

ple get better through talk therapy, medication or a combination of the two. We know that like any medical illness, the quicker you get treatment, the sooner you get better, the less suffering you have. The more chronic, the harder it is to treat.”

To mitigate the chances of depression, Dr. Owens offers tips for well-being throughout the year:

First, be realistic about New Year’s resolutions. “Readjust expectations. Having goals is great because they are very focusing for people. However, an unrealistic goal, for many self-reflective people, causes self-condemnation. Readjust expectations.”

Secondly, get help when you need it. “Seek support from your loved ones and family. Talk to people. If you need more assistance or don’t have a family that can be there for you, get professional help.”

Third, build in positive experiences in your day, week and month. “There is a lot of research showing that Americans are incredibly stressed. To build in resiliency, we need to be intentional about putting enjoyable activities into our days.” The goal of these is not to make us happy, she explains, but to build in positive experiences to help us manage ourselves better. “There is no goal to get happy. Happy is a transient state. It’s a good result.”

Fourth, leverage your resources. “Eat healthy. Move your body. Get outdoors. Notice the seasons. Use your personal leave from work. Don’t put in a lot of overtime if you are not feeling well. Get some daylight. Use meditation and mindfulness, such as breathing, prayer, yoga, gratitude practices. These have been shown to help improve mood.”

These are actions with positive effects that improve mood as well as maintain a sense of well-being. “These behaviors help with prevention of depression and are used during recovery.”

Dr. Owens doesn’t make New Year’s resolutions because of the expectations they create. “I always have self-growth goals. Learning new things is always important to me.” Instead of making resolutions, she uses the New Year for reflection. “I contemplate what my values are, how I’m spending my time and energy and to work toward spending as much time as I can on things I feel are fulfilling.”

Turning 50 this year, she created a bucket list of things she would enjoy doing. “They are all things within a three-hour drive or easily done in the Williamsburg or Hampton Roads area. I’m working through my list. Every time I see something cool, it goes on my list. I enjoy travelling, but I also enjoy going in-depth locally.”

She and her husband, Lewis, moved to Williamsburg over 27 years ago. “Lewis works in Hampton at NASA Langley Research Center. When we married, we decided to live halfway between Hampton and Richmond. We moved here and loved it. We’ve stayed put.”

The outdoor environment is an important part of Dr. Owens’ own collection of healthy resources. “I love the number of parks, trails and waterways that can be enjoyed through hiking, kayaking and fishing. Being in nature is very important to me, and every day, I make space to spend time outdoors. It is one of several things I do to take care of myself.”

Recently transitioning to her own practice, Dr. Susanna Owens spent 13 years working at the College of William and Mary Counseling Center. “I enjoyed working with the students in that environment. Part of my career goal was to have a private practice. It was time to stretch my wings in that way.” The bright beginnings of a new year and new career have her excited for the possibilities. NDN