

GUIDE TO PEACE OF MIND

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healing the WHOLE person



Chris Nihmey 2021

**Mental Health Advocate, Survivor,
Author, Motivational Speaker & Teacher**

YOU CAN DO THIS!

As you read this document, I want you to remember something very important. Healing is a full time job, as is staying healthy, whether you are a sufferer, or not. In my road to healing, I quickly realized how difficult each day can be with every obstacle I confronted. Sometimes the battle seems never-ending. I am proof that it isn't. You CAN heal; you CAN find a positive quality of life despite stumbles and setbacks. Healing DOES happen, but it is not accomplished overnight. However, momentum builds with EVERY healthy choice you make. It takes loving support from here and above, doctors and therapy, hard work, a multitude of lifestyle changes, and incorporating many mental strategies. It all begins by finding HOPE in your life. That begins when we reach for help. In my worst days, I never thought healing was possible. I now know that it is. Make your healing number ONE. With every step you take, remember that each step is equally important in building you up as a strong and confident person. Life is neat that way, and we are RESILIENT when it comes to healing. Our brain is plastic (neuroplasticity), which means it can repair, adapt, and strengthen itself. Renewal is always possible when we work on our health. Our brains are truly incredible.

"The brain can be continuously and consistently enriched throughout your life no matter your age or access to resources."

-Sanjay Gupta, Keep Sharp

Please note: I am NOT a psychiatrist or a mental health professional. I am a survivor of severe mental illness who has invaluable lived experience. I cannot offer you doctor's advice, but I can guide and direct you to the help you need, whether it's for you or for a loved one. Don't hesitate to reach out. The first step to healing is talking. **Talk early & talk often.** Remember, you're not alone.

For healing to be optimal, there must be a full focus on all FIVE areas of health and wellness (mental, spiritual, physical, emotional & social). Begin with the brain (the core, the motor) and the rest will follow. When we heal the symptoms, we only stall the pain. It is only temporary. However, if we heal the WHOLE person, we heal them for life. They will want to inspire and guide others to do the same. They become a symbol of hope.

We CAN never give up; we CAN never lose hope; we CAN never stop reaching for more in our lives. Healing is exponential. It builds momentum. It picks up speed and takes you further and further down the road to success. It starts with one decision and builds up slowly. But when it picks up, it is unreal how far you can go. The amazing thing about healing is this: you will stumble, you will fall, but it is not the end. Steps forward are always great, but steps backward are not failures. They prepare you for giant leaps forward and they build resilience. Without stumbles, we cannot appreciate the victories.

I have learned just as much from my mistakes and stumbles. We find stability, we refocus, and we march on. That is why every single decision you make in healing is so crucial. I have never stopped fighting for my life, and it is amazing what has happened.

Reaching for help brought me "hope"; hope initiated my healing, and purpose & meaning pushed me to new heights. But, even now, I MUST keep working on myself. The best time to do this is when I am feeling good and things are going smoothly. Feeling good and healthy is never a sign to give up all you are doing and say, "I'm healed!" This is a pivotal time when working on YOU is essential. It will ensure that during future trials, you will be equipped with knowledge, strategies, and support systems that will help carry you through and get you back on track. Once you believe you CAN heal, everything becomes possible. Change is painful. I get it. But pain now, will lead to the pleasure of a healthy life in the future. However, if we choose pleasure now (by choosing an unhealthy lifestyle), pain will surely follow.

Believing is NOT wishful thinking. It is a scientifically and biologically proven phenomenon that shifts the chemicals in our brains. Neurotransmitters

react in a positive way; cortisol (the stress hormone) decreases, adrenaline (fight or flight) also decreases, the immune system kicks in, and every cell in your body feels that effect. These chemical reactions heal the body, and the individual lives a much healthier life. That is why, even people who suffer with physical challenges that were deemed incurable, can heal. Is it hard?

