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Benefits News

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Building a healthy relationship with yourself

Your relationship with yourself includes self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-compassion, and self-care. Having a healthy relationship with yourself means you value who you are, as well as your strengths and opportunities. It helps connect you with others and impacts your overall wellbeing.

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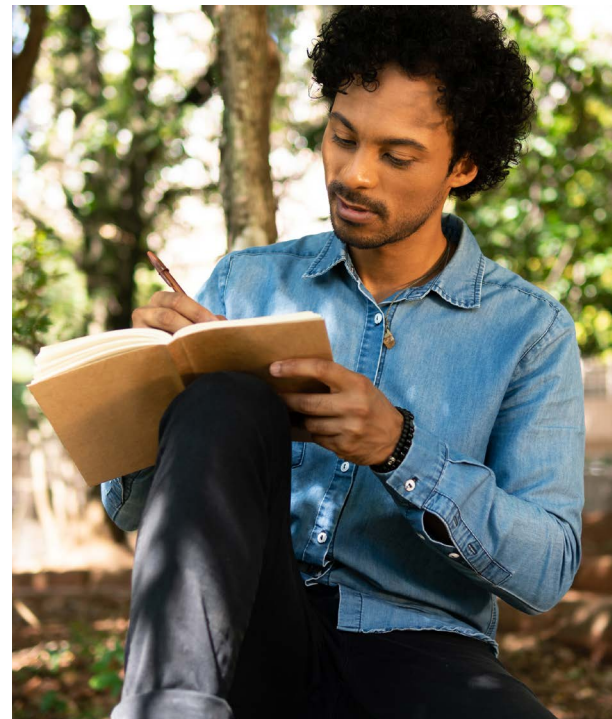
What is self-awareness?

Self-awareness is the ability to look inward and see yourself objectively. It involves thinking about your behavior and how it aligns with your beliefs and values.



When you're self-aware, it can help you:

- Boost your self-esteem.
- Be more proactive.
- Be more open to self-improvement.
- See things from the perspective of others.
- Make better decisions.
- Build better relationships.
- Manage your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, rather than letting them control you.
- Be more resilient, which means you can bounce back easier from hard times.
- Decrease your stress.
- Be happier.



Tips for becoming more self-aware

According to Psychology Today, “Individuals with high levels of self-awareness and self-connection tend to be the most resilient people on the planet.”¹ Anyone can become more self-aware, no matter their age. It just takes willingness and a little practice.

Here are six ways to get started:



Keep a journal. Write down memorable events each day. When you track your thoughts and emotions, it can help you better understand yourself. It can be as simple as keeping a list on your smartphone or jotting your thoughts down on your desk calendar. If you prefer something more formal, download a journal app. Or buy a fancy hard-copy journal at an office supply store.



Ask others for feedback. Trusted friends and family members can help you better understand yourself. Ask them about your strengths and areas for improvement. When are you at your best? Are you someone they go to for advice or comfort? Avoid the temptation to get defensive. Just listen to what they say and thank them for sharing it.



Clarify your values. Becoming more self-aware means living a life that is consistent with your values. Understand why you think and react the way you do based on your beliefs and values. Make a list of your top values and think about how/whether your behavior supports them.



Practice gratitude. Start your day by asking yourself, “What am I most grateful for?” This can help put your life in perspective. It also shows what’s important to you.



Examine your sudden reactions. If something makes you instantly upset, try to understand why you’re feeling that way rather than reacting.



Practice mindfulness meditation. This can help you stay in the moment. You can focus on your breath and accept your thoughts and feelings without judgment.^{2,3}



Learning about perimenopause and menopause



More than 25% of the population is made up of people with uteruses over 40. That means one out of four people in that group you know may be experiencing perimenopause or menopause.

As people with uteruses age, hormone levels will change. This change in life is known as perimenopause or menopause. It's completely normal. Everyone experiences it differently. You can care for yourself—or your loved one—by learning about it, knowing what to expect, and how to manage the symptoms.

