

NEUROSCIENCE TREATMENT TEAM PARTNER PROGRAM

Team Solutions

Recovering From Mental Illness

By **Kay Johnson McCrary, EdD**

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Recovering From Mental Illness

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Planning for a Better Life

People who are recovering from a mental illness often wonder what will happen to them after they get better. Will they be able to live on their own? If so, where will they live and how will they be able to take care of all their needs?

“Reintegration” is a term you may hear as you speak with your case manager, therapist, or others helping you to recover from your illness. It refers to all the things you do from the time you start your treatment until the time you are able to meet your goals, such as living on your own, finding work, or having an intimate relationship.

This workbook focuses on identifying your needs and learning how you can meet those needs as you recover from mental illness.



Needs That Most People Have



People have many different types of needs. Basic needs to survive include having a place to live and food to eat. Feeling that your life has a reason or purpose is another need that most people have.

When basic needs are fulfilled, people feel comfort and peace in their lives. Basic needs include:



- A safe place to live and feel comfortable
- Money to pay for food and other expenses
- Something worthwhile to do, such as working at a job or going to school to learn a new skill



- Adequate transportation
- Finding a way to balance the activities in your life
- Hobbies or activities you enjoy doing
- Friends, love, and a sense of belonging in your life
- An intimate sexual relationship if you choose to have one
- Feeling healthy—physically, emotionally, and spiritually

People who are not feeling well may not realize they have these needs. But these needs usually become more important to them as they begin to recover from their illness.

Identifying Your Needs

What are your needs? Which ones have you already taken care of? Listed below are needs you may have. Read each statement. Then check the box that describes if you want to fulfill that need or if you've already taken care of it.

Needs you may have	I want to find a way to fulfill these needs	I've taken care of these needs
A safe and comfortable place to live		
Money to pay for food and other expenses		
Something worthwhile to do, such as working at a job or going to school to learn a new skill		
Adequate transportation		
Finding a way to balance the activities in your life		
Hobbies or activities you enjoy doing		
Friends, love, and a sense of belonging in your life		
An intimate sexual relationship		
Feeling physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy		

The pages that follow describe ways you can help yourself fulfill your needs. Even if you've already taken care of certain needs, you may still want to read those sections to find new ideas that may help improve your situation.

Where Would You Like to Live?



There are three types of living arrangements you may want to think about:

- Living in your own apartment or other housing
- Living with your family
- Living in a supported housing program

The type of living arrangement you'll be able to choose will depend on several things—how well you are able to care for yourself and the kind of support that's available to you in the region where you live.

Even if you live on your own, you may need support from others once in a while. You can work with your case manager to find a type of housing that fits with your current ability to take care of yourself and that is within your monthly budget. The next few pages may help you decide where you would prefer to live.



Living in Your Own Apartment or Other Housing



If your goal is to live by yourself, you'll need to plan how you will be able to pay for your expenses. You will also have to plan how you will get from your apartment to your group session, work, the grocery store, and your doctor's office. You'll also have to find out what kind of support is available to you through the community or from family and friends.

The questions below may help you decide if you want to live on your own, or if it would be easier for you to live with other people. Write your answers in the spaces provided and discuss them with your case manager.



1. Would you like to live in your own apartment?

- Yes No Unsure

Give reasons why you prefer to live in your own apartment:

Give reasons why you would *not* like to live by yourself:





2. How will you pay for your apartment, phone, food, and other expenses?

3. Are you able to:



• Cook meals for yourself?

Yes No Unsure

• Shop for your food?

Yes No Unsure



• Wash your own laundry?

Yes No Unsure

• Clean your apartment?

Yes No Unsure



• Get your medicine refilled?

