

An App a Day for Mental Clarity

By Heather Bremner Claverie



TELEMEDICINE. Remote work. DoorDash dinners. And online therapy sessions? The pandemic has turned our world into a remote-centric one, where pretty much everything can be ordered from that handheld computer, also known as the smartphone. Yet, as everything moved online to slow the spread of COVID-19, many psychological issues surfaced. Anxiety, depression, addiction and suicide have all risen alongside COVID-19. And as these issues began to soar, companies expanded employee health benefits, tacking on virtual therapy and meditation apps to wellness programs. Some health insurance companies have even begun offering apps as a perk to members. Enter the world of wellness apps for mental health.

A Mental Health Pandemic

There's no denying this past year has taken a toll on everyone's mental health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hospital emergency rooms have seen a rise in the number of visits for individuals with mental health concerns. And, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), about four in 10 adults have experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression since

the onset of the pandemic, up from one in 10 adults in 2019. Another poll from KFF found 36 percent of adults have had issues sleeping, while 32 percent say they've increased their alcohol consumption and 12 percent have dealt with worsening chronic conditions.

For the more than 133 million Americans or 40 percent of the population living with a chronic disease, that means a large chunk of the population is currently dealing with even worse pain, says the National Health Council. And for the nearly 24 million individuals with autoimmune diseases who've had to remain particularly vigilant during this pandemic, anxiety and depression due to isolation, stress and fear are likely on the rise.

A Penny for Your Thoughts

So why choose a mental health app over traditional therapy? While apps don't replace traditional face-to-face therapy, they're a good option since they remove some barriers to treatment such as lack of mobility, financial means or the fear of stigmatization.

Some apps are free, or are at least reasonably priced, and they offer therapeutic ways to cope with everything from depression and eating disorders to anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition to being more accessible, apps are attractive for their anonymity since mental health is still an issue that some struggle to accept or discuss.

For those having suicidal thoughts or extreme depression, a variety of suicide-prevention apps are available. One called notOK that was developed by a struggling teen, features a large, red button users can activate to alert their support network.

There is also an assortment of general

health apps designed to track and beat bad habits, manage anxiety and overcome depression. And, for those who need to talk it out but can't afford a therapist, Talkspace gives users the option to text a trained professional as often as needed.

Sweat, Stretch or Om Your Way to a Healthy Mind

Gyms, yoga studios and other sweat-inducing places were forced to shut their doors due to the pandemic, causing many individuals to search elsewhere for their exercise fix. Not only does exercise keep the heart healthier, but those feel-good endorphins also combat a host of mental illnesses, from depression and anxiety to insomnia and stress. This has led to a rise in the popularity of exercise apps such as the one offered by Peloton, which offers yoga, strength training and cardio classes.

In addition to exercise apps, people can seek out mental clarity through a variety of meditation and mindfulness apps. Guided meditations, breathing exercises and videos accompanied by soothing music are some of those available.

The world will eventually open up and the pandemic will end, but the daily mental health battles that many wage will continue to exist. Thankfully, help is literally available at your fingertips. Just don't forget to look up and head outside because that good old vitamin D and old-fashioned human interaction is an "app" that always perks up the mental faculties. 



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Pump Up Your Mind



Need to get your mood in shape? Check out Moodfit, the fitness app for

mental health. The app provides tools and insight to help firm up one's mood. It is packed with a variety of ways to boost mental health, including breathing exercises, sleep tracking, mood and gratitude journals, and more.

Free for limited version, plus a free 30-day trial for Moodfit Premium; www.getmoodfit.com

Click to Calm Down

The millions of users who've downloaded Calm to sleep better, lower stress and reduce anxiety have helped place the app in the No. 1 spot in the meditation and sleep arena. Calm's designers created the app with a simple goal: to help improve its users' health and happiness through a variety of options, including meditation exercises, sleep stories, mindful movement videos and more.

Free for the limited version, plus the Premium version starts at \$70 per year with a free 30-day trial; www.calm.com



Shopping Guide to Mental Wellness Apps



Think Yourself Happy

Happify Health is a global healthcare platform that combines digital therapeutics and care delivery solutions to improve mental health, physical health and well-being. Individuals can use the app to receive a happiness score and then receive activities designed to help improve mood. The company says 86 percent of frequent app users reported feeling happier within two months.

Free 30-day trial; www.happifyhealth.com

It's OK to Be Not OK

Developed by a teen who had health issues that led to anxiety and depression, notOK is a simple app designed to help curb suicidal tendencies. App users upload their circle of support to the free app and, during times of turmoil, simply press the digital "panic" button to alert their contacts.

Free; www.notokapp.com



Head to a Peaceful Space

Endorsed by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, headspace is a popular

wellness app designed to alleviate anxiety, while promoting a better mood and providing coping skills. The app includes guided meditations, animations, articles and videos, and it even has kid-friendly options.

Free 14-day trial, then \$5.83 per month or \$69.99 annually; www.headspace.com



Talk (or Text) It Out

The Talkspace online therapy platform provides the support of a licensed therapist 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through an easy-to-use app. Any privacy concerns should be allayed since the app is HIPAA-compliant.

Talk (or Text) It Out Plans start at \$65 per month; www.talkspace.com