

# Mental Health: Faith & Spirituality



Dealing with a mental health condition can be tough. Thankfully, our spiritual beliefs can help us cope with the situation as we move forward in faith. In fact, research has shown that for some, religion and individual spirituality can directly improve our physical and mental health.

If you grew up in a specific faith and feel comfortable with it, you may already have prayers and rituals that support your health. These can be a source of strength and comfort for you.

Here are some ideas that could help:

## **Prayer**

Dedicate some time to prayer over your situation. You could pray for guidance in the treatment process, for wisdom for your providers, for your recovery, etc.

## **Meditation**

One practice that has received a lot of attention is contemplative prayer and meditation. Many studies have found that 10-20 minutes of meditation twice a day causes what is called the "relaxation response": decreased metabolism, decreased heart rate, decreased breathing rate and slower, calmer brain waves.

## **Togetherness**

Religious groups can provide structured social activities that cause relatively little anxiety and benefit our health directly. Places of worship may also offer a number of resources and social activities that can encourage and support people living with a mental health condition and their families, providing additional benefits through community connections.

## **A Sense of Understanding**

For some, the most important aspect of religion is that it offers ways to understand our experiences. The major world religions each offer explanations of why suffering exists in the world. Turning to these explanations brings comfort to many people confronting illness. The "why me?" question can never be answered entirely by medical science, and some people find the answers they seek in religion.

## **Helping Others**

Research suggests that we experience direct health benefits when we volunteer to help others. Religious organizations may provide us with straightforward, simple opportunities to serve the community, thus improving our mood and reducing our anxiety levels.

## **It Speaks to Your Needs**

If you don't feel comfortable with organized religion, you can still access the benefits of relaxation and find meaning in your experiences. Think of places, people and experiences that give you feelings of peace, awe or greater meaning.

## **A Note on Faith Communities**

When approaching faith communities, be alert to how each congregation or community approaches mental health conditions. Some churches view mental health conditions as a moral failing for which prayer is the only treatment while others maintain active outreach programs for people with mental health conditions. Above all, find a community where you feel welcomed and loved regardless of your mental health condition.

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

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