



# Mental wellbeing

Explains how to improve and maintain your mental wellbeing, whether you have a diagnosis of a mental health condition or not.

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Mental wellbeing describes your **mental state** - how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life.

Our mental wellbeing is **dynamic**. It can change from moment to moment, day to day, month to month or year to year.

If you have good mental wellbeing you are able to:

- feel relatively **confident** in yourself and have positive [self-esteem](#)
- feel and express a range of emotions
- build and maintain **good relationships** with others
- feel engaged with the world around you
- live and work productively
- **cope** with the [stresses](#) of daily life
- adapt and manage in times of change and uncertainty

This section covers some ideas to stay mentally well and develop your ability to cope with the up and downs of life:

- Think about what is affecting your wellbeing
- Build positive relationships
- Take time for yourself
- Look after your mental health
- Look after your physical health
- Ask for help if you need it

### How are wellbeing and mental health problems connected?

If you experience low mental wellbeing over a long period of time, you are more likely to develop a [mental health problem](#).

If you already have a mental health problem, you're more likely to experience periods of **low mental wellbeing** than someone who hasn't. But that doesn't mean you won't have periods of good wellbeing.

Below we look at steps you can take to **manage your mental wellbeing**, whether you have a mental health diagnosis or not, and what support is available if you need it.

*"Mental wellbeing is essential for me to function and be happy."*

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## Think about what is affecting your wellbeing

We're all different. What affects someone's mental wellbeing won't necessarily affect others in the same way.

But we all have times when we have low mental wellbeing, where we feel [stressed](#), **upset** or **find it difficult to cope**.

Common life events that can affect your mental wellbeing include:

- loss or [bereavement](#)
- [loneliness](#)
- **relationship problems**
- issues at [work](#)
- worry about [money](#)

*"Stress, loneliness, inactivity, lack of sleep are all negative [for my mental wellbeing]."*

Other times there is no clear reason for why we feel the way we do - which can be frustrating.

There are some factors that may make you **more vulnerable** to experiencing a period of poor mental wellbeing. These may have happened in the past or might still be happening now:

- childhood [abuse](#), trauma, violence or neglect
- social isolation or [discrimination](#)
- homelessness or poor [housing](#)
- a long-term physical health condition
- social disadvantage, poverty or [debt](#)
- unemployment
- caring for a family member or friend
- significant trauma as an adult, such as military combat, being involved in a serious accident or violent crime

No matter the reason, it can be helpful to remember that **you deserve to feel good** and there are steps you can take to improve and maintain your mental wellbeing.

## Build positive relationships

Connecting with others can help us to feel a greater sense of belonging and can help to challenge feelings of [loneliness](#).

- **Make time for the people you love.** Keeping regular contact with friends and family, whether it's face-to-face, on the phone or by text, can strengthen your relationships.

- **Join a group.** Think of the things you like to do, such as drawing, gardening or sport and look for local groups. Meeting others with a shared interest can increase your confidence and build your support network.
- **Talk about the way you feel.** Opening up to a trusted friend or family member can help you to feel listened to and supported. Just acknowledging your feelings by saying them out loud can help.
- **Use [peer support](#).** If you're finding things difficult, talking to people who have similar feelings or experiences can help you to feel accepted. This could be online, such as Mind's [Elefriends](#) community, or at a peer support group.
- **Volunteer** at a local school or hospice. Giving your time to those that need it can be extremely fulfilling and can help you to look at things from a different perspective. See the [Do It](#) or website for volunteering opportunities in the UK.

*"I find extremely supportive friends and family help [as well as] finding a fulfilling hobby: horse riding, walking the dogs and yoga."*

Read [Anna's blog](#) about how volunteering at her local Mind shop helped her break out of her secluded routine.

### Take time for yourself

At times you may feel guilty for spending time on yourself. But it's essential for your wellbeing and can help you to be more resilient.

- **Try [mindfulness](#).** Being present can help you to become more aware of, and manage, your thoughts, feelings and surroundings. It can help you to enjoy life more and accept the world around you. See the [bemindful website](#) for further information and details of local courses.

