



Mental Health
Foundation



Our Best

MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

Backed by research



WHAT WORKS:

Protect your mental health and prevent problems

Protecting our mental health is easier than you might think. We can all do it, every day and with simple activities that help us feel OK, we're better able to cope with life.

It's a bit like brushing your teeth every day – important in preventing problems. It's the same for our mental health. It can also be fun!

Each of our tips has been created to help us look after our mental health and,

importantly, each one is backed up by evidence from research, including the [Mental Health Foundation's own ground-breaking study.](#)



Our tips will be easier for some and harder for others. Why not give them a try and see which ones suit you best.



Trying new things can sometimes feel uncomfortable at first but they usually get easier the more we practise them.

One thing to remember: none of us are perfect. We all have our limits. What's good enough for you is great.

GET CLOSER TO NATURE



We all live with worries and fears, uncertainties, losses that leave us sad and pressures that make us feel stressed.

Nature can have a really calming effect on us. We have been living around other animals and plants for thousands of years. Some people say nature helps them feel calmer, more hopeful and less alone. MHF research found that going for a walk was the UK adults' favourite way of coping with stress during the pandemic in 2020.

In Japan, some people use "forest bathing",

which may improve their mental health. So going to a forest or wood and experiencing the different smells, sounds and textures may really help. To get the best out of nature's healing effects, try tuning your senses to what's around you – the trees, plants, birds and animals, for instance, and water such as ponds or the seashore. Take a deep breath and see how you feel. The idea is to get connected with your natural surroundings.

For more information and ideas, see our guide [Thriving With Nature](#), produced by the Mental Health Foundation and wildlife charity WWF.



LEARN TO UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE YOUR FEELINGS



Feeling very upset can interfere with our lives, making it hard to think clearly or work, relax, study, sleep or deal with other people.

Many of us will know when we're upset but not be sure what we're feeling. Is it sadness, fear, shame, loneliness, anger or something else? We don't always know why we're feeling that way.

It often helps to give our feelings our attention without judging them, without

feelings

telling ourselves we're stupid or weak to feel the way we do. It may seem strange and uncomfortable to do this. But practice and patience with ourselves will help.

Naming what we're feeling is also likely to help. So, we can say to ourselves: "I'm feeling really irritable today but also sad." Another helpful step can be to work out what has led to us feeling this way – might it be a disagreement or disappointment that you've had. Some women might find that their periods sometimes (or always) affect their moods.

Talking kindly to ourselves, in the same way that we might reassure a small child who we care about, is also important. It can be very comforting. You might feel uncomfortable at first but give it a go – it might just help.



Some people feel better if they write down how they are feeling; in a notebook or on their phone. You might want to think about how to protect your privacy, before doing this.

You could try repeating something positive about yourself to a few times each day. (This is sometimes called a “mantra”. “I am on a journey, growing and developing”, for example.) Research shows this reduces negative thoughts and feelings.

Some people also feel that an activity called “mindfulness” is helpful. If it’s something you might be interested in, **[you can find more information here.](#)** Talking with someone else can also be helpful – and that’s our next suggestion...



TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST FOR SUPPORT

Many of us have learned to bottle things up inside us and try to ignore painful feelings. It can take a lot of courage to tell someone else about how we’re really feeling or what we’re finding hard, especially if we don’t usually do that kind of thing.

Just talking things through with a person we trust can help and feel like a relief.



Talk to someone you trust for support



TALKING MAY CHANGE THE WAY YOU FEEL ABOUT A SITUATION

Use your own words. It'll make you feel safer and less alone and that will help protect your mental health and prevent problems.

Talking may also change the way you see and feel about the situation, in ways you find helpful.

Another possible benefit is that talking

may strengthen your relationship with the person you speak with. This is likely to benefit both of you and make it easier for them to turn to you, when they need support themselves.

Here is some more information about talking with friends about your mental health.

Here is some information about talking with a health professional about how you're feeling.



Talking

BE AWARE OF USING DRUGS AND/OR ALCOHOL TO COPE WITH DIFFICULT FEELINGS

Many of us sometimes use drugs to block out “difficult” feelings such as sadness, fear or shame.

No-one wants to feel bad and for some people, drugs and/or alcohol offer temporary relief.



Unfortunately, they don't stop the feelings returning and may make things worse or create other problems, including damage to mental and physical health, relationships and work or study.

If you think you may be using drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings, then it may help at first to simply notice it,


without beating yourself up about it. Being understanding and kind to yourself is good for your mental health.

FOR SOME PEOPLE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL OFFER TEMPORARY RELIEF


A possible next step could be to talk with someone you trust, or one of the charities that offer confidential, free information and advice, including how to reduce the harmfulness of using drugs. [Have a look at Talk To Frank, for example.](#)

[Here is some more detailed information about drugs and mental health.](#)

[Here is some more detailed information about alcohol and mental health.](#)



You could also look for other ways of coping with painful feelings, such as getting help with the situation causing them, if possible, and finding a trusted person to talk with. This could be a friend or relative, a colleague, a person working for a charity helpline, your GP or a counsellor.



Many charities around the country offer low-cost or free therapy. [Here is some more detailed information about getting help with your mental health,](#) from many different potential sources.

Some people find it helps to go to “anonymous” meetings, such as [Narcotics Anonymous,](#) to share with others who have/had similar experiences. Some of these meetings are also now online.

TRY TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MONEY AND GET HELP WITH PROBLEM DEBTS



Money problems can be unavoidable and we may have no choice about being in debt.

