



Mental Health Check

**Story by: Dan Tainter, R.N.
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As a social individual, diving headfirst into a pandemic meant more alone time, an unfamiliar concept for me. The lifestyle changes required in the wake of the pandemic has led to less time with friends, less time with family, more time at home, and more time in my own head.

Initially I enjoyed the extra hours, devoting them to finish lingering house projects, to tidy up finances, and to catch up on Netflix. That enjoyment slowly turned into loneliness. Sure, I still had my wife—my teammate and number one fan—but I was missing the camaraderie I once had with my larger social circle. After the projects were completed and Netflix got old, I found myself thinking about work more. The stresses of COVID in my work were encroaching into my daily thoughts and consuming my joy. I became a little more edgy, judgmental, and certainly less fun to be around. My mind felt busy, especially when my body was idle.

It wasn't until I had a mental health check conversation with my office mate and close friend that I realized that time alone can be sacred. I began to understand more about myself, that racing thoughts are a side effect of an idle state, and that I needed discipline and structure to fill in the gaps in my days. Most of all, I needed movement.

I joined the Peloton bike community and started playing Pickle Ball. I started to get more involved in my wife's interests. I even began baking bread. Filling the time outside of work became easy! I soon found that inserting things into my days ahead of time enabled me to fill space and time as well as my head with positivity. I was able to push intrusive thoughts about work to their appropriate place and focus on my personal health.

Sure, I still miss my circle, but I no longer feel daunted by loneliness. I instead feel a sense of empowerment to take charge of my available time with deliberate planning. Through these experiences, I truly feel I have become a better version of myself.

**Artist: Winter Omodth
Eau Claire, WI**

Winter uses they/them pronouns and is a senior at Memorial High School. They have been invested in art since they were a small child. While a perfect world would enable them to be a painter, they plan to attend to tech school for radiography.

The flow of Dan's story was relatable to me, how the early pandemic free time started as a treat but soon became discouraging and stagnating. The most important parts to me seemed to be his lack of community, mental health conversation, and transition from despair. I wanted to show his connection to other people, because although he said movement, structure, and introspection helped him a lot, the thing that spurred this change was a conversation with a friend.

View all the pieces in the *Healing Reflections* [online gallery](#).