

# MY Monthly News



## How Is Your Mental Health - Really?

We schedule physicals, get bloodwork done, and check our blood pressure. These tests help us understand our physical health, but mental health doesn't have the same level of routine testing. While screenings exist for conditions like depression or substance use disorders, emotional wellness and emotional fitness are harder to measure. How's your mental health and emotional fitness? Most of us assume we're okay—until we're not. A practical way to gauge where you stand is to look at four areas: 1) Emotional resilience—can you bounce back from everyday stress, or do you stay stuck in sadness or rumination? 2) Thinking patterns—are your thoughts realistic and flexible, or increasingly negative and repetitive? 3) Behavior—are you following through on responsibilities, or withdrawing from activities you once enjoyed, with changes in sleep or appetite? 4) Relationships—are you connecting well with others, or are you pulling away, experiencing conflict, or struggling to set boundaries that protect your time and energy? Pay attention to ongoing disruption in any of these areas. Mental health can be strengthened, much like physical health, through small adjustments; limit news and social media overload, protect sleep, and stay connected to supportive people. Do small, intentional things each day that align with your values—what matters most to you—rather than living on autopilot. Mental health improves with steady attention, and your SAP can help.

## The Most Dangerous Drug May Not Be What You Think

News media often tracks the most dangerous illicit drug on the street. Increasingly, the answer isn't a single drug—it's unpredictability. Illicit substances are synthetic, rapidly changing, and mixed with potent compounds. Counterfeit pills are everywhere, and what's inside them is anyone's guess. Even non-drug users can become victims—through a spiked drink, an unknowingly purchased counterfeit pill, or what appears to be a legitimate prescription. Worse yet, standard overdose treatments don't always work. This is the new drug crisis. Awareness is your best protection. If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use, your SAP can help.

## Perfect Friend Syndrome: The AI Relationship Trap

Don't be tempted to form artificial relationships with artificial intelligence (AI) that substitute for real human connection. Although engaging with AI online may feel satisfying because it can appear to offer empathy and patience, AI does not know you as a real person. Research shows what experts long theorized: These digital relationships cause psychological harm. The risk of connecting to AI as a substitute for a real person is losing social skills or not developing a deeper sense of interpersonal need and vulnerability that we all need. And loneliness can worsen. This is called "parasocial attachment to AI." This behavior can be defined as a one-sided emotional bond in which a person develops feelings of closeness, trust, and connection with AI that cannot genuinely reciprocate or even recognize the relationship. AI's responsiveness can create the illusion of a mutual relationship, making the attachment feel real. This "perfect friend syndrome" doesn't push back. It doesn't experience bad days. It never demands something from you. This "no friction" experience is the problem, as real experiences are what make us human. AI can simulate conversation, but it will never offer warmth, share life history, or invest in you as a person. This is what makes human connection so special and irreplaceable. Is finding a meaningful relationship a goal in your life? Talk to the SAP to discover how to build real human connections that matter most.

[unesco.org/en/articles/ghost-chatbot-perils-parasocial-attachment](https://unesco.org/en/articles/ghost-chatbot-perils-parasocial-attachment)

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## National Health Observances

Each month, we feature select National Health Observances (NHOs) that highlight important health and life issues affecting people every day.

Join the National Safety Council in June for **National Safety Month**—the annual observance to help keep each other safe from the workplace to anyplace.

**Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month** is declared each June to help raise awareness about the disease, as well as show support for the millions of people worldwide living with Alzheimer's.

**National HIV Testing Day** is June 27<sup>th</sup> and is a day to encourage people to get tested for HIV, know their status, and get linked to care and treatment.

## Mental Health Minute

### Relaxation Breathing

Practice this regularly as part of your daily routine.

Sit, stand, or lie down in a comfortable position with your feet about hip-width apart and your body relaxed.

Breathe slowly and gently into your belly without forcing it. Try inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Some people find it helpful to count from 1 to 5 while breathing in and out.

Continue for at least 5 minutes.

## Recognizing Alcohol Creep

Do you unwind in the evening with a drink after class? Has it become a nightly pattern you increasingly look forward to? If you notice needing more alcohol than before to achieve the same relaxing effect, it may be an early sign of growing alcohol use disorder (AUD)/alcoholism/addictive disease. This "alcohol creep" can begin years before a diagnosis and may reflect nervous system adaptation to alcohol. AUD is widely understood to involve biologic processes or genetics as primary influences in progression of the illness, and stress or personal problems are often blamed for increased drinking. Be especially mindful if alcohol-related problems run in your family, and seek clarity about your drinking through your SAP. Doing so will help you better understand AUD, interrupt growing dependency, and reduce denial that later makes treatment more difficult.

Learn more: [asam.org/quality-care/definition-of-addiction](https://asam.org/quality-care/definition-of-addiction)



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