

Looking after your mental wellbeing

Different areas of our lives have different impacts on our mental wellbeing. Sometimes things can be going well at home, but work is difficult and vice versa. We cannot predict what life will throw at us, and it is important to have realistic expectations. Good mental health isn't something you have but something you do.



To be mentally healthy you must value and accept yourself. This means that:

- > You care about and care for yourself
- > You look after your physical health
- > You eat well, sleep well, exercise and enjoy yourself
- > You judge yourself on reasonable standards
- > How you see yourself is central to every decision you make

Living a healthier life

There is growing evidence that you can manage your mental wellbeing by adopting a healthier lifestyle. Some examples of how you can improve your mental wellbeing include:

- > Balancing your home, work and other commitments
- > Eat healthily
- > Reduce your alcohol intake – alcohol is a depressant
- > Exercise regularly
- > Learn to relax
- > Sleep well – getting enough sleep and taking time out from your everyday routine can help to improve mood and reduce stress
- > Have a good network of support available
- > Stimulate your mind with interests and hobbies



How diet can help

Most people are aware that a healthy diet is vital in order to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other common physical problems. Recent evidence also suggests that good nutrition may be just as important for your mental health and that a number of conditions, including depression, may be influenced by dietary factors.

- Different foods can have dramatically different effects on your mood. Alcohol, caffeine, bread, cheese and sugary foods, like biscuits, cakes and chocolate, are known to trigger low moods. After the sugar rush of sweet foods, your blood sugar levels can plummet and lead to feelings of low energy, tiredness, irritability and depression. You should also eat regularly.

If you are depressed you are encouraged to seek medical help as a priority. While a healthy diet can help recovery, it should sit alongside other treatments recommended by your GP.

How exercise can help

There is evidence that exercise speeds recovery with people who have depression. There's probably a range of reasons for this, including:

- > Exercise leads to an increased release of endorphins in the body
- > It can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety
- > It helps you to get active and meet new people
- > Exercise can give you new goals and a sense of purpose
- > It can boost your confidence and self-esteem



How do I help build my resilience

- > Take small steps at a time
- > Accept that you can change
- > Question the assumptions on which you base your ideas. Look at the consequences of your ideas.
- > Writing these things down puts what you're thinking and feeling outside of yourself, and you can see it more clearly
- > Books can be helpful. Try reading not just self-help books but well-written novels, poetry and biographies
- > Try something different to stimulate your mind
- > Talk it through with friends and family
- > Talking to a therapist or counsellor may also be very helpful. There are many different kinds of therapies, which are adaptable to suit different characteristics within individuals. If your organisation has an EAP try that, otherwise there are local groups and drop in centres throughout the UK.

If these simple steps do not leave you feeling back to your normal self, or if you ever have any specific worries or concerns about your mental health, then see your doctor. They are very used to seeing people with similar problems and because it is generally much easier to help you sooner rather than later, they will be keen to assist. Do not be embarrassed or put off about going to see them. Get advice and support as soon as you feel you need it.



To change, you have to accept you can, and then you have to try to change – without knowing if it will work or not. This isn't easy. It takes courage to decide to change but your mental wellbeing is incredibly important and should not be pushed aside.