Yes. Does it work? Yes. Loving support, professional support, lifestyle changes, strategies, and the belief that one can heal, will produce effects that you've never imagined possible. Our brains are powerful machines. When fed with the "good stuff", good things happen. The opposite is also true. If we make healthy and wise choices, healing happens. From there, purpose develops, and one can live a fulfilling and successful life despite the genetic challenges they face. The effects of genes are minimal. They do not control your life. Just look at twins whose lives go in completely different directions (one positive, the other negative).

Healing DOES happen. Trust me. It works.

Make a Difference in Your Life & the Lives of Those Around You

BREAKING BARRIERS TO ENCOURAGE HEALING

- We ALL suffer in some way: mental illness (1 in 5 or 4) & mental health (5 in 5).
- Ask people about "their" lives - get to know them on a new level. At the same time, show your vulnerability. Share your challenges. They will feel they can share theirs.
- NEVER hide a severe secret by living a lie. Talk early. Talk often.
- Get to know your family & close friends. TALK, TALK, TALK, but only with people you can fully trust. NOT everyone! Not everyone understands. Sadly, not everyone cares. Tragically, some see mental illness as a weakness. Stereotypes like this destroy a sufferer. You are not weak. Speaking up is strength.
- As a supporter, the same is true. TALK, TALK, TALK plus ALL OF THE ABOVE.
- We must know that we are NOT alone (sufferer and supporter).
- WITH FEAR ... people suffer more. Therefore, educate yourself, learn, and gain an understanding. This will help overcome stigma, ignorance & apathy. Overcome misunderstanding and misinformation by being educated and learning all you can.
- Reach out EARLY - earlier talking means a shorter road to healing (mine was a decade ... with all the right moves, it would have come a lot quicker).
- Illness is NO ONE'S fault. Remember that as a sufferer and supporter.
- Ask others about themselves (turn your eyes out, not in) - this increases trust and dependability - unconditional love - empathy - love definitely saved my life.
- Do NOT ostracize ... BRAVERIZE one another (a word I made up).
- We need to look UP at sufferers - They are NOT LESS THAN.
- Get to know their doctor well - watch for EARLY SIGNS. Never hesitate to speak up to a loved one, but do it with kindness and compassion.
- NOT EVERYTHING IS a mental illness - it is quite normal to feel anxiety, sadness, frustration, etc. However, if it begins to affect your QUALITY OF LIFE, get help ASAP and EARLY! Remember, we all struggle with MENTAL HEALTH issues, even PTSD (it is not just a "war" thing ... it is any trauma, and after COVID-19, we've all felt the effects of it). Mental health is part of life. If it impedes on your QUALITY OF LIFE ... take action to get help. Even with

mental health issues, TALK to someone. Do not keep things bottled up inside. If it keeps on rainin', the levee's goin' break (as Zeppelin sang). Don't know the song? Don't care. If problems build and silence persists, one will not get the help they need.

"Supressing becomes depressing. Prevention IS EARLY intervention"
-Chris Nihmey

- As a supporter of someone with mental illness, one can often find their own health and wellness slipping. As a supporter (family, friend, colleague), you **MUST MAINTAIN A BALANCED HEALTHY LIFESTYLE YOURSELF**. Simply put, if you go down, if your health fails you, you cannot be there for them. Stay balanced, stay healthy.
- ***"Pain is pain, body or brain, they are the same"***. I created this quote a while back. Treat the body and brain equally, because they are EQUALLY important, and they affect each other.
- "Hey, is everything okay?" goes a lot further than "How are you?" in helping someone get the support they need. This OPENS UP conversation in a more substantial way. The other leads to two dangerous words that I used to hide my illnesses for year. "How are you?" "Oh, I'm fine".

HEALTHY TIPS FOR A HEALTHY MIND

Healthy Mind, Healthy Everything



Here are some ways to work on yourself whether you suffer or you support. They really worked for me in my battle with mental illness. Make healing a FULL-TIME job. You must take the reins of your life. I used to see my diagnosis and illnesses as a curse. After bettering my life, healing substantially, changing my outlook on life, and helping others to heal, I now see blessings.