Yes No Unsure

4. How will you get to your class, job, or group sessions every day?



5. Are there people living nearby who can help you if you need help?
If so, list them below:



- Family member(s) _____

- Friend(s) _____

- Your case manager _____
- Other person _____
- Other person _____

Making the Decision

After speaking with your case manager or family, you may decide that living in your own apartment is the best option for you. If so, you may want to ask your case manager to help you find a place to live. Your case manager may also be able to assist you with any paperwork you need to fill out.

If you and your case manager or family decide it's not the right time for you to live in your own apartment, you may want to keep this information handy for the future.



Living With Your Family

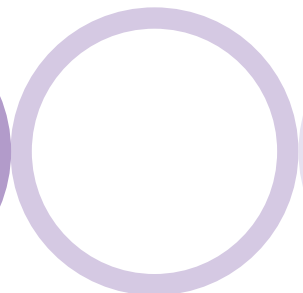
Arranging to live with your family can be good...and bad—for both you *and* your family! Here are the good points:



- Family members usually want to help you
- Living with your family may cost less than the other options
- Family members can drive you to your job, class, group sessions, or meetings with members of your treatment team
- There may be more people to do the cooking, cleaning, and shopping. It may be less stressful for you to share these chores with others than do them all yourself in your own apartment

Sometimes it's not so easy living with your family. And it may not be easy for them to live with you! Here are the bad points about living with your family:

- You may feel you have less freedom in your life to do what *you* want to do—you may feel you're treated like a child
- You may have to deal with your family's rules and expectations
- As your parents get older, they may not be able to help you as much—you may have to find another arrangement sometime in the future
- Because you and your family are living together, they may feel the stress and tension caused by your illness. Some members of your family may have a hard time handling these feelings or coping with some of the problems the illness causes



Living in a Supported Housing Program



There are many different types of supported housing depending on where you live. In rural areas, supported housing may mean living with a family. In cities, supported care might be living in an apartment complex with a supervisor or leader on site.

Here are some examples of supported housing:

- **Supervised apartment**

You may have your own apartment or share an apartment with one or two other clients. Staff members are on call to assist you, and they stop by routinely to see how you're doing.



- **Home-share**

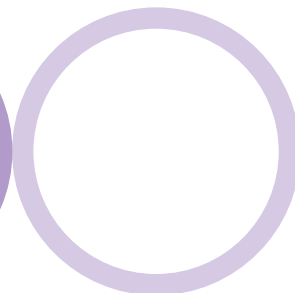
You may share a home with several other clients. Your case manager visits you at your home and assists you if you need help with anything.

- **Foster care**

You may live with a family that has received training and support to provide a place to live for a person who has a mental illness disability.

- **Community care home (group home)**

This group living arrangement serves only people with mental illness disabilities. Professionals and trained staff are available on the premises to assist you.



- **Boarding home**
You may share a home with other clients, where people are available to assist you. This type of housing is different from a “community care home”—the people who are available to assist you are not mental health care professionals. But they have received training to assist people with mental illnesses.
- **Residential treatment facility**
This is another type of group living arrangement that also treats people with disabilities caused by mental illnesses. A large staff of professionals is available, and people usually stay in this type of facility for long periods of time. Clients attend classes or workshops to learn skills to become more independent.
- **Temporary respite bed**
This temporary living arrangement is available for people during crisis. Staff members are available to help clients through the crisis period.



Finding an Income

Everyone needs money to pay for their expenses. There are many ways you can receive an income. Some include having:



- A job that pays you a salary
- An income from a trust fund or inheritance
- Disability income—you may be able to get this type of income if you've:
 - worked for a long enough time
 - had to stop working because of your illnessIt may take a long time to get your disability income (up to four months).
- Social Security Income (SSI)—you may be able to get income provided by the government to people who are not able to work and can't support themselves
- A family member who helps you financially

Where Do You Begin?

The first thing to do is think about your work skills and decide if you are able to get a job. You may need to improve your skills or learn new skills. If so, you may want to think about attending classes or going back to school.



