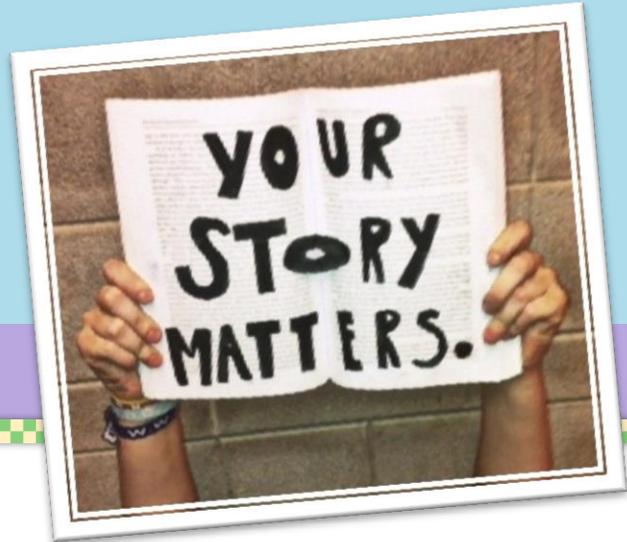




A newsletter about the *My Health, My Choice, My Life* initiative across the State of Tennessee.

# Tomorrow Starts Today



September 2015

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Learn how to make "ice cream" with only ONE ingredient on page 5!

## It's Time to Share

By Lindsey Johnson, Peer Wellness Coach

According to Lissa Rankin, M.D., "Telling your story may be the most powerful medicine on earth." She writes that each of us has a unique story that is continually unfolding. No one will ever have the exact same story, yet so often we keep our stories hidden because of fear. We can feel unworthy and unloved, and we become afraid of judgment.

While we often hear of the peace of mind that telling our story can bring, what often goes unaddressed is how telling your story affects your physical health.

According to Rankin, telling your story to someone who cares will actually turn off your body's stress responses by shutting down toxic stress hormones like cortisol. Relaxation responses take over, releasing healing hormones like oxytocin and dopamine. By doing this, we are allowing the body to self-repair and release the body's natural "preventative medicine." Our nervous system is relaxed, and our minds begin healing from anxiety, depression, and disconnection.

For so long, I was afraid of sharing my story for several of the reasons listed above. I was afraid of judgment, and I thought that no one could truly love me for who I am. Depression kept me so fixated on what I was not that I couldn't find value in who I was.

Not only did I learn strategies to overcome those thoughts, but I also found healing in sharing my story. What I believed about being unlovable was shattered by the responses of those around me.

Today, I still find refuge in being able to share my story because it promotes healing in myself and in others.

*Rankin, L. (n.d.). The Healing Power of Telling Your Story. Retrieved August 17, 2015.*

# 7 Ways Meditation Can Actually Change Your Brain

## By Mark Bresee, Peer Wellness Coach



Some consider meditation a laid back, do-very-little kind of activity. Turns out, that is a completely misguided belief. During meditation, our biceps will not get much of a workout, but our brain will experience significant, even measurable change. Following are some of the benefits meditation brings to our brain.

### 1. Meditation helps keep the aging brain healthy.

A study from UCLA showed that people who have meditated for 20 years have more gray matter. Just in case anyone is unsure, that is a good thing.

### 2. Meditation can decrease activity in the “Me-Center” of the brain.

When our brains are not focused on anything in particular, wondering aimlessly from thought to thought, usually attaching to anxiety about something from the past or future, that is considered the Me-Center. A study from Yale University indicates meditation strengthens our ability to stay out of that mindless, focused-on-me zone.

### 3. Meditation functions much like an anti-depressant.

Scientists from Johns Hopkins found that meditation can do as much as an anti-depressant medication to improve a person’s mood.

### 4. Meditation can help increase the size of our brain.

Research out of Harvard indicates that mindfulness meditation can actually help change the structure of the brain. The results of mindful meditation training can be seen long after the training and helps improve our mood and capacity to think.