1. **TRIFECTA ONE: MEDICATION (NEVER miss it), PSYCHIATRIST/THERAPY & SUPPORT FROM LOVED ONES (You are NOT alone).**

All of these **MUST** be in play at all times. This is obvious. Without these three imperative components, healing won't happen.

NEVER let **SIDE EFFECTS** be an excuse to stop taking your meds. Talk to your doctor about uncomfortable changes. Over time, effects lose some of their strength. You get used to dealing with them and, with lifestyle changes, they start to decrease. Stopping medications abruptly or without doctor advice will be very detrimental. Discuss it with them. ***"Remember, side-effects can be a pain, but mental illness is a BIGGER pain to your brain."*** Never lower medications without professional guidance. Meds are life-saving. Over time (for me it was 15 years), with many healing components in play, and professional advisement, meds may be lowered, but this is a decision that comes from your leader (your psychiatrist).

Don't have a psychiatrist? Not yet? Don't fret. Never stop the search. Get on a waiting list. Do whatever you need to do to find a psychiatrist. A family doctor is

not trained or equipped to deal with the intricacies of the mind. They do not know the fine line between one disorder or the next, let alone what meds to provide. This is not their forte, and poor advisement can lead to misdiagnosis and prescriptions that can be dangerous and ineffective, with side-effects that, over time, may be damaging to the body and brain.

2. TRIFECTA TWO: EATING HEALTHY, SLEEPING HEALTHY, EXERCISING CONSISTENTLY

Remember, what you eat (healthy choices), how you sleep (7-9 hours, and as hard as it, the ideal time to hit the sack is 10:30 [scientifically proven]), and how active you are (a sedentary lifestyle is detrimental to healing) affect your MIND as much as your body.

When it comes to **EXERCISE**, it varies. Most say 30 min./5 times a week. As well, mix cardio (a brisk walk can do the trick, or a bike, or swimming) with strength and resistance exercise. Both are equally important.

What you choose to **EAT** ... there is a very thin barrier between brain and body. The "blood-brain barrier" (see **The UltraMind Solution** by Dr. Mark Hyman). Good nutrients, and bad nutrients, travel to the brain very easily. You want good things travelling there.

Can't get a sound **SLEEP**? Try this: **TONE MUSIC**. Type "**theta healing music**" into Youtube. Theta waves are very healing. Theta brain waves enhance rejuvenation, growth and healing in the body and brain. This eases the mind. Put this on and let it lull you to sleep.

"Healthy body, healthy mind ... healthy mind, healthy body."

3. EARLY INTERVENTION - reach out for continual help **EARLY and OFTEN**. **SPEAK UP ALWAYS!** That was why my healing took so many years. I stayed quiet. "I lived a lie". Never stay quiet. Talk early and keep talking. Talking is healing.

4. AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS (marijuana included). I began emphasizing this drug specifically after legalization. Research & professional advice motivated me to write about it. Marijuana is a depressant and impedes healing. It just does. **SELF-MEDICATION NEVER works. Marijuana, other drugs, alcohol, and physical harming** damage the brain, whether you suffer or not. These substances take away the positive effects of any prescribed medication you may be taking. If you're on prescription medication, or even if you aren't, avoid these vices. Prescription medication will lose its effect, and damage will occur, bringing higher levels of anxiety and depression. Doctor-ordered prescription medications will help you heal. Alcohol/drugs of any kind will do the complete **OPPOSITE**. New studies continue to show that marijuana most certainly has a negative effect on our minds. Healing is way too important, as is living a healthy lifestyle. Self-medication pushes you in the opposite direction & hinders healing. Even for pain, I tell people to avoid marijuana (and opioids, of course). Marijuana may relieve some pain, but it also numbs the brain.

5. Write in a JOURNAL, or just plain WRITING is SO therapeutic. The writing of my memoir "TWO SIDES TO THE STORY: LIVING A LIE" changed my life in every way. I found **MEANING & PURPOSE** in wanting to help others. Meaning and purpose changes everything.