What is perimenopause?

Perimenopause is the time before menopause when hormone levels begin to decline. It usually begins in your 40s but can start earlier or later. During perimenopause, you may notice symptoms and changes in your body.

This can affect a variety of bodily functions, including your:

- Bladder
- Body temperature
- Bone density
- Heart health
- Metabolism, or how your body burns energy
- Menstrual cycle
- Emotional dynamics
- And more⁴

What is menopause?

Menopause occurs when you've gone at least 12 months without a menstrual cycle, or period. On average, this happens in your early 50s but can start earlier or later. The reason it occurs is that your ovaries stop making certain hormones called estrogen and progesterone. These hormones play a big role in how your body functions.

Stages of menopause

The entire process of menopause can last for 10 years or longer. It happens in three stages:

1 Perimenopause →	2 Menopause →	3 Postmenopause
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your estrogen and progesterone levels start to decline.• You might experience night sweats, hot flashes, or other symptoms.• Your periods might be spaced out more. They might also occur more often.• It can last four to eight years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your period has stopped for 12 months in a row.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You might continue to experience hot flashes or other symptoms for a while.

Menopause symptoms and ways to manage them

Perimenopause and menopause look different for every one. Here are some common and lesser-known symptoms, as well as ways to manage them:

Symptom	Ways to manage it
Anxiety, depression, or fluctuating emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meditation• Cognitive behavioral therapy• Hypnosis• Prescription medications, like antidepressants
Bladder control issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Kegel exercises</u>• Prescription medications
Bone thinning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Strength training and weight-bearing exercises</u>, including walking and climbing stairs• Calcium-rich foods, like almonds, broccoli, kale, cauliflower, canned salmon, and tofu
Dry skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moisturizing lotion and lip balm

Symptom	Ways to manage it
Hair loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special shampoos and conditioners • Over-the-counter hair replacement products, like Rogaine®
Hot flashes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black cohosh, a natural supplement • Estrogen and/or progesterone pills or patches (known as hormone replacement therapy)
Irregular periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth control pills, estrogen, or progesterone
Memory problems or brain fog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sticky notes or note-taking • Task list or reminders on your smartphone
Trouble sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise • Maintaining a regular sleep schedule • Occasional over-the-counter or prescription sleep aids that aren't addictive
Vaginal dryness, decreased sex drive, or pain during sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-based lubricant • Vaginal moisturizers • Estrogen ring or gel inserts • Prescription testosterone creams • Having sex more often keeps tissues softer
Weight gain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce sugar and carbohydrates in your diet; your body doesn't process these foods as well as you age • Exercise more often

To learn more about perimenopause and menopause symptoms, do your research. Check out these online resources:

- [The Menopause Society](#)
- [National Institute on Aging](#)



Is hormone replacement therapy right for you?

One option for managing the symptoms of menopause is hormone replacement therapy (HRT). It comes in creams, patches, pills, vaginal rings, and other forms. HRT can help maintain estrogen (and progesterone, if you still have a uterus) levels in your body. This helps reduce your symptoms, like hot flashes.

New studies have found that HRT also reduces your risk of:

- Osteoporosis, or bone thinning, which can lead to falls and broken bones
- Heart disease, stroke, dementia, and mood changes
- Colon cancer and ovarian cancer

However, HRT does come with some risks, depending on the form you use. Overall, it can increase your risk for breast cancer, although only slightly.

Depending on your family health history, age, and other factors, HRT might not be a good option for you. Talk with your gynecologist to discuss your unique situation and ask if HRT is the answer for you.⁵

There are solutions out there and doing nothing doesn't have to be the answer.⁶

— Stephanie S. Faubion, M.D., M.B.A., and women's health expert at Mayo Clinic and medical director of The Menopause Society



When and where to seek help

People experience different symptoms related to menopause. Some may experience more issues than others. Talk to your primary care provider or gynecologist about how you're feeling. Your provider can help direct you to possible solutions.