### 5. Meditation increases our ability to concentrate.

A recent study showed that even a few of weeks of

meditation training helped improve the scores of people taking the verbal reasoning portion of the Graduate Record Examination by increasing their ability to remember and concentrate.

### 6. Meditation decreases anxiety, including social anxiety.

Mindfulness meditation has been shown to decrease physical and emotional stress as well as social anxiety. Two months of training can produce results even years later.

### 7. Meditation can help with addiction.

Mindfulness strengthens the self-control regions of the brain. When meditation is included in conventional methods for reducing tobacco usage, it increases the number of people who succeed significantly.

Meditation can be as simple as slowing down to focus our attention on our breathing. Mindfulness also includes focusing our attention on a word, a picture, or a thought—something pleasant. When we fill our brain with simple, non-stressful thoughts, there is not room for stress, fear, anxiety, doubt, depression and a host of other possible downers.

This list of seven brain benefits of meditation is not intended to be exhaustive. But it will likely be enough to move many of us from thinking about meditation, to actually doing it.

*\*This article is a summary of a piece by Alice Walton in Forbes magazine which can be found at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/alicewalton/2015/02/09/7-ways-meditation-can-actually-change-the-brain/>*

# Sometimes, Being a Quitter Is a Good Thing

By Leanne Crawford, Peer Wellness Coach

In early April, I received a referral from Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) Hannah Carroll regarding a patient named Chris who wanted to quit smoking and had an interest in attending my Tobacco Free Workshop. I contacted him, scheduled his pre-assessment, and he began the six-week program on April 10<sup>th</sup>.

When I first met Chris he was taking Chantix, a tobacco cessation medication, and was having some unwanted side effects. I immediately arranged for him to see FNP Carroll and she discontinued the Chantix. Chris began using Nicotine Transdermal Patches and attended all six sessions of the Tobacco Free workshop. He continued using the patches as prescribed until he no longer needed them. This is his success story (reprinted with permission).

05/29/15

My name is Chris Collins and I have attended the Tobacco Free Program provided by Cherokee Health Systems in the Morristown, TN area. The six week sessions was the inspiration that I needed to stop my thirty six year addiction to cigarettes. I stopped smoking on April the 18<sup>th</sup> and have not touched another cigarette since then. By taking the sessions and with the help of my doctor made kicking the habit a lot easier than I thought. I feel great now and can breath so much better. I can enjoy a lot more physical activities now especially riding my mountain bike which I love to do. By choosing not to smoke has helped my self esteem and self worth tremendously.

I would just like to let CHS and Leanne Crawford know how much I appreciate what they have done for me. Thank all of you very much!

I would recommend these sessions to anyone who truly wants to quit smoking.

Chris Collins - Non-Smoker 😊

## A Message of Hope

### By James Pincham, Peer Wellness Coach

Sandra P. has been going to Ridgeview for several years and has struggled mostly with depression. Today, though, she is most thankful to Ridgeview and the *My Health, My Choice, My Life* initiative for her newfound hope in a brighter tomorrow.

While taking a Chronic Disease Self-Management workshop, Sandra decided to reconnect with her sister. The two were separated when they were small children and their parents divorced. Sandra didn't hear from her sister for years or know where she lived or whether she was alive. She told other workshop participants about her heartache and depression and how much she wanted to reconnect with her sister. With encouragement from her classmates and staff, Sandra made the decision to find her.

Two weeks after finding her sister's address, she decided to write her a letter and included her own phone number. Her sister almost immediately responded with a phone call, and about a month later they spent two weeks together.

Sandra says this has now been one of the happiest years of her life. She and her sister talk on the phone almost every day now.

Finding her sister has also motivated Sandra professionally. After working with a wellness coach, she decided to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS). This has involved attending training for certification, completing an application, and teaching classes. Sandra recently received her official CPRS certification in the mail, and she said that she owes a special thank you to her CDSMP classmates and Ridgeview staff "for all of encouragement that they have so unselfishly given her."

**Meet our  
newest  
coach,  
Jessica  
Collins!**



Hello! I'm Jessica Collins and I'm very excited to be a Peer Wellness Coach. I come from a background where mental illness was talked about a lot due to multiple family members living with someone with mental illness, so it was never stigmatized. My family encouraged me and my siblings to talk about mental health and explore who we were while we were growing up.

