

Affiliate Newsletter

February 2019

Family Support Groups

UMass Memorial Health
Alliance Leominster
Hospital
60 Hospital Road,
Leominster
7:00-8:30 p.m.
1st and 3rd Thursdays
Contact Paul
978-514-2942

Clinton Hospital, 2nd Floor
Conference Rooms A & B
6:30-8:30 p.m.
2nd and 4th Fridays
Contact Edie
978-345-2214

Connection Recovery Support Groups

UMass Memorial Health
Alliance Leominster
Hospital
60 Hospital Road,
Leominster
7:00-8:30 p.m.
Every Thursday
Contact Maryann
978-874-5602

Heywood Hospital
242 Green St., Gardner
Dining Room, Conference
Room B (inside Cafeteria)
7:00-8:30 p.m.
Every Tuesday
Contact Cortney
508-331-2921

Hi Everyone,

We have some amazing things happening in North Central Massachusetts! There is a NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group Facilitator training being held on February 23 and 24 in Lunenburg – you must pre-register. The flyer is attached! There is a Family to Family course being held in April – this is a 12 week course for family and friends of those with mental illness. We are also working on a pizza/game/get together in March – more info to come! There is also, our largest fundraiser, the NAMI Walk in May. For information on the trainings and events please go to our website – naminorthcentralma.org.

Cathy

How Exercise Has Helped My PTSD Recovery

By [KYLI RODRIGUEZ-CAYRO](#)

People exercise for many reasons, and one of the major ones is for its mood-boosting benefits. But as someone who lives with co-occurring mental illnesses, I was skeptical as to whether these benefits would actually work for me. However, as I read more and more research about the therapeutic benefits of working out, I decided to give exercising on the regular a shot. Developing an exercise routine as a way to cope with my PTSD and eating disorder became a pivotal moment in my healing process — and dramatically changed my relationship with my body for the better.

There's a wide body of research that speaks to the positive impact exercise has on your mental health. Walking alone has been shown to release endorphins, lessen fatigue and symptoms of depression, improves your overall brain health, and even increases the production of BDNF — a protein that strengthens memory, as well as your ability to learn. These brain-boosting benefits go way beyond cardio and aerobic exercise: As Tonic reported this past December, studies have consistently found strength and resistance training (aka, lifting weights) may be even *more* effective when it comes to dealing with depression and other mental health issues.

Specifically, research has shown that exercise is an effective adjunct treatment that can reduce the severity of symptoms associated with PTSD. So much so, clinicians have developed practices such as trauma-informed yoga. What's more, a 2016 review published in the journal of *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* found that working out — in a

therapeutic and balanced way — actually improves eating disorder treatment outcomes for a majority of people.

I've lived PTSD for well over a decade (though I was officially diagnosed in my early twenties), and have experienced dissociation, depersonalization, and the other symptoms periodically throughout my life. In my early teen years, I developed bulimia as a way to deal with the sense of powerlessness that trauma caused and the lack of autonomy I had over my own body. As I moved through my mental health recovery years later, I began to develop an exercise routine as a way to replace the harmful coping skills that I had relied on for so long with a healthy outlet. Before bulimia, I always loved to be active and played various sports all year long. But during the height of my mental health issues as a teenager, activities I enjoyed quickly fell to the wayside. At times, exercise even became a way for me to “punish” myself during my eating disorder.

It had been so long since I had a healthy and compassionate relationship with my body, that beginning a new workout routine in my twenties was like starting from scratch. At first, just having to “be” in my body while exercising was an overwhelming experience — almost to the point of being unbearable. I'd dip early from workout classes, leave the gym after running for twenty minutes, and end up filled to the brim with panic. I'd think to myself, *If exercising is supposed to be so helpful, why do I feel so uncomfortable?*

I learned that this initial discomfort and anxiety I felt while working out was actually a very typical response that many people who've been through trauma and abuse face. “Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort,” trauma expert Dr. Bessel van der Kolk explained in his book *The Body Keeps The Score*. “Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves. [...] Trauma victims cannot recover until they become familiar with and befriend the sensations in their bodies.”

I kept going back to the gym, doing what I could, and not punishing myself for not staying as long as I'd planned to. In many ways, exercise started to help me bridge the gap between my mind and body that the years of trauma I experienced had created — and that my eating disorder perpetuated. I still felt uncomfortable, but each day I tried to incorporate exercise into my routine, it became easier. And right after my workouts, my mood would improve, while my anxieties and fears would dissipate.

I found that much like dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) and meditation, exercising requires mindfulness. It demands that I be present in that *very* moment, and quiets the intrusive thoughts that PTSD can cause. I don't have time to obsess and ruminate on my negative body image when working out because I'm too busy focusing on accomplishing the task at hand — whether that's resistance training, or pushing through the last five minutes of a 40-minute run. If I begin to dissociate or get stuck in the past when working out, I'm able to recenter myself much faster when I'm at the gym. More than anything, exercise has helped me relearn to respect and communicate with my body, and appreciate all that it does for me — despite the trauma it's experienced.