In some regions of the country, you may be able to get assistance from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. They may be able to help you evaluate your skills and find the right classes for you. Ask your case manager to help you set up a meeting with the educators at the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

If you are receiving disability or Social Security Income, check the guidelines about earning additional income. If you work too many hours (or earn too much money), you may lose your disability or social security benefits.

If You're Not Able to Work



To qualify for Social Security Income, your doctor will have to certify that you have a disabling medical condition. You'll also have to fill out applications to apply for income.

Some of these applications can be very confusing, so you may want to ask your case manager to help you with the paperwork. There are also public mental health service agencies with specialists who can help you with your applications.

If you qualify for Social Security Income, you may be able to get food stamps, payment for your health care needs, and special assistance with utility bills. Your case manager can help you apply for these services.



Finding Work You Might Enjoy

Having money to pay for your expenses is only one of the reasons why people like to work. There are many other reasons why people enjoy working.

Here is what some people have said:

- *“I feel good when I finish a project. It makes me feel like I have a purpose in my life.”*
- *“I met some nice people at work. I have people to talk to, and I don’t feel as lonely as I did before.”*
- *“I learned something new. Now people come to me when they need help!”*
- *“When I’m at work, I think about my job and other people instead of how my illness changed my life.”*
- *“Working keeps me busy and staying busy helps control my symptoms.”*



When You First Start Working



It's important to get the right balance of activity and rest, especially during the early stages of your recovery. Start with tasks that are easy for you. If you live at home, you may want to be in charge of making lunch sandwiches for you and your family. If you enjoy this kind of activity, you may find yourself well-suited for work in a restaurant. Starting out with an activity you enjoy may lead to finding a part-time job.



Think about small tasks you'd like to do. List them below:

**What kinds of work would you like to do in the future?
List your ideas below:**



Are You Ready to Begin a New Job?

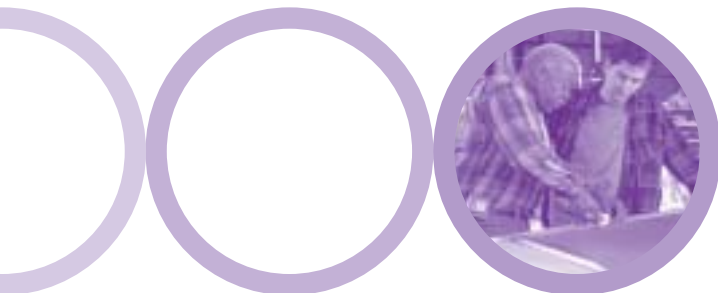
Before you apply for any job, think about your needs and the needs of the people you want to work for:



- Do you have the skills to do the job you want to apply for? If not, you may have to go to school to learn these skills before you can be hired.
- How many hours will you have to work? Too many hours may cause too much stress in your life. Part-time work or a volunteer job may be a good place to start.
- How will you get to your job and back home again?

Planning for a New Job

What are your best skills? List them on the spaces below:





How many hours would you like to work each week?

- Less than 2 hours, a few days a week
- About 4 hours, a few days a week
- About 4 hours, 5 days a week
- About 8 hours, 5 days a week
- Other _____



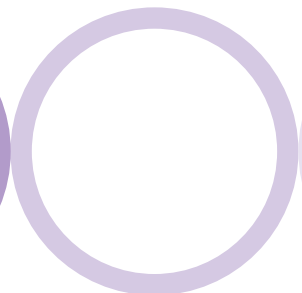
How will you get to work and home again?

- Walk
- Take a bus or train
- Drive a car
- Have a family member or friend drive you
- Other _____



If you have a specific job in mind, do you live close enough to accept this job?

- Yes
- No



Finding a Job You Like

Doing all the things you need to do to find a job you like is challenging for everyone! But with patience and persistence, you may be able to find work you enjoy. Here are some ideas that may help you:



- **Call the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation**

They may have a list of companies that are looking to hire someone with your skills. If you need help, ask your case manager to assist you.

