

Tips

Continued from Page 8

bring wholeness and a sense of belonging and purpose borne of positive human connection. Loneliness is being called “the new smoking.” Research suggests that togetherness with supportive others reduces stress and anxiety, strengthens the immune system and improves sleep quality. Toxic relationships can do the opposite.

“Relationships get into our psyches,” Lindsay said. “We need to be thoughtful about our relationships.”

Other lifestyle factors affecting mental health include diet, tech habits, sleep, alcohol and drugs, and learning to quiet the mind. Getting enough exercise is key.

“Exercise is good all the time, whether or not you are struggling with mental health issues,” Lindsay said. “Exercise is good for our brains and good for our body.”

One’s outlook on life can likewise affect mental health.

“Our brains are so powerful. Outlook impacts so much of how we feel,” Lindsay said. “It’s as simple as walking down the street and smiling or not smiling. Every time you smile, you release a little bit of dopamine or serotonin. Your brain knows something good is coming.”

People who laugh more tend to be healthier and live longer. Making a purposeful decision to smile and be a little cheerier can pay big mental health dividends. Research even suggests that doing nice things for other people boosts one’s own mental wellness. Start your spouse’s car when it’s cold outside. Bring cookies to the office.

“Try doing one nice thing every day for 10 days,” Lindsay said. “You’re just going to feel better.”

Another topic researchers are investigating involves how screen time affects our mental health. Results are, so far, inconclusive about whether technology is a bane or a balm. One study, examining the tech hab-



EO Media Group/E.J. Harris

Friends Justin Farrow, from left, Andrea Brobst, Cody Nash and Matt White carry on a conversation Jan. 17 at a table at Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co. in Pendleton. Research suggests that togetherness with supportive others reduces stress and anxiety, strengthens the immune system and improves sleep quality.



EO Media Group/E.J. Harris

Acosia Red Elk, left, teaches a yoga class Jan. 17 at Wellness Wave in Mission. Diet and exercise are key to maintaining good mental health.

its of 120,000 kids, found that a few hours using devices actually seemed to improve well-being. Other studies, such as one released recently, found a relationship between screen time and higher teenage suicide rate.

Lindsay doesn’t pretend to have the answer, but says unplugging regularly can’t hurt and will most likely help. Meditate. Do yoga. Stare out the window. Whatever.

“Just disconnect. Go off grid for 15 minutes,” she said. “Listen to music while you drive.”

Psychology scientists, she said, are starting to look at the importance of daydreaming and giving your mind a break from thinking. People aren’t letting their minds roam these days, she said. Children don’t have as much free time. Regular daydreaming can help people try on different scenarios for size and imagine themselves in various roles. Lindsay isn’t an all or nothing sort of person. Moderation, she said, is good when it comes to most things in life. She said an example of healthy liv-

ing can be found on the Greek island of Ikaria.

She referenced a *New York Times* story, “The Island Where People Forget to Die,” that tells of a Greek man who lived in the U.S. for most of his adulthood, but returned to his island to die after learning he had lung cancer and only six months to live. There, he reconnected with childhood friends, spending hours talking and sometimes sharing wine together.

He went on leisurely walks and didn’t worry about time, since few wore watches there. His diet included homegrown vegetables, olive oil, beans and a moderate amount of alcohol. He started feeling better. Decades later, the man remained cancer free.

The island, designated a Blue Zone for its abundance of centenarians, has lessons to teach us in regards to mental health.

“They’re eating healthier. They’re walking,” Lindsay said. “They let things go.”

When talking about mental health, those are words to live by.