



# EXTENSION IMPACT

## Supporting Mental Health in Wisconsin

**W**isconsin residents report an average of 3.8 poor mental health days in a month, yet many people do not have proper tools or skills to effectively reduce or manage the daily stress they experience. In 2020, the isolation of pandemic restrictions and concerns about physical health and safety increased stress and mental health concerns.

In response, Extension adapted its existing “Taking Care of You” program for online delivery. “Highlights of Taking Care of You” is a research-based program that offers practical strategies and experiences to help people deal with the stress in their lives. In developing the virtual program, Extension also incorporated current research on topics such as stress and toxic stress.

The curriculum includes information on aspects of wellness including physical, mental, social, and spiritual health as well as practices such as mindful breathing and meditation. Multiple series of the virtual series were offered to 899 total training contacts in Wisconsin. The target audience for this program was any adult who wanted to learn more about stress and its effect on their health as well as coping strategies for dealing with stress in their daily lives. Outreach efforts were focused on groups identified as having high levels of stress, especially due to the pandemic: caregivers (74 participants), childcare providers (24 participants), librarians (136 participants) and healthcare providers/nursing students (356).

One key outcome of the virtual program is an increase of self-awareness and range of emotions. In post-workshop evaluations, participants reported improvements in awareness of how stress affects their body, thoughts, and behaviors. In addition, there was a significant improvement in the awareness that caring for oneself can improve overall health, with 95% of participants reporting they are using the stress management skills learned in our program a few times a week or more. Further, 20% reported using the skills several times a day.

*Extension’s “Taking Care of You” program leads to better sleep and overall health, reduced muscle tension, improved relationships and greater physical and emotional resilience.*

Through Extension’s “Highlights of Taking Care of You” program, participants gained an increased awareness of how stress influences their body, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, and learned healthy strategies and skills to manage their stress and deal with life’s challenges. The effects of practicing the skills learned include better sleep and overall health, less muscle tension, improved relationships, and greater physical and emotional resilience.

in 2020



**850+**

online training contacts



**95%**

of participants implement  
tools & strategies  
they learned



“Highlights of Taking Care of You” is part of Extension’s Health & Well-Being Institute.

Learn more by visiting  
[extension.wisc.edu/health](https://extension.wisc.edu/health).



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