Contact your regional mental health advocacy groups. They may know about potential employment opportunities.

- **Find out about supported employment programs**

There are many types of supported employment programs depending on the region where you live. These programs help people get started with their new “career.” There are several jobs to choose from—you can choose the one you’d like to do. The next few pages list some examples of supported employment programs.



Work Programs (Vocational Programs)



Some vocational programs offer a variety of work settings. These might include:



- **Food services**—preparing meals and other related services
- **Clerical assistance**—typing, taking phone messages, mailing information, and other types of correspondence
- **Newsletters and other publications**—writing and editing articles
- **Maintenance services**—doing repair work, painting, cleaning, and landscaping



Once you've gained enough experience, you may be better able to work in a permanent job. People who qualify may be assigned a special job in the community for a few months. This could lead to a permanent job.

Some of these work programs may be provided as a service through your treatment team. Others are available through sources that are separate from your psychiatric treatment.



Client-Operated Businesses



This kind of program offers combined living and job programs. Clients live together and also work together as a team to operate a business. Some client-operated businesses have included restaurants, lawn care services, photo developing, and carpet cleaning businesses.

Clients as Counselors



An exciting new trend is for mental health services to *hire* clients! Positions in which clients have been hired include receptionists, consumer affairs coordinators, and counselors to residential home staff.

Your case manager may be able to help you apply for one or more of these programs. There is one more important benefit that you should be aware of. It's called the "Americans With Disabilities Act." It can protect you from being fired because of your illness. It can also help you get recruited and hired for a job, and may also help with job promotions.

If you can perform the job you were hired to do and meet the requirements of the job (skill, education, and experience), then you are eligible to receive the benefits of this act.



Which kind of program interests you the most?

Would you like your case manager to help you apply for any of these programs?

- Yes No Unsure

Going Back to School



Some people may have had to leave high school, college, or a vocational program because of their illness. They often wonder if they will ever be able to finish their program and get their degree. The answer may depend on several factors, including:

- How severe your illness is
- How well your medicine is working for you
- How much support you have from others
- How well you are able to avoid relapses

In many cases, people have been able to resume their programs and graduate. *But it took them longer to complete their programs because they had to do everything at a slower pace.*



If you are planning to go back to school, you may have to make a few changes to keep your stress level low. Here are a few tips from other clients:

- *“Take only one class at a time. It was easier to do each course one at a time because I had a lot of time to do the assignments.”*
- *“Switch your major. I decided to switch my major from biochemistry because it was too demanding.”*
- *“Live at home instead of in the dorms. It was quieter at home and my concentration was better.”*
- *“Think about switching schools. I went to a big university with about 100 other people in my biology class. Now I go to a small school. There are only 20 other students in my class and I like it a lot better.”*
- *“Change your vocation. I felt it was less stressful to do some kind of work alone. So I switched from fashion designer to watercolor artist. I work at home now.”*



List some of the things you can do to keep your stress level low while you attend school:

Getting From Place to Place



Whether you are going to work, a class, a group session, or the store, you'll need transportation that's reliable and convenient.

Many people don't feel safe driving a car—they say their symptoms get in the way, or their medicine makes them feel sleepy. Some people can get a ride from family members or friends. Others live close enough so they can walk. Those who live in group homes may ride-share with others in a van.

If you don't have any of these options, you may have to take a bus or train to get where you have to go. This can be a confusing experience the first time you try it—especially if you aren't sure where to get on or get off.



It's a good idea to have your case manager's or family member's phone number with you at all times. That way, you'll be able to call someone if you need help.



Finding Balance in Your Life

Balancing your daily activities with enough time to rest is one of the most important things you can do for yourself. Working or doing relaxing activities every day can help you feel better. But too much work or too much partying can add stress to your life. And too much stress can lead to a relapse.

