture rather than mashing it smooth.

Smash the peeled eggs directly into the bowl; a mix of chunky and creamy is fine, or, if you would rather, you can smash the fish smooth, too. Add the avocado and fold everything together lightly, letting the avocado do some of the creamy work.

Add the celery, capers, and most of the herbs. Fold gently, taste, adjust seasoning, and scatter the remaining herbs over the top to serve.

Why This Recipe Matters for Brain and Mental Health

Sardines and anchovies are among the most concentrated and affordable sources of EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, and B12 — nutrients directly involved in mood regulation and reducing inflammation in the brain. Eggs contribute choline, the precursor to acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter essential for memory and cognitive function. Avocado adds monounsaturated fats and potassium, supporting healthy blood flow to the brain. Together, these awesome ingredients make one of the most genuinely brain-supportive meals you can put together in under 15 minutes.

This recipe was provided by **Remission Nutrition** in support of Health Hunters.

Remission Nutrition focuses on how food and nutrients support metabolic health, cellular function, and overall resilience during cancer care. This approach considers the individual to help guide personalized nutrition strategies alongside a broader care plan.

Learn more at remissionnutrition.com



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DREW ROSE, DO



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A Better Way to Treat Pain with Dr. Clayton Dir

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A Better Way to Treat Pain with Dr. Clayton Dir

We are only going to heal you as fast as your body can allow.” —Dr. Clayton Dir

Pain doesn't always need more appointments. Sometimes it needs a different approach.

In this episode of the Real Health Podcast, Dr. Drew Rose sits down with Dr. Clayton Dir, Doctor of Physical Therapy and Clinical Director of Natural Wellness Physiotherapy, to talk about what's missing in many recovery plans and how a more thoughtful, patient-centered approach can change outcomes.

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A Global Perspective on Orthomolecular Medicine with Dr. Richard Z. Cheng

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A Global Perspective on Orthomolecular Medicine with Dr. Richard Z. Cheng

“Orthomolecular medicine is about giving the body what it needs to function at its best.” —Dr. Richard Z. Cheng

There are many ways to approach health. Some focus on managing symptoms. Others take a step back and look at what the body needs to stay well in the first place.

In this episode of the Real Health Podcast, Dr. Ron Hunninghake sits down with Dr. Richard Z. Cheng to discuss how orthomolecular medicine fits into the bigger picture.

Listen now at realhealthpodcast.org

