**Together for Mental Health**

Without question, mental health issues are on the rise and one of the biggest challenges to modern day health. In the latest analyses of Global Burden of Disease data, we see that cases of mental disorders increased dramatically due to COVID-19, in part fuelled by the anxiety brought on by the spread of the virus, lockdowns, stay-at-home laws, school and business closures and not being able to interact with others socially.

After the last ±3 years of pandemic panic and pivot, it’s no wonder that we’re all experiencing heightened emotional reactions and responses to the challenges of life – and no wonder, too, that mental health issues have increased so significantly.

That said, even prior to the pandemic mental health issues were a big cause for concern among healthcare professionals. In 2019, for example, two of the most common types of mental health disorders ranked on the list of leading causes of disability: depression (ranked 2nd) and anxiety (ranked 8th).

As someone passionate about behavioral change and encouraging positive lifestyle choices, it comes as no surprise to me when I see the strong link between physical and mental health. Just as we need to exercise and eat well for better bodily health, we get similar benefits for our mind. The mind/body integration also extends to good quality (and quantity!) sleep. When we get a good night’s rest, our body can restore and repair – and our mind to refine and regulate.

**Dealing with stress and anxiety**

When I think about my own life, I know that exercise is my mind’s greatest ally. After a long day at work or some type of challenging life moment, going for a cycle or joining a spinning class is a sure-fire way for me to prevent negative emotions building up and calm my mind. In fact, I maintain that some of my best business ideas have presented themselves during my workouts. This makes sense, as research shows that boosting your heart rate through physical activity helps to clear the mind and increase cognitive ability – offering an opportunity to process information and problem solve better than before.

Ask other people in my life and they’ll tell you that more reflective methods help them to deal with life’s stresses: breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, even journaling.

What we need to see more of is education on mental health disorders paired with easy, affordable interventions to help people better manage mental health.

**Healthy + happy**

At Vitality, our priority has always been to help our members live their healthiest, happiest and most rewarding lives. Our wellbeing program – now impacting 27 million people across 37 markets – has been designed with holistic health in mind.

As part of ongoing work to integrate mental health initiatives into our Vitality program, we have identified priority pillars to help our members navigate poor mental health. We are building interventions across the pillars of nutrition, physical activity, sleep, mindfulness and financial wellness to provide trusted guidance here through assessments and self-diagnosis tools.

We know that “checking in” on mental health sometimes feels difficult or inaccessible, and this is one of the challenges we’re addressing as part of new product design in our space.

I’m particularly proud of the role that Vitality continues to play in in de-stigmatizing the topic of mental health. Knowing that so many people share similar mental health challenges means we can talk more openly about these concerns and access the right health resources, earlier.

**An empowering approach to mental health management**

Vitality is making a serious commitment to addressing the rising mental health crisis. Helping people become mentally healthier and stronger is fundamental to the Vitality business with the realization that more needs to be done to make mental health care a reality for more people worldwide.

To support global efforts this month, we are focusing on health promotion behaviors to enhance mental wellbeing. We will be highlighting topics related to stress management, mindfulness and meditation, restorative sleep, financial wellbeing, the influence of technology on mental health and dealing with issues related to work/life balance and burnout. As part of the campaign, Vitality members around the world will have access to interactive mental health resources, ‘check in’ moments and health advice from our global experts.