

# MENTAL WELLBEING



ESSENTIAL GUIDE

# This Essential Guide is about mental wellbeing.

## It explains:

- The importance of taking care of how you feel
- How to look after your mental wellbeing
- How to recognise when you might need some extra help
- How to find mental health support

# What does mental wellbeing look like?

Your mental wellbeing includes everything about how you feel and how you cope – emotionally and practically – with everyday life.

Good mental wellbeing means that you:

- Feel good about yourself most of the time.
- Have good relationships with others.
- Feel able to cope with daily life.
- Are able to manage your feelings and enjoy things.

Good mental wellbeing does **not** mean you:

- Feel happy all the time.
- Are never angry, sad, or upset.
- Never have bad days or bad moods.

Good mental wellbeing has lots of benefits, besides just making you feel happier. Other benefits include:



Better physical health.



A healthier lifestyle.



Feeling more motivated and able to concentrate.



Better relationships with family and friends.



Better recovery from or ability to cope with illness.



Improved quality of sleep.

# What if my mental wellbeing is not good?

It is normal and healthy for people to feel stressed, low, or sad sometimes. However, feeling like this a lot of the time can start to affect how well you feel able to cope with life in general.

Your mental wellbeing can be affected by a lot of things. For example, if you are ill or worried about your health, if you are having relationship problems or problems at work, if you are fatigued or tired, or if you feel lonely.

At other times, you may not know the reason that you do not feel good, and this is OK too.

Long periods of unusual irritability, fear, or low mood may be an indicator of mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, or PTSD. It can also be a response to a traumatic event like a stroke, heart attack, or accident.

## Signs to look out for...

- Feeling unhappy and low in mood a lot.
- Not getting any enjoyment out of life.
- Losing interest in other people or activities that you used to be interested in.
- Feeling hopeless or lost.
- Often feeling tired or like you have no energy.
- Struggling to focus.
- Disturbed sleep.
- Feeling guilty or worthless.
- Having little self-confidence or self-worth (generally feeling bad about yourself).
- Fear of things that didn't frighten you before, like going outside or meeting new people.
- Noticeable changes in appetite, either eating more or eating less.
- Changes in your ability to care for yourself.

# Why is mental wellbeing so hard right now?

If you have experienced a change in your life, this can have an impact on your mental wellbeing and make it difficult to regain balance you may have had before.

This is especially true if you have experienced an illness, medical emergency, or injury, which can often drastically change the way you live your day-to-day life.

Uncertainty, grief, and upheaval are all things which can make it difficult to maintain good mental wellbeing.

It can also be difficult to pull yourself out of a state of mental struggle, as poor mental wellbeing can prevent you doing things that might help - like exercise, meeting friends, and staying active.

**There are a lot of things you can do to help with your mental wellbeing. Here are our top ten tips...**

## **1. Spend time with others**

Having positive relationships with family and friends is important for your mental wellbeing.

Make time to speak to the people you love often. This could be face-to-face, over the phone, or even through text or letters.

If you don't know many people, consider joining a local activity group. For example: a book club, art class, or walking group.

If you have a long-term health condition, meeting others who understand what you're going through can make a huge difference.

**Speak to the Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland Advice Line nurses to find out about support groups in your area.**

## 2. Get out and about

- Getting out of the house is good for your mental wellbeing. Think about things you enjoy doing outside the house – going for a walk, meeting a friend, or walking the dog – and plan to do some of them every week.
- Exercise is also a great way to improve your mood. Physical exercise releases endorphins which make you feel good.
- Sunlight is known to help mental wellbeing. Even in winter, going out in daytime can help your mood. If you can't get enough natural light, consider a SAD lamp to simulate the effect of sunlight on the skin. These can cause migraines and headaches, so speak to a health professional first!
- Choose activities you enjoy to help motivate yourself. This could be anything: gardening, yoga, dancing...



### 3. Get good sleep

Good sleep habits can improve your mood, help with stress, and improve your concentration. Sleeping well can also improve your physical health.

Tips for getting a good sleep include:



Relaxing before bed by having a bath, reading a book, or listening to music or the radio.



Getting physically tired during the day.



Avoiding screens - TVs, computers, and phones - for at least 1 hour before bed.



Going to bed at the same time every night, and getting up around the same time every morning.



Making sure your bedroom is comfortable, quiet, and dark.

## 4. Limit alcohol use

Some people use alcohol to help them to relax and improve their mood. However, alcohol is actually a depressant - it affects your brain in a way which is likely to cause low moods and reduced mental wellbeing. This means that it can make you feel anxious, angry, low, or sad.

The more you drink, the higher the risk of negative effects. If you are feeling low or stressed, try to avoid or cut down on alcohol.



If you think you may be drinking too much and need support or advice to cut down, there is help available. Speak to your doctor, go to

**[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)**, or call **Drinkline** on **0300 123 1110** for free, confidential advice.

## 5. Avoid recreational drugs

Many people turn to recreational drugs like cannabis, cocaine, or ecstasy to avoid feelings or to escape problems in their life. This can also include legal drugs like tobacco or caffeine, which many people take because they find it helps them to feel better.

Like alcohol, recreational drugs may make you feel better in the short term, but that short-term boost comes at a cost. Over the longer term, not only can this kind of self-medication impact your physical health and your wallet, but it can also make your mental wellbeing significantly worse.

Many recreational drugs are addictive, and taking them for a long time can mean you feel unable to function without them. They may also make mental illnesses worse, by changing how your brain works.