To feel better and avoid relapse (and perhaps the hospital), find a balance in your life—the right amount of activity and the right amount of rest. Do you have the right balance in your life? To find out, answer the questions below:

Your Sleeping Habits



1. What time do you usually go to bed at night?

2. What time do you usually wake up?



3. How many hours of sleep do you usually get each night?

4. Do you feel rested or tired when you wake up?

Most people need between 7 and 8^{1/2} hours of sleep each night. And it's important to sleep about the same number of hours each night.



Your Work Activities



1. How many days each week do you go to work, class, or group session?

2. How many hours are you there most days?

3. How do you feel by the end of the day?



4. Check the box that describes how you feel:

I would like to work:

- Fewer hours
- The same number of hours
- More hours

If you feel very tired by the end of the day, or you feel very stressed, you should tell your case manager. You may have to adjust your work schedule.



Relaxing Activities



1. How much time each day do you take a walk, enjoy your hobbies, or do other activities you enjoy?

2. How do you feel when you do these activities?

3. Check the box that describes how you feel:

- I'd like to have more time for relaxing activities.
- The time I have for relaxing activities is just right.
- I spend too much time on these activities, and I'd rather do something else.

Restful Activities



1. How much time do you usually spend watching TV, listening to music, or doing other restful activities?

2. How do you feel when you do these activities?



3. Check the box that describes how you feel:

- I'd like to have more time for restful activities.
- The time I have for restful activities is just right.
- I spend too much time resting, and I'd like to do something more active.

Planning a Balanced Activity Schedule for Yourself



Most people tend to feel better when they have a regular, balanced schedule. How can you plan a balanced schedule?

First, decide on a daily routine (the time you plan to go to bed, wake up, eat your meals, and do your work each day). Then plan the rest of your activities so they'll fit into your schedule. Remember to give yourself extra time between activities so that you'll feel relaxed when you change from one activity to the next—this will help you avoid stress.

On the next page is an example of an activity schedule. It was provided by a client who said it helped him organize his day. Look over his activity schedule so you can get some ideas on how to plan your own activity schedule. Then, fill out your activity schedule. Ask your case manager to help you.



Examples of Activity Schedules

Time	Activity
7 am	Wake up and get dressed
8 am	Eat breakfast and take medicine
9 am	Wait for ride to group sessions
10–11:30 am	Group sessions
12 noon	Lunch
1 pm	Rest and read newspaper
2 pm	Take a walk or do house chores
3–5:30 pm	Volunteer time at the Red Cross
6 pm	Dinner
7 pm	Help clean up
8 pm	Watch TV
10 pm	Take a shower and get ready for bed
11 pm	Go to sleep

Time	Activity
7 am	Wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast
8 am	Take medicine and pack a lunch
8:30 am	Ride bus to part-time job
11:30 am	Eat lunch in park or mall
12:30 pm	Ride bus to group sessions
1–2:30 pm	Group sessions
3 pm	Ride bus home
3:30 pm	Walk to nearby food mart and buy items for dinner
5 pm	Cook and eat dinner, clean up kitchen
8 pm	Watch TV
10 pm	Take a shower and get ready for bed
11 pm	Go to sleep



Your Activity Schedule

Time	Activity

Coping With the Special Needs of Your Illness

People who have a mental illness may be more sensitive to stress than other people. There may be times when you won't be able to follow your activity schedule *exactly*. That's okay, because your activity schedule is only a *guide*. If you need more rest one day, take more time to rest. Learn other ways to handle stress—that way, you may find it easier to keep up with the activities you enjoy.

Hobbies and Other Activities

Having a few hobbies or interests can help you in many ways:

- If you get bored with one activity, you can switch to another one that interests you.
- You may discover a new friend—people often become friends because they have a similar hobby.
- Hobbies and special activities can make you feel relaxed.

In your activity schedule, you may have listed a hobby or an activity you like to do. You may like to try some other hobbies and activities. Some ideas are listed on the next page.