I became a mental health consumer in 2006 and what a road it has been! I am excited to share my story with others with the hope that it will empower someone who is experiencing similar problems to be strong and make healthy decisions.

I currently hold a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Tennessee and recently received an associate's degree in general science from Roane State. I am currently enrolled at the University of Alabama in an online food and nutrition program on the path to receiving a second bachelor's degree. This curriculum is an amazing path since I am interested in being and/or becoming a healthier individual and coaching others in making healthy lifestyle choices.

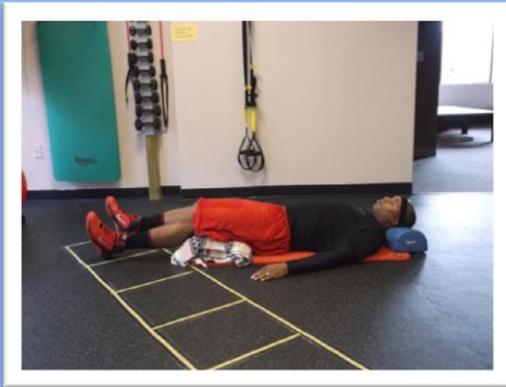
I am an animal lover who also loves to travel. I have four cats, a dog, and a rabbit. My animals are my therapy and it never fails that they comfort me if I feel the path is dark. I like to consider myself a world traveler. Since 2007, I have visited 11 European countries and Mexico. I feel travel broadens the mind and opens you up to understanding other people and cultures.

I look forward to working with everyone on the *My Health, My Choice, My Life* team and serving clients as a Peer Wellness Coach.

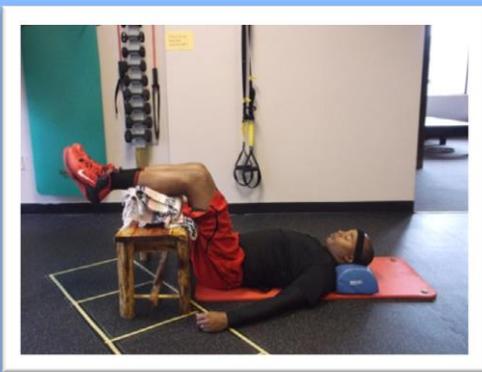
# Donald's Move of the Month

Lower back aches are a common complaint among adults who sit at a desk for the majority of the day. If you have experienced back aches, here are a couple of remedies you can try to help relieve the symptoms.

- Lie down on the floor with pillows under your knees.



- If that doesn't help, bring your knees up even higher with more pillows, or you can even use a chair. Getting your knees above your chest can relieve the pressure in your lower back.



- A heating pad can work wonders on back spasms. Use it for 20-30 minutes. Ice is recommended especially if the area feels inflamed.
- A massage will bring blood to your muscles and release tension.
- For those who experience chronic back pain, incorporate stretching exercises into your daily routine. These can range from yoga, mat Pilates or physical therapy. Strengthen the core (abs and low back muscles) because these muscles help support the spine.
- Carrying extra weight will put a strain on the spine which can cause pain and lead to a future injury. Keep your weight under control.



## “Ice Cream” made with only bananas? You've got to be kidding!

Yes, it's possible. Here's how to make it!

Ingredients:  
3 ripe bananas

Instructions:

1. Peel and slice three bananas.
2. Freeze sliced bananas in a freezer-proof container.
3. Once frozen, put bananas into a food processor, and process until creamy!

## Katie Lee, Former Manager of *My Health, My Choice, My Life*, Reflects on Her Role

By Katie Lee, IPS Trainer, Park Center



For three and a half years, I was a Program Manager at the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services working with *My Health, My Choice, My Life*. During these three and a half years, I had the privilege of working with the nine Peer Wellness Coaches across the state, visiting nearly every Peer Support Center, and partnering with CPRS's, mental health practitioners, agencies, and community advocates to promote health and wellness.