*"I just found that I had to make room to be well. Sounds daft but give yourself some space - in my case I used mindfulness to help me gain control."*

- **Learn something new.** Learning new skills can help boost your confidence and give you a sense of achievement. You could learn a new language, sign up for an art class or try a new recipe. It doesn't have to be something big.
- **Do something you enjoy.** Whether it's taking a long walk, playing an instrument or going to the cinema, it's positive for your wellbeing to do something that makes you feel good.
- Try [relaxation techniques](#). Doing something that you find relaxing, such as listening to music, colouring in or having a bath can help to reduce stress and improve your mental wellbeing.

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## Look after your mental health

If you're living with a mental health problem, taking steps to look after your mental health can help you improve your wellbeing.

- **Tell people what helps.** If certain treatments have helped in the past, tell your doctor. Let your friends and family know how they can support you, whether it's listening to you when you're having a bad day, helping you keep on top of your commitments, or being aware of your triggers
- **Spot your early warning signs.** If you can, try to be aware of how you're feeling, and if you can spot any signs you might be becoming unwell. These will be individual to you, but it can be useful to reflect on what these may be so you can get support for your mental health problem as soon as possible.
- **Keep a mood diary.** Tracking your moods can help you to work out what positively and negatively affects your mental wellbeing. You can then take steps to avoid, change or prepare for negative situations. You can create your own mood diary or try one available online such as [moodpanda.com](http://moodpanda.com), [moodscope.com](http://moodscope.com), [medhelp.org/land/mood-tracker](http://medhelp.org/land/mood-tracker) and [mappiness.org.uk](http://mappiness.org.uk).
- **Build your self-esteem.** Increasing your self-esteem can help you to feel more confident and able to challenge adversity.

Read [Dave's blog](#) on how he planned to get mentally healthy.

## Look after your physical health

Looking after your body can help to keep you mentally well. Making small, gradual changes can have a positive impact on your mental wellbeing - try to start with one or two things you feel able to do.

### Moving

Our mental and physical health are closely linked. Taking up sport or exercise can help you feel better in lots of different ways.

> [See our info on physical activity, sport and exercise](#)

### Eating

Exploring how what you eat affects how you view yourself might help you to feel better.

> [See our info on food and mood](#)

### Drugs and alcohol

You may think that drinking and taking drugs boosts your confidence. But these can have a negative effect on your mental wellbeing.

> [See our info on drugs and alcohol](#)

### Sleeping

Getting too little or too much sleep can have a big impact on how you feel.

[> See our info on sleep problems](#)

## Set yourself a challenge

Find something you like doing and **do more of it**.

You could take up a hobby, join a class or volunteer your time for something you feel passionate about.

At times it can be hard to find the motivation to set goals for yourself, especially when you don't feel confident or **worry about what other people may think**. But it doesn't have to be something big.

Making **small goals** such as trying a recipe or learning the days of the week in a new language can help you to feel more positive about yourself.

*"Focus on 'small wins' don't chase big achievements. Do the little things and use it as a springboard whatever you can do be proud of it!"*

## Ask for help

- Think about **treatment options**. If you're finding things really difficult, you might want to talk to your doctor about any support services in your local area. You might want to try counselling to talk through the things you're finding challenging with a trained professional. See our pages on [seeking help](#) for more on how to speak to your doctor about your mental health, and our pages on [talking treatments](#).
- **Don't pressure yourself** to carry on as normal. Take small steps and if you are finding it difficult to cope on your own, don't be afraid to ask for help. For example, you may need [support at work](#) or help with day-to-day tasks, such as cleaning or childcare.
- **Plan for a crisis**. When you're really unwell, it can be hard to ask for the support you need or figure out what support you want. Making a crisis plan while you're well can help you can stay in control of your treatment, and mean other people know how best to help. See our page on crisis plans for more.
- **Stay safe**. If your feelings become overwhelming, and you have [suicidal thoughts](#) or you think you may [self harm](#), remember that you can pick up the phone at any time of night or day and talk to the [Samaritans](#).
- [Call, text or email our Infoline to see if they can help you find a local group or service.](#)
- [See if one of our 140 local Minds has a peer support, befriending or other service that might help you.](#)
- [Not sure where to start? Take a look at our pages on how to seek help for a mental health problem.](#)

## Read others' stories

[Read Shalini's story](#) about how dancing helped her to cope during difficult times.



## How could relaxation help me?

Exploring relaxation can help you look after yourself when you're feeling [stressed](#) or worried. Have a look at these tips and ideas to see how relaxation can fit into your daily life. Don't worry if some ideas don't work for you – just enjoy the ones that do:

### Take a break

Relaxation doesn't have to take up lots of your time. Just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space and distance to feel calmer.