**Turning Point Scotland** can offer help with addiction: [www.turningpointscotland.com](http://www.turningpointscotland.com).

## 6. Practice mindfulness

**Mindfulness** is the process of focusing on the here and now. Evidence has shown that mindfulness can reduce anxiety, improve your mood and concentration, and help you to relax.

- Mindfulness is all about focusing on the present moment, instead of the past or the future.
- It is about being aware of your thoughts and emotions, how your body feels, and what is happening around you.



Anyone can practice mindfulness. It can be hard to start with, but the more you try, the easier it will be.

There are many books, websites, and classes on mindfulness. Look online or check your local library. Smartphone apps can also be a great way to get started - try searching for "meditation" or "mindfulness".

## 7. Stay active

Being active - not just physically, but also mentally - is a great way to help your mental wellbeing.

This might include physical activity, but it doesn't have to!

Anything that feels like it gives you purpose and makes you happy is great.



Having projects, hobbies, and routines to care about can make it easier to cope with difficulties in your life, by letting you focus on something else for a while and giving you motivation and something to work towards.

What you fill your time with doesn't have to matter to anyone else - it doesn't have to be big, impressive, or world-changing. It just has to be something that matters to **you**.

## **8. Volunteer and give to others**

Volunteering can help with your mental wellbeing, giving you the knowledge that you are doing something helpful and nice for others. Humans are social animals, and we often feel better when we're helping others. Volunteering can also be a great way to meet new people.

There are many different ways you can volunteer, even if you don't have a lot of time. You don't have to volunteer through a charity or any organisation at all – it's enough just to do nice things for the people around you.

Doing something for others, even something as small as giving a compliment or a smile, can make you feel good about yourself.

Doing small things every day can add up to a big difference in your mental wellbeing.

You can find volunteering opportunities through your local Third Sector Interface (TSI).

## **9. Practice conscious gratitude**

It's easy, in the busy day-to-day of life, to not notice the things that make life fun and enjoyable, or the things that we care about. Becoming aware of large and small things you're grateful for is a great way to boost your mood and keep sight of what's important.

There are lots of ways to practice conscious gratitude. You could try:

- Keeping a diary where you list 5-10 things you're grateful for every day.
- Making it part of your morning routine to think of things you are grateful for that day.
- Challenging yourself to take one photo every day, for a month, of something that makes you smile. You could post these to social media, and maybe make someone else smile too!

Conscious gratitude exercises may seem cheesy, but they really do work!

## 10. Feel your feelings

One of the most important things you can do for your mental wellbeing is to feel and accept your feelings - negative ones, as well as positive ones.



It's easy to believe that feelings like anger, sadness, or fear should be pushed down and ignored, and that we should try to be happy all the time. However, evidence shows that trying to be happy and positive even when we don't feel that way (sometimes called **toxic positivity**) causes stress, exhaustion, and poor mental wellbeing - and it doesn't make those feelings go away!

Try to recognise what you're feeling, and to accept it. You are never a worse person for feeling something - what matters to your overall wellbeing and to the people around you is how you respond to it.

# Getting help

Asking for help with your mental wellbeing can be difficult, but lots of support is available.

## Tell someone how you feel

Telling someone how you are feeling is an important step towards feeling better. Even just being heard and understood can make a difference.

You could speak to a supportive friend or family member. Your doctor is also an important person to speak to if you are finding things difficult.

There are also organisations that offer a free helpline or chat where you can speak to someone about how you are feeling. For example, you could contact **Samaritans** ([www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org), tel: 116 123) or **Breathing Space** ([www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot), tel: 0800 838 587).

# Talking therapies

You may benefit from speaking to someone who has been specially trained to help people who are struggling with mental wellbeing.

You may be referred to a therapist through the NHS. Some areas also have services that offer talking therapies, such as counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). There is often a waiting list for these therapies.

You can also find a private therapist, although they can be expensive – try searching COSCA ([www.cosca.org.uk](http://www.cosca.org.uk)) for registered therapists near you. Some therapists offer reduced rates for people experiencing financial difficulties.



# Medication

If your mental health problems are ongoing and you have been diagnosed with a mental illness, you may be offered medications to treat this illness. Your doctor will discuss the options with you to find what suits you best.



# Advice and support

Besides your health team, friends and family, there are a range of organisations that can support you. You can find advice and support through:

## **Breathing Space Scotland**

A free helpline for anyone in Scotland over the age of 16. You can call at any time between 6pm and 6am to talk about what's bothering you.

**[www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot)**

**Tel: 0800 83 85 87**

## **NHS Inform**

The information website for the NHS in Scotland. This page has information on mental wellbeing and low mood, as well as advice on how to manage these situations.

**[www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health](http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health)**

## **Samaritans**

A volunteer-run helpline to discuss how you feel and what's bothering you. Samaritans also has a self-help app for your phone or tablet, which can help you to manage your mental wellbeing.

**[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

**Tel: 116 123**

**Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

**App: Search SAMARITANS SELF-HELP on your app store**

## **SAMH**

Scottish Action for Mental Health offers a range of information and support for mental wellbeing. They can also direct you to local mental health and wellbeing services.

**[www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)**

**Email: [info@samh.org.uk](mailto:info@samh.org.uk)**

**Tel: 0344 800 0550**

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**text ADVICE to 66777**

**advice@chss.org.uk**

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**NO LIFE HALF LIVED**

Published: Jun 2024

Next review: Jun 2026

E6-v2.0-Sept25



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