I had the opportunity to meet so many people through trainings, workshops, and wellness events. By far, the Championship Games for *My Health, My Choice, My Life* were my favorite. I loved seeing people dance, break boards with karate chops, and cheer for each other during tug of war.

I am proud to have been part of an initiative promoting health and wellness working with people who have mental illness and/or substance use, and even prouder that this initiative consistently achieves statistically significant outcomes in impacting individuals' physical health behaviors and recovery.

This past March, I transitioned from *My Health, My Choice, My Life* to my new journey as the IPS (Individualized Placement and Support) Trainer through Park Center in Nashville. IPS supported employment is an evidence-based practice that helps people with mental illness work in regular jobs related to their work preferences. It was a difficult decision but is a wonderful opportunity to promote occupational wellness and recovery through employment in our state.

Working with *My Health, My Choice, My Life* has been the most exciting, most fun, and most challenging experience of my professional life. I am incredibly grateful for the time and memories, and I look forward to seeing how *My Health, My Choice, My Life* will continue to impact our great state!

## Hope Abounds in the DSMP at Freedom Peer Support Center By Constandina Savvenas

I am leading my very first Diabetes Self-Management Program (DSMP) at Freedom Peer Support Center in Greeneville and so far I have learned to simply meet clients exactly where they are. This means finding out what their current habits are and helping them take baby steps (of their choice) toward increasing healthy behaviors and reducing risks associated with diabetes.

Our DSMP handbook, *Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), explains that high blood sugar over time can cause serious complications, such as "loss of consciousness, damage to blood vessels and nerves, heart disease and stroke, kidney damage, loss of vision, pain and loss of feeling in the feet, and slow healing of infections and wounds" (p. 288).

One of our workshop participants asked if there is anything that could be done to stop diabetes. We were all excited to learn that, fortunately, "you can greatly reduce or delay [such complications] through healthy eating, exercise, weight control, controlling blood pressure and cholesterol, taking certain medications, and not smoking," and that "some of the risks for diabetes, such as having a brother, sister, or parent with diabetes, cannot be changed. But most of the risks can be reduced by healthy eating, regular exercise and weight control. Sometimes just losing 5 or 10 pounds can stop or slow the development of diabetes" (pp. 288 – 289).

After learning this, several of our members were inspired to create an action plan choosing no seconds or thirds at dinner time 3-4 days per week. Others are choosing to exercise more or drink more water on most days. We are having so much fun making and sharing low-glycemic, delicious, healthy, low fat smoothies, and we are learning to increase our physical activity slowly by doing beginner chair aerobics during the break times in our workshop.

Remember, every little bit counts! Here's to your health...



# Important Facts about Suicide: Suicide Prevention Week is September 7-13

## By Allison Harwell, Peer Wellness Coach

Suicide and suicidal thoughts affect millions of people across the nation every day, yet it is a subject we simply don't discuss much in our day-to-day lives. The reality of suicide is alarming. Someone commits suicide every 16.2 minutes, and approximately 30,000 Americans complete suicide every year. To prevent suicide it is important to become informed about the facts, warning signs, and risk factors related to it. According to the 2013 USA Suicide Report, suicide actually accounted for 41,149 deaths in 2013.

### Who is at risk of suicide?

Men are more likely to complete suicide, but women are more likely to attempt it. Men comprise 79 percent of all suicides. White males over the age of 85 have a suicide rate of 49.8 deaths per 100,000 (Peeples, n.d.). Those who are between the ages of 45 and 64 years old are more likely to commit suicide compared to teens. Although teens and young adults do not have the highest suicide rate, they still are considered a high-risk group (Peeples, n.d.). Suicide is the third leading cause of death among ages 15 to 24 (Do Something, n.d.). Alarmingly, one in five high school students say they have considered suicide in the past year, and one in 12 attempts to take their own life. (Peeples, n.d.).

### What are the warning signs of suicide?

About two-thirds of people who complete suicide experienced depression (Do Something, n.d.). "Depression is more common than AIDS, cancer, and diabetes combined, and nearly 400,000 people *attempt* suicide in the U.S. every year" (Peeples, n.d.). Depression is just one warning sign. According to the American Association of Suicidology (2015), you can remember the warning signs of suicide by "IS PATH WARM".