New Hobbies and Activities You May Like to Try

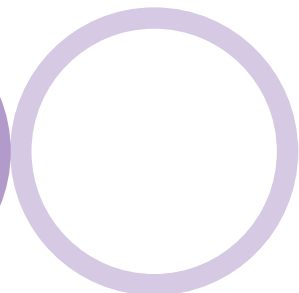
Listed below are hobbies and activities other people seem to enjoy. Place a check in the boxes of those you'd like to do. When you are finished, ask your case manager to introduce you to other people who have the same interests.



- Art
- Bicycling
- Bird watching
- Building furniture
- Camping
- Chess
- Collecting coins
- Collecting stamps
- Computer games
- Cooking or baking
- Crafts
- Dancing
- Exercising
- Fishing
- Gardening
- Jogging
- Keeping a diary
- Learning jokes
- Listening to music
- Photography
- Playing a sport:

- Playing an instrument
- Playing card games
- Reading (reading club)
- Sewing
- Singing (choir)
- Swimming
- Table tennis
- Walking
- Watching a TV show:

- _____
- Watching old movies
- Watching sports games
- Woodworking
- Writing for a newsletter
- Writing poetry
- Other: _____



Love, Friendship, and Belonging



One need that most people have is the need for love, friendship, and belonging. Having a friend to share your interests can add much enjoyment to your life. Feeling loved and having a sense of belonging within the group of people you see every day helps you feel good. And having a friend to talk to when you're sad or upset can help you feel better.

Being a good friend to others is also important. Caring about other people and helping them in their lives can add satisfaction to your own life. By helping others, many people have found a sense of purpose in their own lives.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a big problem for many people, especially for older adults and those who have a mental illness. Having such an illness can make it harder for you to communicate with your friends. You may have a hard time understanding what others are saying. You may also have a hard time expressing your thoughts. Getting acquainted with a new friend can be especially hard under these conditions.

Be patient with yourself. As you continue with your treatment, the symptoms that are causing these problems may improve. And it may be easier for you and your friend to talk with each other. This will make things even easier for the two of you.



Ways to Find Friends

New friendships often begin when people have similar interests. Here are a few ideas you may want to consider:



- Share your hobby with other people—if you like to play cards, teach someone you know how to play



- Join a club (art, music, book club, etc.)
- You may be able to meet people at your church or synagogue by helping with volunteer work



- Be open to friendship while you're at your group session, class, or work
- Join a support group to meet others who have a mental illness—you could support each other in dealing with your illness
- Participate in a sport at the YMCA—maybe start with a swimming lesson
- If you or someone you know has a computer, you may want to try chatting on one of the on-line services, such as the Internet, America Online,[®] or Prodigy.[®]

One of the best ways to meet other people is to get involved in activities. Try more than one activity. That way, you'll have a chance to try something new, and you might meet more people. But remember to pace yourself—keep your activities balanced. It's just as important to rest as it is to keep busy.

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Intimate Relationships

Many people say they would like to have an intimate and sexual relationship with someone they care about. But finding someone you care about may not happen right away. You may develop many friendships with other people before deciding you like someone well enough to start an intimate relationship with them. Also keep in mind you have the right to choose *not* to have an intimate relationship. It may not be one of your goals, which is fine.

If you do want to have an intimate and sexual relationship with someone you care about, you may find this type of relationship to be one of the most fulfilling and satisfying experiences you ever have. But meeting new people and developing an intimate relationship can be very stressful.

Having symptoms of mental illness can make things worse. It may be harder for you to communicate with other people. It may also be harder for you to handle problems that occur during your relationship. But keep in mind that as you continue your treatment, your symptoms are likely to improve. And you may find it easier to meet people and start relationships.

Another concern that often arises in new relationships is when to tell others that you have a mental illness. You may think that telling people about your illness will affect your relationship. But you know that being open and honest is important in a relationship. It can be very difficult to recognize the best time in your relationship to discuss it with your partner. It may be helpful for you to discuss this with your therapist first. That way, you may feel better prepared to handle this problem when you begin a new relationship.