Sometimes, trauma makes me feel as though the air has been knocked out of my lungs — like I have no sense of foundation, my reality crumbles, and I can't trust myself or anyone else. On these days, exercise is one of my go-to coping skills for grounding myself. As difficult as it can be to haul myself out of bed, I

always try to take that first step for the sake of my mental health (not always successfully, I should add). I feel strong when my mind and my body feel connected, and work together — rather than against each other.

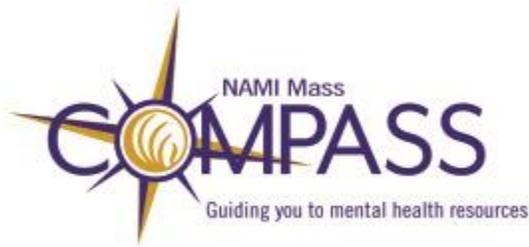
Don't get me wrong: I don't think exercise is the best coping skill for everyone, and it's not a cure for mental illness. However, many of the skills I have to utilize in the gym — like mindfulness, deep breathing, and recentering myself — are the same ones I use when I'm triggered and trying to cope anxiety, flashbacks, and eating disorder urges. There are some days I feel stronger and more prepared than others to cope with my PTSD and eating disorder; I know that my mental illnesses will always ebb and flow throughout my life. It may sound a little cheesy, but like learning to live with mental health disorders, exercising is all about perseverance, patience, and self-compassion — and it's become essential to my recovery process.

If you or someone you know has an eating disorder and needs help, call the National Eating Disorders Association helpline at 1-800-931-2237, text 741741, or chat online with a Helpline volunteer here.

Obtained on 2/7/19 from: <https://www.bustle.com/p/how-exercise-has-helped-my-ptsd-recovery-15832428>

Save the Dates

- February 23 and 24, 2019 – (Saturday and Sunday) – NAMI Connection Recovery Support Facilitator Training, Lunenburg – email Cathy for information and application c_e_s13@yahoo.com
- Family-to-Family, a FREE 12-session course, **starts April 9** - for family caregivers of individuals over 17 with mental illness. The course is free, but PREREGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. IN LEOMINSTER Tuesdays 6:30 – 9:00 PM April 9-June 25 Contact: Lynn Chenevert @ (774) 253-1120
- May 11, 2019 – NAMI Walk – Artesani Park, Brighton. – Please consider participating as a walker, cheerleader, or fundraiser! Register at: <http://www.namiwalks.org/massachusetts>
- ****Please check out our website – naminorthcentralma.org for the most up to date information and events!!



Navigating the mental healthcare system can be complicated—we help individuals and families affected by mental health issues find their way.

The NAMI Mass Compass is **operated by peers and family members** who have dealt with these issues first hand. Navigators are available to **answer a wide range of questions** and **refer to NAMI support & education programs and other community resources.**

Please call us at (617) 704-NAMI (6264) or toll free, (800) 370-9085 Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm or go to our webpage: <http://namimass.org/resources/compass>

Mental Health Referral Services

The **William James INTERFACE Referral Service** maintains a mental health and wellness referral Helpline **Monday through Friday, 9 am-5 pm, at 888-244-6843** (toll free). This is a free, confidential referral service for individuals across the lifespan living in participating communities.

Communities currently served are: Acton-Boxborough, Ayer-Shirley, Chelmsford, Cohasset, Concord, Carlisle, Dedham, Framingham, Groton, Dunstable, Leominster, Lincoln – Sudbury, Littleton, Marshfield, Medfield, Medway, Melrose, Middleborough, Natick, Needham, Newton, North Middlesex, Reading, Scituate, Wakefield, Waltham, Westford, Westwood.

If you live in one of these communities, and need access to mental health care, call 888-244-6843.

Centro

Established in 1977, CENTRO, formerly Centro Las Americas, is the largest minority led, community based, multiservice, multicultural, multilingual, nonprofit organization in Central Massachusetts. CENTRO's primary purpose is to assist individuals and families striving to reach self-sufficiency while promoting social responsibility, fostering cultural identity, and encouraging families to be significant contributors to the community as a whole.

Services provided include: Family Support Services, Adult Family Care, Latino Elder Program, Emergency Food Pantry, Children's Behavioral Health Services, and Children and Family Services.

For more information go to: www.centroinc.org or call 978-343-5836

Fitchburg office: 437 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA 01420

Families Anonymous

A 12-step Support group for families of someone with a substance addiction or someone with behavioral health issues. Meets at the Groton Senior Center, 163 West Main St. , Groton, weekly on Tuesday nights from 7-8:30. Contact Kathy 978-448-3402

Gardner Suicide Survivor Support Group

The Gardner Suicide Survivor Group meets the second Wednesday of each month from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at Heywood Hospital, 242 Green St., Gardner, MA. This is a peer support group open to anyone 16 or older who has lost someone to suicide. All are welcome to attend.

For more information, contact Peer Facilitator Brenda.Melanson@heywood.org.

