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Hamilton doctors, continued from Pg. 7

was on enjoying a rodeo scholarship in breakaway roping and earning a degree in business.

But college taught her something else: She had a knack for helping others.

"I'm a good listener so I was the type of friend everyone turned to for advice," Kayelen told Beneath the Surface News. "When I was in college, everyone called me 'mom.'"

Kayelen took a class in psychology during her freshman year, and not long after, began paving the way for a different, unexpected career as a counselor.

"When I took Psychology 101, I fell in love with it," she said.

Kayelen went on to earn a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Master of Education in Counseling from Tarleton and today she is a licensed professional counselor with Hamilton Healthcare System.

Kayelen still lives in Stephenville, but has offices in Hamilton and Goldthwaite.

She works primarily with children and teenagers, helping them navigate through troubled home lives and through angst-filled high school years.

"Most of my clients are under 18 years old," she said. "I see a lot of stressors like social media and the desire to fit in among teens. Many of the kids I see are in CPS or foster care."

Kayelen works with many of her youngest children in a room filled with toys and sensory devices that make them feel safe.

"I use play therapy techniques to help them deal with issues like anxiety, depression, trauma and stress," she said. "It's fulfilling to give them a safe place to talk and feel comfortable."

Kayelen said she helps teens work on coping skills and teaches them how to build healthy support systems.

"A lot of the teenagers use me as their support system; they confide in me," she said. "I tell them that we can't predict the future and we can't change the past, so we have to focus on today and tomorrow."

Kayelen said her job is incredibly fulfilling, but can also be difficult.

"I have some really good days and some really hard days," she said. "They say to leave work at the office, but I can't always do that."

Nor can she shut off communication with her clients after hours or on weekends.

"I always stay connected to them," she said.

Kayelen also offers couples and family counseling.

To schedule an appointment, call Hamilton Healthcare System's Solutions Behavioral Health clinic at 254-386-1800.



3 strategies to protect mental health

Improving one's overall health and maintaining that health over the long haul can have a profound impact on quality of life.

For example, the Harvard Medical School notes that regular exercise can slow the natural decline in physical performance that occurs as people age. That means routine exercise can serve as something like a fountain of youth that allows people to keep their cardiovascular fitness, metabolism and muscle function on par with their younger counterparts.

When attempting to improve long-term health, it's important that people emphasize mental health as much as they do their physical health. The Anxiety & Depression Association of America notes the importance and effectiveness of preventive efforts in relation to depression and anxiety. In regard to mental health, prevention efforts can function in much the same way that exercise serves physical health. Routine exercise helps people to maintain healthy weights, reducing their risk for various conditions and diseases. Preventive

efforts designed to improve mental health can significantly reduce a person's risk for anxiety and depression.

Various techniques and strategies can be utilized to promote mental health, and these three are simple and highly effective.

1. Get enough sleep

According to the Primary Care Collaborative, a not-for-profit member organization dedicated to advancing an effective and efficient health system, sleep and mental health are intimately related. Sleep loss can contribute to emotional instability. The amygdala is the part of the brain responsible for humans' emotional responses. When an individual does not get enough sleep, his or her amygdala goes into overdrive, leading to more intense emotional reactions. The prefrontal cortex is

another part of the brain that needs sufficient sleep to function properly. Without it, the prefrontal cortex, which is integral to impulse control, cannot function properly. Adults can speak with their physicians about how much sleep they should be getting each night. Those needs change as individuals age.

2. Eat a balanced diet

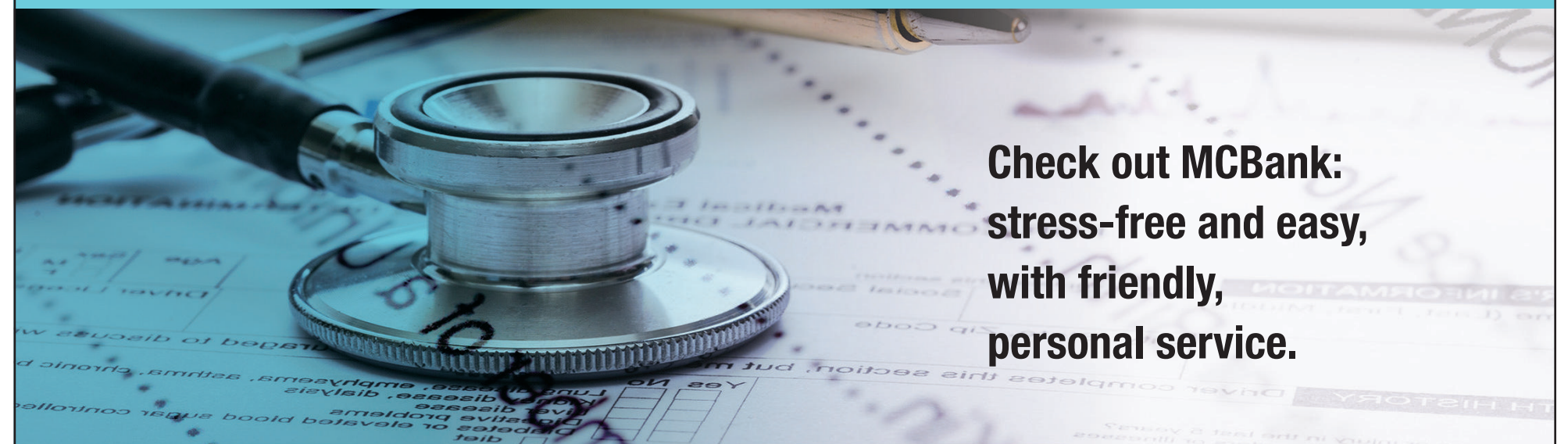
A balanced, healthy diet doesn't just benefit the waistline. According to the ADA, a balanced diet that includes protein, healthy non-saturated fats, fiber, and some simple carbohydrates can reduce the likelihood that mental health issues like fatigue, difficulty concentrating and irritability will arise during the day.

3. Volunteer in your community

A 2020 study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies found that people who volunteered in the past were more satisfied with their lives and rated their overall health as much better than people who didn't volunteer. Perhaps the most noteworthy finding in the study was that people who began volunteering with lower levels of well-being tended to get the biggest boost from volunteering. Volunteering provides opportunities to socialize, which can help ward off the loneliness that can sometimes contribute to anxiety and depression.

Mental health is important, and protecting it should be part of everyone's health care regimen.

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