6. Write 5 things you are GRATEFUL for every day. GRATITUDE has a healing component to it. As does **FORGIVENESS**. Seek forgiveness and forgive others. **Never lack HUMILITY**. Practise it always. No matter how far up you climb on the social ladder, you did not do it alone. You had a multitude of people who carried you along the way. Always recognize those pivotal people in your life (close family and friends OR people in society), and give them the credit they deserve.

7. CONNECTION & BELONGING through VOLUNTEER WORK - ALWAYS give of yourself in some way - your life will change. So will the lives of those you work with. This was a **HUGE** step in my healing. I began volunteering at Royal Ottawa Place in 2009, an affiliate of The Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre. I am still there today. It is a residence helping those with mental and physical challenges. I worked with 14 of these residents to produce my latest book "Reflections from Another Side".

8. LAUGH - it really is the best medicine! Find time for this each day. Check out "Scary Snowman" or "Cats and Cucumbers" on YouTube. Hilarious!

9. READING is LIFE! Learn, explore, and put your newfound knowledge and awareness into strategies and life changes. Reading has been proven to effectively build and strengthen the brain. It also decreases the stigma we may carry towards others. With understanding comes acceptance, compassion & empathy.

10. EXPLORE TALENTS (new and old) & HOBBIES. Talents and hobbies are therapeutic in every way. They can also be acquired. They take time and patience, but that in itself is healing. Try, try & try again. Learning a new language (or anything new) has a very positive effect on the mind. As does simply colouring. I recently began to draw again after over 20 years, and it has made a massive difference in my life. I have taken my drawing to new levels and it gets me into "the zone". Find this in a healthy activity. Be fully immersed. It brings true joy and healing. Talents and hobbies are brain boosters. Our brains are the control centre of our bodies. Remember that. Treat your brain well. Moderation and balance.

WORD SEARCHES ALSO HEAL: www.wordsearch365.com/tips/benefits-of-word-search I try to do a word search every day: www.word-search-puzzles.appspot.com/ There are also numerous mind building & mind healing apps like: [Luminosity](#), [CogniFit Brain Fitness](#), [Happify](#), [Headspace](#), [Abide & Calm](#)

11. BUILD UP MENTAL STRATEGIES - You can look some up or create your own. For example, some of mine: fill a jar with loonies as you avoid acting on an obsession, or as you implement a healthy habit, or if you calm yourself down in a stressful situation. Maybe you suffer social anxiety. Begin by walking into a grocery store for 5 min. With all of these strategies, reward yourself. This builds momentum. **MENTAL STRATEGIES & LIFESTYLE CHANGES** are crucial and **ESSENTIAL** to healing. **LIFESTYLE CHANGES** are **AS EFFECTIVE** as anything you do. Habits build easily, and they snowball forward. If they are negative, they take you down. If they are positive, they lift you up.

REMEMBER THIS: when we act on something (build a habit), a neural pathway is formed in our brain. Over time, a repeated habit will strengthen this pathway. It will be reinforced (like a tree trunk getting thicker). With positive habits, great things happen. Negative habits will hinder and hurt us.

12. BUILD A BALANCED "FAITH" LIFE - this can be a spiritual faith with God, or having faith in your family members, your friends, and loved ones. Also, a belief within yourself, knowing that YOU are capable of healing. There is always someone to reach to. **SUPPORT SYSTEMS** are critical. Attempt to find healing through prayer, deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness. Yoga is also a very effective tool. No matter what you feel about faith or spiritually, it is **HIGHLY** effective for healing. **Biggest Tip:** Never close your door to finding faith or spirituality in your life. Faith and spirituality can also find its way to you.

13. HEALTHY TELEVISION & MOVIES - **LIMIT YOUR TIME** on these and on **SOCIAL MEDIA**. The dopamine reward system can be overactivated and overstimulated from sites like Facebook and Twitter. This can affect you negatively. Limit your time on these. Too much screen time is a detriment to healing. Use it effectively and with caution. Screens off an hour to an hour-and-a-half before bed ... you will have a much better sleep. **READ** a book instead. Or listen to uplifting **MUSIC**. Music has a healing component. Ever heard of music-therapy?

