

# Why Spring Cleaning Should Extend to a Lawyer's Wellbeing

BY KIRALYN LOCKE AND STEVEN SITEK



**A**h, spring – the season of renewal, rejuvenation, and the sudden realization that your home is in desperate need of a deep clean. Spring cleaning is the annual ritual where we roll up our sleeves, dust off the cobwebs, and embark on a mission to refresh and renew our living spaces. But spring cleaning is more than just scrubbing floors and decluttering closets. It can also be a time to cleanse our minds, re-awaken our bodies, and focus on self-improvement.

Lawyers exist in a profession known for its high stakes and higher stress levels. The hours can be long, and it may feel like there is not enough time in the day to focus on personal wellbeing or self-improvement. But cleaning up your mental and physical health is not only a good idea – it is a legal necessity. This article will address the importance of mental and physical wellness in the legal profession and provide some tips for how to “spring clean” your health.

## MENTAL HEALTH IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

You have heard it before and you will hear it again: lawyers struggle with mental health. In fact, in a 2016 study by the American Bar Association and the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, 45% of lawyers reported experiencing depression and 61% of lawyers reported experiencing anxiety. This same study found that one out of every five lawyers consumes alcohol at levels consistent with “problem drinking.”

It probably comes as no surprise that depression, anxiety and substance abuse can negatively impact a lawyer's home life. But these struggles can also impact a lawyer's professional life and their law license. Unrecognized or untreated depression and anxiety can cause a decrease in productivity and can cause that lawyer to make simple mistakes. When lawyers make mistakes, they are at a greater risk of facing legal malpractice claims or ethical complaints.

Even conduct outside of the legal workplace can have an impact on a lawyer's ability to practice law. The Minnesota Supreme Court recently suspended an attorney from the practice of law after multiple instances of driving under the influence of alcohol. Even though the lawyer's conduct was not related to a client matter, the Court still found the conduct warranted suspension.

## CLEANING UP YOUR HEALTH

Unfortunately, there is no magic cure for depression, anxiety or substance abuse. But there are things we can do to improve our mental health.

**Healthy Eating:** Eating a balanced diet certainly helps your physical health, but did you know it helps your mental health as well? Studies have shown that diets that are high in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, and fish and seafood can increase mood and decrease the prevalence of depression by 25-35%.

Magnesium has also been shown to combat depression and anxiety. Foods high in magnesium, such as nuts, seeds, and whole grains, might make your stomach happy and your brain happier.

**Exercise:** Exercise acts as a potent mood booster due to its multifaceted effects on the body and mind. When you engage in physical activity, your brain releases a surge of feel-good chemicals called endorphins, which can lift your spirits and create a sense of euphoria. Exercise helps to reduce levels of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, promoting relaxation and reducing feelings of tension and anxiety.

Exercise may seem daunting to some, but it does not have to be. If you are currently unable to carve out an hour of your day to exercise, there are still ways to get physical activity in throughout the day. For example, if you are planning to have a status meeting with a co-worker, consider turning the meeting into a "walking meeting." You can have your meeting while taking a brief walk outside, through the skyway, or around the office. Even minimal exercise, such as walking, is proven to be a mood booster.

**Hobbies:** Participating in hobbies can also have a significant impact on mental health. Hobbies provide an outlet for stress relief and relaxation, and they can create a sense of accomplishment. Like exercise, hobbies do not necessarily require you to carve out large blocks of time all at once.

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*Perhaps you like to read books*

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*Or writing poems*

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*These can be done over time.*

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*(Did you notice the haiku?)*

**Seek Help:** Simple lifestyle changes are typically not enough to fully combat depression, anxiety or substance abuse. Thankfully, there are many resources available to help.

## IF YOU ARE UNSURE WHAT TYPE OF HELP YOU MAY NEED, CONSIDER CONTACTING LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS.



Therapists and counselors can help you navigate life struggles and teach you tools for coping with the same. Psychiatrists are trained physicians who specialize in mental health and can recommend and prescribe medications to combat various mental health diagnoses.

If you are unsure what type of help you may need, consider contacting Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers. Lawyers can contact this nonprofit to seek free and confidential help with addiction, mental health struggles, chronic stress, and other career related issues.

## CONCLUSION

Spring is the perfect time to take a moment and focus on your wellbeing and make a plan to prioritize your mental and physical health. While being a lawyer is important, nothing is more important than your own health and wellness.



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