PEBB's medical plans include benefits for menopause and treatment options, such as:

- Prescription medications, birth control, and hormone replacement therapy

Visit your plan's website to find an in-network provider near you:

- **Providence members:** [Find Providence providers and locations](#)
- **Kaiser members:** [Find Kaiser Permanente providers and locations](#)
- **Moda members:** [Find Moda providers and locations](#)

PEBB's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help too. The EAP offers these resources 24/7 at no cost to you (if provided by your employer), and it's completely confidential:

- Trained counselors
- Helpful articles where you can learn more about menopause and treatment options
- Virtual peer support to connect anonymously online with others who are experiencing menopause

If you're experiencing menopause symptoms, support is only a call or click away:

- **Canopy** EAP (except OSU) 800-433-2320
- **Lyra Health** EAP (OSU only) 877-235-7812

How to support someone going through menopause

If you know someone who is experiencing perimenopause or menopause, you can be an important part of their support system. Start by learning more about perimenopause and menopause so you better understand what they're going through. You can also:

- Ask how you can help
- Avoid making negative comments or jokes
- Give them space when needed
- If they are experiencing memory issues, help them set up reminders
- Let them control the thermostat
- Offer to take some tasks off their to-do list
- Don't take it personally
- Understand that they might not be feeling their best⁷
- Support at work

Support at work

Menopause is impacting employers, too. Each year, employees are missing \$1.8 billion dollars' worth of work time because of symptoms.⁸

As a result, The Menopause Society™ is trying to make workplaces more menopause-friendly by:

- Giving managers tips for talking with employees
- Suggesting workarounds for menopause symptoms, such as flexible bathroom breaks, better air flow, and breathable uniforms
- Sharing ideas for employers to consider, like updating their time off policies and offering additional health care benefits.⁸

If you're struggling with menopause symptoms at work, talk with your manager about potential accommodations.





Six ways to build a healthy relationship with yourself



If you're like most people, you recognize the value of showing kindness and compassion to others. But do you extend the same to yourself? Being kind and compassionate to yourself is just as important. And with practice, you can make self-compassion a habit.

Here are some tips:

Step	Why it's good	How to do it
 <p>Celebrate small accomplishments</p>	<p>You don't have to achieve big things to feel proud of yourself. The small things really do add up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maybe you didn't work out three times this week like you planned. Give yourself credit for what you did do. If you exercised once, that's something. If you took a walk around the block, that's something too.
 <p>Don't believe everything you think</p>	<p>On harder days, you might find yourself having more negative thoughts. For example, you might have a conflict with a friend and think, "They're never going to speak to me again."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledge the thoughts you're having, but you don't have to accept them as fact.

Step	Why it's good	How to do it
 <p>Check your self-talk</p>	<p>The things you tell yourself can have a big effect on how you feel about yourself. And a lot of us are much harder on ourselves than we would be on others.</p> <p>A positive inner dialogue builds your self-confidence and helps you cope with anxiety and depression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try shifting your self-talk to be more forgiving. When you don't do as well as you'd like, be gentle with yourself. You can say, "This is new, and I'm doing my best." Or "I'm caring for my family, and I'm doing a good job." • Try to focus on being grateful. • Look for ways to focus on what's positive in your life.
 <p>Remind yourself of your good qualities and how you can grow</p>	<p>When you value your strengths, it helps build your self-confidence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down a list of your strengths. • Ask friends or family members to help. • Think about what skills you might want to develop.



Step	Why it's good	How to do it
 <p>Do something just for you</p>	<p>Alone time gives you a chance to self-reflect. It can provide the space you need to think through your beliefs, likes, dislikes, current challenges, and life goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find ways to have quiet time for yourself each week. Take a coffee break, go for a walk, or take a long bath. • Try journaling, yoga, or meditation. • Give your mind a chance to wander.^{8, 9}
 <p>Stay on top of your health</p>	<p>Annual checkups are a good way to make sure your body is performing at its best. They can also reveal any potential issues early and when they're most treatable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule an annual preventive exam with your medical provider. • Schedule annual checkups with your dental and vision providers. • Click here for more.



