

May is Mental Health Month. When an individual's mental health is negatively impacted, they may turn to alcohol and/or drug use, which may in turn become an addiction. Individuals with both mental health and substance use disorders are said to have co-occurring disorders. Protecting mental health is critical for overall well-being.

During the past year, Mental Health America (MHA) witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of people experiencing mental health problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In November 2020, the CDC reported that 44 percent of people were dealing with either depression or anxiety. Nearly 3 million people have taken a MHA mental health screening during the past twelve months. During that time, one million people were experiencing depression and hundreds of thousands more were experiencing either anxiety or psychosis. Young people are bearing the brunt of the pandemic, but these mental health impacts cross all generations. Here are some additional important points:

- While 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health.
- The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to cope with situations we never imagined. In fact, of the almost half-million individuals that took the anxiety screening at [MHAscreening.org](https://MHAscreening.org), 79% showed symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety. Now, more than ever, it is critical to reduce the stigma around mental health struggles that commonly prevent individuals from seeking help.
- During difficult times, it is important to accept the situations we cannot change, actively work to process the mental struggles associated with big changes, manage anger and frustration, recognize when trauma may be affecting your mental health, challenge negative thinking patterns, and make time to take care of yourself.
- Turning to friends, family, and co-workers when you are struggling with life's challenges can help improve your mental health.
- Living a healthy lifestyle and incorporating mental health tools may not be easy, but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes.
- Seeking professional help when self-help efforts aren't working is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Recovery is a unique and personal journey that requires trial and error to determine what works best for each individual.

It's important to remember that working on your mental health and finding tools that help you thrive takes time. Change won't happen overnight. Instead, by focusing on small changes you can move through the stressors and develop long-term strategies to support yourself on an ongoing basis. I will be discussing these stressors and strategies in upcoming articles.

A great starting point for anyone who is ready to prioritize their mental health is to take a mental health screening at [MHAscreening.org](https://MHAscreening.org). It is a quick, free, and confidential way for people to assess their mental health and to begin finding hope and healing. Ultimately, during this month of May, Drug Free Adams County wants to remind everyone that mental illnesses are real, and recovery is possible.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.drugfreeadamscounty.org](https://www.drugfreeadamscounty.org).