- Read a book or a magazine, even if it's only for a few minutes.
- Run yourself a bath, watch a film, play with a pet or try out a new recipe.

### Focus on your breathing

Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer.

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.
- Count as you breathe. Start by counting 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe in and 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe out. Try to work out what's comfortable for you.

### Spend time in nature

Spending time outside and in green spaces can be great for your physical and mental health.

- Take a walk in the countryside or through a local park, taking time to notice trees, flowers, plants and animals you see on the way. See our page on [relaxation exercises](#) for a guided mindful moment in nature.
- Spend some time taking part in conservation, whether that's digging in your own garden or taking part in a local green project. You can find projects and outdoor activities to suit whatever level of mobility you have. See our pages on [ecotherapy](#) for more information about how to find projects in your area.

### Do a tech check

Technology can be great for helping you feel connected, but if you're using it a lot then it can contribute to making you feel busy and stressed. Taking a break (even a short one) can help you relax.

- Try turning your phone off for an hour (or a whole day if you're feeling brave).



- Step away from the TV, or have an evening where you don't check emails or social networks. Use the time to do something relaxing – you could try some of the ideas above.

## Try active relaxation

Relaxation doesn't have to mean sitting still – gentle exercise can help you relax too.

- Take a walk, going at your own pace. You might choose to go for a longer walk, but even a few minutes of walking can help you feel relaxed.
- Look for a class you'd like to try, such as yoga, Pilates or gentle stretching.

See our page on [physical activity](#) and mental health for more tips.

If you're interested in getting more active to support your mental health, take a look at our [Get Set to Go](#) campaign to find out more about how you can get active in your local area.

## Get creative

Getting in touch with your artistic side can help you feel more calm and relaxed.

- Try painting, drawing, making crafts, playing a musical instrument, dancing, baking or sewing.
- Try not to worry too much about the finished product – just focus on enjoying yourself.

See our page on [relaxation exercises](#) for more ideas on how to use creative activities to relax.

## Listen to music

Music can relax you, connect you to your emotions and distract you from worrying thoughts.

- Listen to your favourite songs. Turn up the volume and dance or sing along, or put your headphones on and close your eyes.
- Really listen to the music. Can you pick out different instruments? Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.

## Picture yourself somewhere serene

Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to somewhere you feel calm.

- Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you have imagined.

- Close your eyes, and think about the details of this place. What does it look like – what kind of colours and shapes can you see? Can you hear any sounds? Is it warm or cool? Let your mind drift and your body relax.

Making space in your life for relaxation is only one part of managing your mental health. Our pages on coping with [stress](#) and [anxiety](#) have more suggestions for ways to help yourself.

If you're finding things very hard right now and the tips on this page don't feel possible, it is ok to ask for help. See our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) for guidance on talking to your doctor about options for support and treatment.

For more support and suggestions, if you're:

- **a student** – see our pages on [coping with student life](#)
- **in work** – see our pages on [workplace mental health](#)
- **a parent** – see our pages on [parenting with a mental health problem](#)
- **a carer** – [how to cope when supporting someone else](#)

## What can I do to relax?

You can use these exercises when you're feeling stressed, busy or worried:

Don't worry if one technique doesn't work for you – you could give it another chance, or just move on to a different exercise.

How to use relaxation exercises:

- **You can use relaxation techniques regularly, or every once in a while** – whatever feels right for you.
- **Try and make some time in your day to try these exercises.** Don't treat relaxing like a task that needs to be completed – try to think of it as giving yourself some time and space.
- **Find somewhere quiet and comfortable** where you won't be interrupted, if you can.
- **Try to make sure your surroundings are the right temperature** – it can be hard to relax if you're too hot or cold.

## Relax your body

When you're stressed your muscles can become tight and tense. This exercise helps you notice tension in your body and relax your muscles.