14. NEVER LOSE HOPE - I almost died. I was an inch from losing my life a few times. Now, I inspire others and give sufferers and their supporters hope. Your life is too important. Make it matter. Make it count. You are **NEVER** alone in your journey. Find people you can trust. If you have no one, you **NOW HAVE ME**. Very soon, you will be **SHARING YOUR OWN STORY**.

MANDATORY READING

"Reading is food for the brain."

The following books that REALLY pushed my healing forward.

"KEEP SHARP" by Sanjay Gupta

Dr. Sanjay Gupta is a neurosurgeon and chief medical correspondent on CNN. His book involves INCREDIBLE ways to keep your brain healthy and sharp. You'll be surprised at some of the ideas in this book: our brain is 73% water! Our brains dehydrate pretty quickly. With just a few gulps every 15 to 20 min., you replenish your brain, and it has a big difference in your thinking, in keeping your brain sharp/heart sharp and on cue, which affects everything. The book is backed by science and medical research, with many innovative hands-on strategies. There is also a section on concussions & Alzheimer's/Dementia. *"Focus on the brain, and everything else will follow."* <https://amzn.to/3stqijT>

"MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING" by Viktor Frankl

This book was monumental in my healing. It inspired me to write my memoir. This is a MUST read. Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist in the outside world. During WWII, he was imprisoned in the Auschwitz death camps, a prisoner of the Holocaust, a slave to the German army running the extermination camps. Surrounded by evil, torture, genocide, and the worst suffering one can ever imagine, he chose NOT let the horrors around him impede or seep into mind. He knew that it would take him down, as it was destroying others who lost hope and their purpose for living. Instead, he kept the circumstances outside of him and found meaning and purpose inside himself, looking towards a future of helping others in his practice. He also developed his own

philosophy for healing. This kept him motivated to survive. It kept him healthy, resilient, and strong. It instilled hope for a bright and successful future. He found meaning and purpose beyond suffering. <https://amzn.to/3on1LZ6>

"ATOMIC HABITS" by James Clear – POWER BEHIND ONE SMALL HABIT

Small, minute habits every day that add up to produce huge changes along the way. Healing is EXPONENTIAL. It builds momentum, which takes you further, faster. I have set up a spreadsheet on Excel with 10 to 12 things I try to accomplish each day. It has been a big motivator in my healing, and maintaining my daily mental health and wellness balance. <https://amzn.to/3r3qLVq>

Here's an example. You can create an excel chart (or any) that helps you heal:

POSITIVE HABITS	MAY 24	MAY 23	MAY 22	MAY 21
WORKOUT OF THE DAY		Resistance	Walking	Resistance
5 CHECKINS WITH OTHERS				
15 MINUTES TALENT PRACTICE				
SPRITUAL TIME				
5 THINGS I'M GRATEFUL FOR				
RELAXING TIME				
BOOK WRITING & READING				
BREATHING EXERCISES/ MINDFUL				

"THE GIFTS OF IMPERFECTION: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to be & Embrace Who You Are" by Brene Brown

Anything written by this author is life-changing. Explore her on Amazon and on YouTube. Look up "Ted Talks on Brene Brown" or videos on her. <https://amzn.to/3spuMEc>

"HEAL" DOCUMENTARY

The information in this documentary is scientific, research proven, fact-based, and backed by some of the world's most renowned scientists, researchers, doctors (conventional & unconventional), mental health advocates & activists, and spiritual teachers in the field. BELIEF. Yes, belief. If you believe you CAN heal, you will. Our brains prove this. When you combine a belief (where there's a want, there's a way), with a proficient doctor, loving support (here and above), positive lifestyle changes, wise choices, and the adoption of healthy habits, incredible things happen in our body (biologically and physiologically). Positive neurotransmitters kick in, cortisol (the stress hormone) levels drop, adrenaline levels (fight or flight) drop and stabilize, our immune (healing) system is activated, and every cell in our body reacts positively. Healing occurs, in mind, body, and soul. Even those with terminal issues can heal. It is unbelievable what can happen. Our brains are that POWERFUL and capable of accomplishing things we never imagined were possible. Belief in the power to heal is NOT "pie in the sky" or wishful thinking. It is scientifically, biologically, and physiologically proven. Stress kills. Belief that healing is possible ... you HEAL. It works. It most certainly does. Order the documentary here. Only \$5 to rent.

