



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 with everyday life. Both emotionally and practically.

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. This might include 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 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 post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can also be a response to a traumatic event like a stroke, heart attack, or accident.

Poor mental wellbeing, especially mental illnesses like depression and anxiety can also impact your physical health. They may increase your heart rate and blood pressure. They can also be a risk factor for cardiovascular conditions, like coronary artery disease, heart attack, and stroke.

By supporting your own mental health and wellbeing you are also supporting your physical health and wellbeing.

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.
- 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. It can make it difficult to regain the balance you may have had before.

This is especially true if you have experienced an illness, medical emergency, or injury.

These 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. Poor mental wellbeing can prevent you doing things that might help. For example, exercise, meeting friends, and staying active.

When living with an illness like Long Covid or a stroke you might find that some barriers to your mental wellbeing increase. Or they might require more tailored solutions.

Having aphasia may make you feel more isolated and inactive due to communication difficulties. You may find hobbies such as art help your mental wellbeing as they don't require reading, writing, or speaking.

Long Covid fatigue can also be a specific barrier to good mental wellbeing as it prevents consistent engagement with different activities. When developing any new habits you should prioritise pacing yourself and energy management.

It's important to remember that fluctuations in your mental wellbeing are normal.

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. 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 practitioners 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 and plan to do some of them every week. This could be going for a walk, meeting a friend, or gardening.

Exercise is also a great way to improve your mood. Physical exercise releases endorphins which make you feel good.

Start with small, actionable steps and gradually increase them over time. For example, aim to do three 10-minute walks a week at first.

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 seasonal affective disorder lamp to simulate the effect of sunlight on the skin. These can cause migraines and headaches, so speak to a health professional first!



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. You could try:



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



Getting physically tired during the day.



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.



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

4. Eat well

Eating a balanced diet can help you feel better. Our bodies need a variety of nutrients to stay mentally and physically healthy. For example, having some protein with every meal means your brain can regulate your thoughts and feelings better.

Eating regularly can help keep your blood sugar levels steady. Having low blood sugar levels can make you feel more tired, irritable, or depressed. Try to eat foods that release energy slowly, such as wholegrain bread and cereal, nuts and seeds, and brown pasta and rice.

Drink plenty of liquid, like water or juice. Being dehydrated can make it harder to concentrate or think clearly.

Incorporating plenty of fruit, vegetables, and beans supports your gut health and provides many of the vitamins and minerals your brain and body need.

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.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk, or call **Drinkline** on **0800 7314 314** 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.

Recreational drugs may make you feel better in the short term, but that short-term boost comes at a cost. Over the longer term, this kind of self-medication impacts your physical health and your wallet. As well as potentially making 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.

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 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. They help you focus on something else for a while and give 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.

We have lots of volunteering opportunities at CHSS. For example, as a Community Connector, shop volunteer, or fundraiser. You can find out more on our website: chss.org.uk/supportus/volunteering

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)**. The TSI Scotland Network is a group of expert charities that advocate for the third sector and make it easier for people to volunteer.

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. The 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. Or that we should try to be happy all the time.

However, evidence shows that trying to be happy and positive when we don't actually feel like it causes stress, exhaustion, and poor mental wellbeing. This is also sometimes called **toxic positivity**. It also doesn't make the actual negative 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.

How to build healthy habits

A habit is any action that you do in response to a specific contextual or emotional cue.

Habits can be either healthy or unhealthy.

It can be hard to know how to form a new healthy habit. The important thing to remember is to start simple. Forming one small healthy habit can increase your confidence so you feel able to incorporate more habits over time.

Some simple tips for building healthy habits:

- Choose the new behaviour you want to start doing. For example, 30 minutes of yoga a day.
- Identify the context or cue you will use. For example, set an alarm for 1pm every day to do it at lunch time.
- Repeat the behaviour in the same context every time. This creates an association and in time leads to a habit.

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, tel: 116 123) or **Breathing Space** (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) 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

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 on weekends and 6pm to 2am on weekdays to talk about what's bothering you.

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

Mind

This charity offers information on mental health problems, treatment, and self-care.

www.mind.org.uk

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

Tel: 116 123

In person at one of their branches.

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

Email: info@samh.org.uk

If you believe you are having a mental health crisis please call NHS 111 and choose their 24/7 mental health support line.

Our publications are free to everyone in Scotland, in PDF and in print. See them all at **www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub**

For free, confidential advice and support from our Advice Line Team, contact:

0808 801 0899 (Mon-Fri 9am-4pm)

text ADVICE to 66777

advice@chss.org.uk

One in five people in Scotland are affected by chest, heart and stroke conditions or Long Covid. Go to **www.chss.org.uk/supportus** to find out how you can help us support more people in Scotland.

To give feedback or request alternative formats, email: **health.information@chss.org.uk**

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