If you need a hand

If you're having difficulty loving yourself, it might be time to call in reinforcements. A professional therapist can help you develop coping skills. They can also show you ways to develop gratitude, self-awareness, and compassion for yourself. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help.

- **Canopy EAP** (if provided by your employer)
800-433-2320
- **Lyra Health EAP** (OSU only)
877-235-7812

Practicing self-compassion



Take a moment to reflect on the following two questions:

- 1 How do you respond to a friend who's experiencing a difficult time?
- 2 If your pet is acting quiet, sluggish, and ill, what is your response?

Now think back to a recent time when you didn't quite meet your expectation for yourself. Maybe you slept through your alarm, didn't cross an item off your to-do list, or didn't exercise because you weren't feeling well. Did you show yourself the same compassion that you showed your friend and/or your pet?

We often develop negative patterns of self-talk at an early age, so developing a mindset of self-compassion requires practice. Here's how:

Self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when faced with personal failings. After all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?

— Kristin Neff,
co-founder of
Center for Mindful
Self-Compassion



Take a self-compassion quiz.

Take this self-compassion quiz to assess your areas of self-compassion that might benefit from a bit of attention.




Explore ways to be more compassionate with yourself.


Click on these guided practices and/or exercises to learn tips for practicing self-compassion.¹⁰


Programs that promote your mental health

Your emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing deserves the same care as your physical health. Mental health issues can have a big impact on your day-to-day life. They can impact your relationships, happiness, and productivity.

To help support your mental health, PEBB offers programs through our vendor partners:

Vendor partner	Program	How to enroll
 <p>Providence Health members</p>	<p>Learn to Live, a virtual and confidential program. It's available in English or Spanish, whenever and wherever you are.</p> <p>Learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand how your mind works and how to deal with what may be making you anxious or depressed.• Identify and work through thoughts and behavior patterns that may perpetuate your issues.• Develop new habits to help deal with problems in healthy ways.• Use new tools to help manage your thoughts and actions.• Set goals to help you practice what you've learned.	<p>Register on learntolive.com/welcome/providencehealthplan</p> <p>Use access code: PHPPEBB</p>
	<p>Personal coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coaching to help you identify your goals, overcome obstacles, and achieve them.	<p>providencehealthplan.com/member-perks/health-coaching</p>

Vendor partner	Program	How to enroll
 <p>Moda Health members</p>	<p>Spring Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one counseling. • Virtual sessions. • 24/7 crisis counseling. • Guided meditation. • Mindfulness programs. • Cognitive behavioral therapy. 	<p>modahealth.com/pebb/behavioralhealth/</p>
	<p>Meru Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one counseling. • Virtual sessions. • 24/7 crisis counseling. • Guided meditation. • Mindfulness programs. • Cognitive behavioral therapy. 	<p>meruhealth.com/sign-up/modahealth/</p>
	<p>Life coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching to help you identify your goals, and overcome obstacles to achieve them. 	<p>855-466-7155</p> <p>healthcoachteam@modahealth.com</p>
	<p>Cyti Psychological (for Oregon members)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online counseling services for individuals, couples, and families. 	<p>cyticlinics.com</p>

Vendor partner	Program	How to enroll
 <p>Kaiser Permanente members</p>	<p>Self-care apps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm—Sleep and meditation tools to help lower stress, anxiety, and more. • Headspace Care (formerly Ginger)—One-on-one texting with an emotional support coach. 	<p>healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/health-wellness/mental-health/tools-resources/digital</p>
	<p>Mind and body health education classes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes and tools to help develop skills and techniques for stress, health problems, relationship issues, and more. 	<p>healthengagement.kaiserpermanente.org/wp-content/uploads/mindbody.pdf</p>
	<p>Personal coaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching to help you identify your goals, and overcome obstacles to achieve them. 	<p>healthengagement.kaiserpermanente.org/health-coaching/</p>



Maintaining positive relationships



“Positive relationships can be as important to your health and wellbeing as nutrition and physical activity.”¹¹ Friends can come and go over time. Maintaining a strong social network as you age can contribute to a longer, healthier life.