- I – Ideation
- S – Substance Abuse
  
- P – Purposelessness
- A – Anxiety
- T – Trapped
- H – Hopelessness
  
- W – Withdrawal
- A – Anger
- R – Recklessness
- M – Mood changes

### How to get help?

Sources from The American Association of Suicidology website include:  
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>.

### **In Tennessee, you can call the statewide Crisis Phone Line: 855-CRISIS-1 (855-274-7471)**

Chattanooga: Volunteer Crisis Services, Volunteer Behavioral Health: 1 (877) 561-6051 or 1 (800) 704-2651

Jackson: Crisis Services- Pathways: (731) 541 – 8200

Johnson City: Frontier Health Mobile Crisis Response/Watauga Behavioral Health Services: (877) 928-9062

Memphis Crisis Center: 1-(901)-274-7477

Nashville Area: Family and Children's Services: (615) 244-7444, (800) 784-2433, or (615) 320-0591 or Centerstone Crisis Care Services: (800) 681-7444 or (615) 460-4486

Becoming educated and informed about suicide can empower self and others to prevent suicide. National Suicide Prevention Week is September 7 – 13, 2015. This is a great time to take action and advocate for suicide awareness.

Where did she get this information? See the last page of the newsletter for references!

# Wellness Coaching Helps Prepare Woman to Leave Group Home

By Julie Fann, Peer Wellness Coach

When I first met Connie H. two years ago, she constantly struggled not only with symptoms of mental illness but also with Type II diabetes and other physical health problems. Her blood sugar often climbed into the 500's and 600's, and at one point she had to seek treatment in the hospital.

But attending Chronic Disease and Diabetes Self-Management workshops, and recently participating in eight weeks of one-on-one wellness coaching, combined with additional support has made a big difference. Connie's blood sugar and her mental illness are now under control. Soon, she will be able to live independently.

"I've learned a lot about how to control my blood sugar by watching what I eat and how much I eat," she said. "This is important so that I can live on my own." Connie, who is 59, has been pursuing her goal of living in her own apartment for the past several months while she's become stronger and healthier.

To help manage her diet, she has been using measuring cups that I provided to her that are made specifically for people with diabetes. We also created a poster of a diabetes healthy eating plate together, using pictures from magazines, so that she now knows what foods are considered carbohydrates, protein, fruits and grain. We also practiced reading food labels.

A resident of a group home in Johnson City for a total of six years (one stint of four years and a recent stay of two years), Connie has come a long way from eating Reese's cups and drinking soda during the day. She only drinks water now, has ditched the candy, and is eating dried fruit, salads, and no fried foods at all. During our work together, she has managed to lower her blood sugar into the 100's. She has also started walking at least three times a week and has learned how to manage her own medications by creating a medication list.

Connie has lost eight pounds in eight weeks and hopes to achieve her goal of losing 60 more. "I love to walk and I plan to continue that once I leave here. I know that I'll need to work hard to stay well." Hopefully, Connie will be living in her own apartment within the next two months.

A native of Washington, D.C., Connie's story is a painful one that includes physical and sexual abuse by family members until she entered elementary school. Abandoned as a child, she spent most of her formative years in foster homes. Other biological family members have also taken advantage of her financially in the past.

"I have overcome a lot and learned to put the past behind me, which hasn't been easy. Living here in the group home has been the best place for me to get well. Leisa Wells, the director here, has helped me so much and I appreciate all that she's done. And I'm thankful for Julie, my wellness coach. I look forward to living in my own space and having my own life again."

As a wellness coach, it is so encouraging to me when I see people heal and grow from what they learn and from the assistance I provide them. It increases my belief that all of us can live happier, healthier lives if we educate ourselves, work hard, seek support, and never give up.



