What do you suggest to help a person develop healthier habits?

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Getting proper exercise, eating well, following a regular schedule and having good sleep habits have been proved in studies to help with most mental illnesses, yet it can be difficult to find the energy and motivation to do all these things. What do you suggest to help a person develop healthier habits?

It's really important to take baby steps. I mean, what depressed person wants to exercise? A therapist or person who is acting as a support system shouldn't lecture the person or dictate from a list. It's much better for the people who are struggling with illness to come up with actions they think they can actually accomplish.

Exercise is probably the hardest, so I might start with healthier eating. If they're eating too much, or too much junk food, I'd explore with them when they are most vulnerable. Is it late at night? What kinds of things could they do instead of eating that would sooth them?

For some people, the first step may just be getting out of bed, or opening the shades. For others it could be a walk around the block.

Answered by: Gail Tager, she is a marriage and family therapist from Sierra Madre, California, with two decades of experience. Here, she answers five of the most common questions regarding mental health, ranging from how to find the best therapist to how to figure out when and whom to tell others about your struggles.

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