**What do I need?**

- somewhere comfortable to sit or lie down
- space where you won't be interrupted

<b>What do I do?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lie down or sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes or focus on a spot in the distance.</li><li>2. Start by clenching your toes as much as you can for a few seconds then releasing them. Notice the difference between the two feelings.</li><li>3. Match this to your breathing. Tense your muscle as you take a deep breath in, and relax as you breathe out.</li><li>4. Move up your body to your thighs, your stomach and all the way to your shoulders and hands, clenching and relaxing each muscle in turn. Take time to notice any parts of your body that feel tense, tight or tired. You can repeat if you still feel tense.</li><li>5. Take a moment to relax, then slowly and gently begin to move. When you feel ready, you can stand up slowly.</li></ol>
<b>Variations</b>	Instead of tensing your muscles, try placing something warm on each part of your body in turn.

## Draw calming circles

Colour, creativity and movement can help you feel relaxed by:

- distracting you from worrying thoughts
- giving you an outlet and focus for your emotions
- stimulating your senses.

<b>What do I need?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a table or desk</li><li>• blank paper</li><li>• crayons, coloured pencils or pens</li><li>• sticky tape or masking tape to hold your paper down (optional)</li></ul>
<b>What do I do?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Make sure you are sitting comfortably with your feet firmly on the floor, your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.</li><li>2. Take your paper and crayon, and draw a circle that fills most of the page – don't worry if it's a bit wonky!</li><li>3. Now keep drawing. You could keep going over the circle, or fill it with a pattern, but try not to let your crayon leave the page. Don't worry about creating a finished picture, just keep going.</li></ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Take time to focus on what you're drawing. Focusing on these sensations can help you quieten your mind.</li> <li>5. Once you have done this for a few minutes, try using a different colour or pattern.</li> </ol>
<b>Variations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you're focusing too much on getting the pattern right, try using your other hand.</li> <li>• If you find it hard to get started, try using a colouring book.</li> </ul>

## Take a mindful moment in nature

[Mindfulness](#) is a way of paying attention to the present moment. And spending time in green spaces ([ecotherapy](#)) has been found to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

Follow these steps for a new way to experience your surroundings. If you're able to walk this can also be an opportunity get some gentle exercise, but you can do this exercise whatever your mobility.

<b>What do I need?</b>	Just yourself and a green space – try a local park, woodland, nature reserve or just your garden.
<b>What do I do?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Find a green space. When you get there, stop for a moment and take a deep breath.</li> <li>2. Start exploring slowly – try not to focus on getting somewhere in particular. Really focus on any movement you make. If you're walking, notice which part of your foot touches the ground first, and feel the transfer of weight through your foot.</li> <li>3. Notice the ground underneath you. Is it grass or earth? Does the ground feel soft? What colours can you see?</li> <li>4. Think about the rest of your body – how are you holding your arms? Does the air on your face feel cold or warm?</li> <li>5. Listen to the sounds around you – can you hear birdsong, or wind rustling through the leaves?</li> </ol>
<b>Variations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you can't go to a green space, you can try opening your window and noticing what's around you. Notice any clouds in the sky, or trees and plants you can see. Can you feel rain, wind or sun on your skin?</li> </ul>

- You could try looking after a plant. Spend time focusing on its scent, shape and texture. You could try touching some of the leaves or soil and focusing on how it feels.

## Useful contacts

### Mind's services

- **Helplines** – all our helplines provide information and support by phone and email. Our Blue Light Infoline is just for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families.
  - Mind's Infoline – 0300 123 3393, info@mind
  - Mind's Legal Line – 0300 466 6463, legal@mind
  - Blue Light Infoline – 0300 303 5999, bluelightinfo@mind
- **Local Minds** – there are over 140 local Minds across England and Wales which provide services such as [talking treatments](#), [peer support](#), and [advocacy](#). [Find your local Mind here](#), and contact them directly to see how they can help.
- **Elefriends** is a supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. See our [Elefriends page](#) for details.

## Who else could help?

### Be Mindful

[bemindful.co.uk](http://bemindful.co.uk)

Information about mindfulness and mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR). Guidance on how to learn mindfulness, including course listings.

### Do-it trust

[do-it.org](http://do-it.org)

Website advertising volunteering opportunities.

### Mood diaries

[moodpanda.com](http://moodpanda.com)

[moodscope.com](http://moodscope.com)

[medhelp.org/land/mood-tracker](http://medhelp.org/land/mood-tracker)

[mappiness.org.uk](http://mappiness.org.uk)

Some examples to try. There are many more available.

### Samaritans

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Chris, PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

24-hour helpline: 116 123

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

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

Emotional support for anyone in distress.

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References are available on request.