# Cancer Screenings and Prevention

By Dr. Febe Wallace and Stella Melton, Cherokee Health Systems

Cancer is a worrisome diagnosis and one we hear about all too often. Cancer refers to conditions in which the body's cells start dividing in an unhealthy way and these abnormal cells then invade and harm surrounding tissue. There are many types of cancer, and cancers can occur in any organ or tissue in the body.

One piece of good news is that we now have many effective and promising treatments for many types of cancer. Also, we now know that we can engage in good self-management habits to prevent the development of cancer, and we can get screenings that find it early when it is easier to treat and manage.

Preventing the development of cancer includes many of the same healthy life choices that help us avoid many other physical and emotional health problems. These good habits include healthy eating (low fat, high fiber, and LOTS of fruits and veggies), maintaining a healthy weight, staying physically active, avoiding tobacco and alcohol, and protecting your skin when you are in the sunlight.

Cancer is more treatable when it is found early, before it spreads beyond its original site. There are many screenings available, and your primary care doctor can discuss your cancer risk factors with you and help you decide which screenings are indicated for your particular age, gender, and situation. Types of screenings tests can include colonoscopy, fecal occult blood testing, PAP smears, mammograms, PSA or manual exam for prostate, and several other types of blood tests. Another type of screening occurs when your doctor physically examines you and asks questions about your health; this can allow him or her to notice subtle signs that something needs further evaluation.

It's easy to procrastinate about getting and keeping a doctor's appointment, especially if you are fearful that you will learn something serious is wrong. But that old saying is true, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." If you are overdue for a checkup, go ahead and make the appointment and follow through. If nothing is wrong, you'll get a feeling of relief. If there is a problem, early detection will give you the best opportunity to restore your health.



***October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Please take time to learn about this cancer, and let's all celebrate those who fight to overcome it!***

*Febe Wallace, MD, is the Director of Primary Care Services at Cherokee Health Systems. Stella Melton, LPN, BA, CPRP, is a nurse who coordinates Cherokee's Psychosocial Day Programs.*

# Making Healthier Choices

## By Donald Williams, Peer Wellness Coach

Pam H. attended a Chronic Disease Self-Management (CDSMP) workshop at the Mental Health Cooperative in Nashville (Metro Center location) during the spring while also participating in wellness coaching and a Tobacco Free workshop. During this time, I witnessed a lot of growth in Pam.

Pam was always looking forward to groups each week and enjoyed the companionship of the other participants. I realized how motivated she was to participate in the programs when I saw she was always the first person to arrive at the clinic.

This pattern of arriving early continued into our coaching sessions. She also did a great job using her self-management skills when she communicated with me. One morning, before a CDSMP session, she said she didn't feel well and would not be attending. This seemed to me to be a sign that she was actually beginning to take seriously what she learned.

Pam credits the program with helping her become more aware of many aspects of her life. The healthy eating lessons really helped. She has been increasing her fruit and vegetable intake. She is now also more mindful of how much she's eating.

Pam reads food labels now, chooses lower sodium options, and tries to avoid processed foods as much as possible. By reading food labels she has become aware of true serving sizes.

She's even growing a few vegetables in a small garden now – something she's never done before.

Warmer weather has also allowed her to become more physically active. She now participates in a walking group at Park Center. Intentional walking has also inspired her to reduce her smoking.

During the Nashville Championship Games she was so busy that she didn't even think about smoking. She said before the CDSMP workshop she was smoking a pack-and-a-half a day. Now, she only smokes five cigarettes a day.

Pam wants to be able to share her own story without getting emotional. She feels that one-on-one peer wellness coaching has helped her, even more than other professional help, to be more comfortable when she communicates.

Pam is moving to Jacksonville, Florida, soon and says that she will use the skills she learned from the *My, Health, My Choice, My Life* programs. She feels that her participation in the workshops has given her more confidence to be successful.



## Remember Allison's Article? September 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> is Suicide Prevention Week. Find the Warning Signs of Suicide...

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### Word Bank

|              |                 |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Anger        | Anxiety         |
| Hopelessness | Ideation        |
| Mood Changes | Purposelessness |
| Recklessness | Substance Abuse |
| Trapped      | Withdrawal      |

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