Preparing for Intimate Relationships



- Meeting people and dating can be very stressful. Be aware of your stress level—too much stress can cause an increase in your symptoms or make your symptoms worse. Talk to your doctor and the other members of your treatment team about things you can do to keep your symptoms under control during this time.
- If you aren't quite ready for an intimate relationship, you may find it easier and less stressful to focus on relationships with your friends. Developing close friendships with others may help you learn how to communicate better and handle disputes. Practicing these skills may help you feel more comfortable when intimacy begins to develop in a relationship.
- Before dating, it's a good idea to decide whether you will tell the person about your illness, and how you will tell them.
- Appearance and hygiene are very important when you're trying to meet new people. You may want to talk to your case manager about things you can do to look your best!



Developing an Intimate Relationship

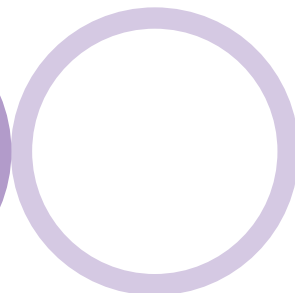
- Make sure the person is interested in you.
- Starting a relationship can be exciting...but can also cause you to feel nervous. This is normal—because you're not sure how your relationship will turn out. You may feel nervous about doing something wrong. But keep in mind that relationships can end without either person doing anything wrong. Even so, you may have to be prepared to deal with feelings of rejection—which is never easy!
- It's up to you to decide if and when you want to have sex with another person. Your decision may depend on many things such as your values, morals, religious beliefs, and how well you know the other person. You may want to discuss how you feel about these issues with your case manager or therapist before your relationship develops further.



As the Relationship Grows



- Let your relationship develop naturally from a caring, long-term friendship. Feeling comfortable with your partner can make physical intimacy less stressful.
- At the beginning of your relationship, you may have difficulties with sexual performance (such as getting an erection). This is normal and usually improves as you and your partner start to feel more comfortable with each other. However, if this problem continues, be sure to discuss it with your doctor—sometimes there’s a medical reason why this is happening to you.
- It’s important to practice “safe sex” by always using a condom. Condoms help protect you not only against pregnancy, but also against the AIDS virus (HIV) and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- If you and your partner will not use condoms, talk to your doctor about other methods of birth control to prevent pregnancy. Remember, these other methods of birth control will not protect you against the AIDS virus or other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Pregnancy is always a concern when you’re involved in a sexual relationship. Some medicines can be harmful to the unborn fetus, so if you think you may be pregnant, tell your doctor as soon as possible. Also, if you are about to start a new medicine, your doctor may recommend a pregnancy test, just to be sure you’re not pregnant.



Your Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Health

When people hear the word “health,” they often think about a physical illness or fighting a common cold. They often don’t think about their emotional and spiritual health. But all three types of health can affect your illness and the way you feel overall. Below are a few things you can do to help yourself feel the best you can.

Your Physical Health



- Keep your activities and rest schedule balanced
- Keep taking your medicine every day
- Remember to visit your doctor regularly for check-ups
- Eat a proper diet
- Stay away from alcohol and street drugs

Your Emotional Health



- Be patient with yourself
- Express your feelings to other people in a calm manner and also be a good listener
- Express yourself through art, music, poetry, or dance—creative activities can help you feel better
- Enjoy your friendships—be a good friend

Your Spiritual Health



- Keep a hopeful outlook
- Get past setbacks and focus on the future
- Find comfort in the traditions of your religion and culture
- Keep your values and faith—they may help you get through the most difficult times

This may seem like a lot right now, so start with one idea. You may want to focus first on friendships. Then you may want to move on to expressing yourself through art. Focus on only one idea at a time—you have a lot of time to discover each one—and master them all.