Learn to Cope Support Group

Meets Tuesdays, 7 – 8:30 pm in the Kenneth & Doris Pierce Board Room (near Gift Shop & Pharmacy) at Heywood Hospital.

Learn to Cope is a support network for families dealing with addiction and recovery. They offer compassionate, experienced facilitators who have been there, support, resources, educational materials and guest speakers who are in long-term recovery or professionals in the field.

These meetings are confidential and open to all who have a loved one struggling with addiction.

For more information, contact the Learn to Cope office at (508) 738-5148 or visit the meetings tab at www.learn2cope.org.

Military Family Support Group

Meets the Wednesday of the month at 6pm in the Dining Room B at Heywood Hospital.

The Military Family Support Group offers a safe place for family members of both active and former military members to share their experiences, struggles and hope in overcoming the invisible wounds of war that affect the entire family unit.

Veterans and their loved ones can suffer from one or many of the following: survivor's guilt, separation anxiety, emotional numbing, adrenaline seeking, depression, anxiety, insomnia, alcohol and substance abuse, PTSD and traumatic brain injury. The group coaches and supports military family members to find healing, balance, and strategies for positive re-integration for military members with their family and society. We also connect families with local resources.

For more information, please contact Crystal Bean at (978) 320-9804.

MENders Support Groups

MENder's brings together guys facing similar issues including illness, anger, stress, substance abuse, relationship problems or major life changes. By using a whole host of techniques, participants can develop the skills to deal with stressors. Members of support groups often share experiences and advice.

Athol - Men's Support Group takes place the on the first and third Monday of each month from 7:30 – 9 pm in Athol Hospital's Hillis Board Room. For more information, please call (978) 846-8201.

Fitchburg- Men's Support Group takes place the on the second and fourth Thursday of each month from 7 - 9 pm at First Parish Church of Fitchburg (923 Main Street). For more information, please call (978) 846-8201.

Gardner - Men's Support Group takes place the on the first and third Wednesday of each month from 7 – 9 pm in Heywood Hospital's Community Education Conference Room. For more information, please call (978) 630-6455.

Leominster - Men's Support Group takes place the on the first and third Thursday of each month from 7 - 9 pm at St. Mark's House (62 West Street, Leominster)For more information, please call (978) 846-8201.

Important Telephone Numbers

NAMI Information Helpline	1 (800) 950-NAMI (6264)	
NAMI Massachusetts Information and Helpline	1-800-370-9085	
Veterans Crisis Line	1-800-273-8255	Confidential chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	1-800-273-TALK	Free, confidential 24-hr. emotional distress line
Mass Substance Abuse HELPLINE	1-800-327-5050	Free, confidential information and referrals
Samaritans of Massachusetts	1-877-870-HOPE	24 hour Crisis Intervention/Hotlines
Samaritans of Massachusetts	1-800-252-8336	Teen Line (statewide)
Samaritans of Massachusetts	1-617-247-0220	24 hour Helpline
Emergency Services Programs (ESP)	1-800-977-5555	In-person behavioral health crisis assessment. Note: After dialing this toll-free number, you will be prompted to enter your Zip Code and will then be given the local number to call
Alzheimer's Association	1-800-272-3900	For information and support. Free and confidential, 24 hours a day/7 days a week.
MAA Substance Abuse Information Hotline	1-800-327-5050	
The Partnership at Drugfree.org	1-855-378-4373 (DRUGFREE) - tollfree	assistance to families concerned about a teen's drug use or drinking. Trained specialists can help parents outline plans for prevention, intervention and other services. They also can direct parents to local and national resources.
SAMHSA's National Helpline	1-800-662-HELP (4357) 1-800-487-4889 (TTY)	Free and confidential information in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. https://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

Board of Directors, NAMI North Central Massachusetts

Cathy Gaudet, President	978-870-8887 (c) 978-348-2165 (h)	catherine.gaudet@leominster.mec.edu c_e_s13@yahoo.com
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Membership Form

AFFILIATE #119, NAMI NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS, INC.

NAME _____ Telephone _____ e-mail _____
 ADDRESS _____ Town _____ Zip Code _____
 DATE _____

New members: Please tell briefly how you heard about NAMI _____

Check only one membership choice

<input type="checkbox"/> Household (\$60.00)	New member <input type="checkbox"/>	Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (\$40.00)	New member <input type="checkbox"/>	Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Open Door/Low-Income (\$5.00)	New member <input type="checkbox"/>	Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra Donation - Thank you!			\$ _____
TOTAL enclosed (Please make check payable to NAMI NCM)			\$ _____

Please mail to: NAMI of NCM, P.O. Box 442, Fitchburg, MA 01420-0442

NAMI North Central Massachusetts, Inc., is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

Membership is at all three levels: national (NAMI), state Chapter (NAMI Massachusetts), and local Affiliate (NAMI North Central Massachusetts)

You may also join on-line at www.nami.org (click on “Become a Member”).



P.O. Box 442
Fitchburg, MA 01420