

SAFLEO Issue Brief Series #4

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Spotlight on the  
Connection Between  
**Physical Wellness**  
and **Mental Wellness**

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## Are physical and mental health tied together?

So often, we think of physical health and mental health as being separate entities, but really, everything in our bodies connects. Good health is not just the absence of disease, it also refers to our ability to bounce back from an illness or another challenge in our lives. There is significant evidence that poor physical health can lead to an increased chance of developing mental health concerns. Similarly, poor mental health can then affect your physical health.

## Depression

Understanding the connection between physical and mental wellness includes examining the link between depression and physical illnesses and injuries.

- Around one-third of people with serious medical conditions experience symptoms of depression such as low mood, sleep problems, and a loss of interest in activities. For example, being diagnosed with cancer or having a heart attack can lead to feelings of depression or anxiety. The mortality rate from cancer and heart disease is higher among people with depression or other mental health conditions.<sup>1</sup>
- Depression has been linked to many chronic illnesses, including diabetes, asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and arthritis.



**33%**

## Law enforcement is a physically and mentally demanding job

For law enforcement professionals, this connection is especially important given the demands of the job. While the job is physically demanding, it is also mentally demanding. From the weight of carrying around the duty belt, to sometimes having to sit for long periods and quickly transitioning to being on the run, there are a lot of physical demands on one's body. And there are also emotional demands—having to stay alert for long periods, the unknowns of the day's work, and traumatic exposure to events on the job.

1. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/9288-chronic-illness-and-depression>

**Understand the links between mind and body**

Understanding the links between mind and body is the first step in creating strategies to reduce the likelihood of developing issues that may deteriorate our physical and mental well-being. Several lifestyle factors influence both your mental and physical well-being. Ultimately, there are many things we may do to maintain our physical health that also improve our mental health and vice versa. It is important to evaluate our nutrition, level of exercise, mindfulness, social connectedness, and sleep habits to determine how they are impacting the physical and mental wellness connection.

**Daily things to boost your physical and mental health**

Remember, your physical and emotional wellness are connected. When considering daily activities that you may want to do for your well-being, consider ones that check both the physical and the mental health box.

- Do your best to get at least seven hours of sleep.<sup>2</sup>
- Commit to 20 minutes of physical activity.<sup>3</sup>
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet.
- Monitor how much caffeine and alcohol you consume.
- Connect with your family and friends.
- Practice mindfulness techniques to reduce stress and improve responsiveness.
- Enjoy recreational activities to boost your energy, productivity, and overall cognition.

These activities may help you to improve your work performance and, more importantly, they will contribute to your overall quality of life.

**Reach out**

Lastly, it is critical to recognize when your daily coping strategies are not enough to meet your needs. Never hesitate to reach out for additional assistance when you feel that your physical or mental wellness needs more support. Whether it is a workout with a friend or a session with a counselor, your physical and mental wellness needs are tied together. You will feel the benefits of giving equal attention to both.

2. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0215-enough-sleep.html>

3. [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy\\_eating/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/index.html) to learn more.



## My Local Resources

## Resources

- SAFLEO postvention guide
- Primary care physician
- Culturally competent clinician (in person or online)
- Professionally led support group
- Peer support group
- Employee Assistance Program
- Agency chaplain
- Clergy
- Supervisor
- Human resources
- Trusted colleagues
- Friends or family members
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call 988
- Crisis Text Line: Text "BLUE" to 741741

## SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE, AND IT STARTS WITH YOU!

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