Healthy relationships come with these benefits:¹²

- They reduce your stress.
- They help you heal faster from sicknesses and injuries.
- You’ll engage in healthier behaviors.
- You’ll have a greater sense of purpose.
- They promote a longer life.

12 signs of a healthy relationship¹³

You respect one another.	You trust each other.	You’re willing to have difficult conversations.	You find ways to communicate even if you disagree on an issue.
You can agree to disagree.	You forgive each other.	You each put in an equal amount of effort to keep the relationship going.	You’re kind to each other.
You enjoy one another’s company and support each other’s dreams and goals.	You’re good at making decisions together.	You’re comfortable with who you are separate from your friend or partner.	You and your friend or partner can relax and be yourselves in front of each other.

Looking to make more social connections?

Check out [this article](#) for ideas. Support groups can be a great place to make connections with other people. View [tips](#) on finding the right community for you.

Finding more purpose and meaning in your life



Finding a purpose in your life can help you feel more in control and satisfied. If you're looking for more meaning, try these tips:

- Donate your time, money, or talent to a group you believe in.
- Strike up a conversation with a new person.
- Pay attention to compliments people give you.
- Explore your interests, like music, photography, history, etc.
- Surround yourself with positive people.
- Volunteer for a cause that you care about.

Think about what you love to do, and then find a way to do it.¹⁴



Foods that boost your immune system

Keeping your body healthy is another important part of self-care.

Consider eating some of these foods to help your body fight off illnesses:

Fatty fish Try tuna, salmon, mackerel, or sardines	Citrus fruits Try oranges, grapefruit, lemons, or limes	Garlic Try it in salad dressing or sprinkle it on roasted vegetables	Ginger Found in Asian and Indian dishes	Turmeric Found in curries
Broccoli Try cooked or raw	Bell peppers Add to your salad or try with chicken fajitas	Spinach Add to your salad or blend in a smoothie	Greek yogurt Eat it plain or mix it in recipes	Almonds Mix in your salad or sprinkle on pasta
Sunflower seeds Eat raw or add to your salad	Green tea Drink hot or cold	Papaya Try in a fruit salad	Kiwi Try in a fruit salad	Poultry Try chicken or turkey ¹⁵

PEBB at your service

To ensure members receive a high standard of health care, the Board relies on a number of partners. These partners include PEBB staff, health and wellbeing consultants, and several workgroups.

One of these workgroups is the Strategies on Evidence and Outcomes Workgroup, or SEOW. SEOW was originally created to support the Oregon Educators Benefits Board (OEBB). Over time, as OEBB and PEBB work more closely together, PEBB has begun using the SEOW workgroup to support the PEBB Board's efforts.

SEOW supports the Board by:

- Monitoring how well services for Oregon employees are working, and if they are worth the cost
- Making sure there are guarantees for good results
- Keeping track of new medical treatments and technologies
- Using data to identify new opportunities for PEBB and OEBB
- Evaluating new physical, behavioral, and social treatments and programs
- Making recommendations to the Boards based on their analysis

SEOW's work helps the Boards make important decisions about what coverage should be available to members. It also ensures that PEBB and OEBB continue to offer quality, member-first care for the best value.

SEOW holds regular working sessions that are open to the public. To learn more about SEOW, visit the [SEOW meetings](#) page. You can find SEOW's meeting schedules, agendas, and recordings from previous meetings.

PEBB Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month and are open to the public. To learn more about upcoming meetings or to view recordings of past meetings, visit the [Public Meetings](#) page of the PEBB website.

Benefits Questions?

Email: pebb.benefits@odhsosha.oregon.gov

Phone: 503-373-1102



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