<https://youtu.be/rdNWn6BwU8s>

"SOCIAL DILEMMA" DOCUMENTARY on NETFLIX

A true eye-opener on the algorithms, addiction, and control that social media has on societies worldwide. The top tech wizards in the world behind the technology and creation of these social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are stepping down and speaking up about the dangers and complete manipulation that social media has on all of us. They discuss the effects that social media has on our mental, emotional & social health, especially on our youth, which is leading to individual and societal breakdowns, a rise in teenage suicides and attempts, and an overall increase towards a loneliness crisis, possibly epidemic in proportion. Social media does not unite us. Ultimately it divides us. We just don't see it or realize it yet, but society is already feeling the brunt, and this is just the beginning.

GOALS FOR HEALING & HELPING OTHERS HEAL

**Show Respect, Be Accepting, Be Compassionate & Empathetic,
Show Sympathy, Try to Understand, Be Non-Judgemental**

“I’m only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.”

- Helen Keller

“Focus on your brain, and everything else will follow.”

-Sanjay Gupta

“1 in 5 suffer from mental illness. 4 in 5 support them. 5 in 5 of us suffer from the ups and downs of mental health. No one is immune to pain from the brain. Some are just better at hiding it. Like I was. That is no way to live.

You can’t do it alone.”

If you heal substantially, don’t stop there. Take your successes, and help others heal. Give a fish, heal a symptom. Teach them to fish, heal the soul. You will then realize that healing goes far beyond anything you ever imagined. It is a lifelong process with endless possibilities.

Help others, heal thyself. -Chris Nihmey

HELPFUL SUPPORTS & RESOURCES

www.chrisnihmey.com (“Two Sides To The Story” is an invaluable resource)
cnihmey@gmail.com / 613-601-4256

Ottawa Distress Line

www.dcottawa.on.ca

DISTRESS LINE: **613-238-3311**
CRISIS LINE: IN OTTAWA **613-722-6914**
OUTSIDE OTTAWA **1-866-996-0991**
TEXT: **343-306-5550**
CHAT & TEXT **10AM – 11PM**

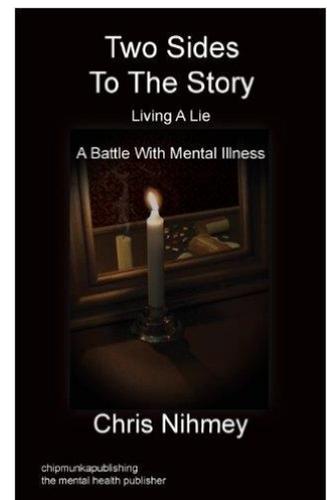
“One step forward, two steps back was often the case. This had to change. Eventually, it did. It became two steps forward, one step back. A stumble or a step back is not a sign of failure. It builds resilience preparing you for a giant leap forward. Never lose hope.”-Chris Nihmey

SIGNS YOU MAY BE SUFFERING:

www.mentalhealthamerica.net/recognizing-warning-signs
www.mindhealthconnect.org.au/signs-mental-health-issue
www.nami.org/Learn-More/Know-the-Warning-Signs
www.psychiatry.org/patients-families

LOOKING FOR MORE DIRECTION:

Canadian Mental Health Association – www.cmha.ca
Centre for Addition and Mental Health - www.cmho.org/
Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health – www.camimh.ca (I am linked to this organization through my FACES campaign.)
The Royal Mental Health Centre – www.theroyal.ca (613) 722-6521



REMEMBER: Never hesitate to reach out. You are NEVER alone. I am here.