Fears about paying debts, bills and essentials such as food and electricity can be very stressful. If we feel responsible for sending money back home, or we're the only earner in our household, we may feel burdened and isolated.

Feelings like this can make it harder to cope with everything, including the money problems themselves.

There are things we can do to help prevent financial problems causing issues with our mental health.

We might feel ashamed of what we're going through, which may make it harder to tell anyone, leaving us feeling alone with it.

The truth is, we're never alone with money problems. Research shows they are one of the most common and serious sources of stress for many people.

Even if our finances are impossible to change, sharing our fears with another person who's not involved, and who you trust, is likely to help us feel less alone and overwhelmed. This may help us to see new ways forward.

If we are struggling financially, including with debt, it can be helpful to talk about it with an expert at a charity that offers free money advice. They are very experienced with what can go wrong with people's finances and what may help.

It can be really helpful to ask for help before any debt becomes unmanageable. But

getting help will benefit everyone.

Here is a list of organisations that offer free advice about financial problems, created by the charity Money and Mental Health.

Talking with one of these free, expert advisers could also lead to you finding out about new possibilities, such as benefits you're entitled to, your legal rights, ways to reduce the size of your debt repayments and other ways to save money.



GET MORE FROM YOUR SLEEP



If you're struggling with your sleep, think about trying a few simple changes. For example:

Anyone who has struggled with sleep will know what a difference it makes to our bodies, minds and ability to cope with life.

We all have times when we sleep badly and some of us live in situations that make a good night's sleep impossible.

For many people, sleep is often the first thing that suffers when we're struggling with our mental health.

Adults need between 7 and 9 hours' sleep a night, including enough dreaming sleep and enough deeper sleep.

- **Develop a relaxing bedtime routine to help you start winding down before you actually go to sleep**
- **Avoid TV and mobile screens, alcohol and caffeine before bed. This will help you fall asleep and stay asleep. You could also avoid vigorous exercise before bed.**
- **Go to bed and get up at around the same time every day, including weekends.**



Get more from your sleep

For more suggestions, try this [guide to sleep and mental health](#). It includes information about potentially helpful apps, and getting professional help if self-help isn't working for you.



BE KIND AND HELP CREATE A BETTER WORLD



If you have ever felt lonely, you will know how much it helps to have even a small connection with someone else.

Exchanging a smile or friendly words can be comforting and lift our mood.

Research shows that being kind is good for both sides. Being kind can boost our mood, help us feel more capable, strengthen our connections with others and even make us cope better with stress. [You can read more about it here.](#)



**TRY SMALL BUT
MEANINGFUL ACTS
OF KINDNESS**

If you don't know where to start, you could try small but meaningful acts of kindness, such as offering a smile or a few kind words to another person. You could make their day but also feel better for it - friendly connections with others are vital for our mental health.

[For more inspiration about acts of kindness, try this page on our website.](#)

We can also help others by doing volunteer work and getting together with other people to work for good causes. These things can help us feel connected with other people and the world around us. It can give us the sense that we can make a difference. All of this is good for our mental health.



KEEP MOVING



Our bodies and our minds are connected, so looking after ourselves physically also helps us prevent problems with our mental health (it works the other way around, too).

Moving our bodies – with sport, gardening, dancing, cycling, walking the dog, doing the cleaning or going to the gym, for example – are great ways to improve our mental health and physical health.

Exercise releases “feel good” hormones, that reduce feelings of stress and anger. It also helps us feel better about our bodies. It can improve our sleep too. If it involves other people like being part of a team, a class or group we see regularly, that can also boost our mental health.

Keep moving

We don't have to be professional athletes, or sporty, to get the benefits of being physically active. From walking to dancing, and basketball to the gym, the best exercise is simply the one we enjoy.

[You can find more information about exercise and mental health here.](#)



EAT HEALTHY FOOD



Food and drink affect our bodies, brains and mood - for good or bad.

Sugary snacks and drinks can give us a temporary “high” or sense of comfort that can feel irresistible. But they soon

leave us feeling exhausted or jittery. Caffeine in coffee, tea or so called energy drinks can also have this effect.

A balanced diet, with lots of vegetables and fruit, is essential for good physical and mental health.

How we eat is also important. Having meals with other people can help to grow relationships – with family, friends, partners, and colleagues. This is really important in protecting everyone’s mental health and prevent problems.

Food can also get mixed up with our feelings. Some people over-eat or under-eat when they are upset. It may help to talk to someone we trust and get professional support if we need it.

[This page offers information](#) about getting help with our mental health, from many different possible sources.

And there’s [more information about food and mental health on this page.](#)



**HAVING MEALS
WITH OTHER PEOPLE
CAN HELP NOURISH
RELATIONSHIPS**



BE CURIOUS AND OPEN- MINDED TO NEW EXPERIENCES



We can all get stuck in familiar ways, like how we spend our time and what we think about ourselves and the world.

This can be self-fulfilling, with our expectations influencing what actually happens, for good or bad. For example, we might say to ourselves: “Things never get better” or “I’m useless”, as a response to what others have said to us.

It can help to notice these thoughts and try out new ones, such as “I can change things for the better” and “there is so much I can do”.

Life can feel more interesting, lively and rewarding when we are open to trying new experiences and experimenting with how we do things.

It could be as simple as what we have for breakfast or the route we walk with the dog. It could also need some planning, like an adventure holiday. We might find a new place that it turns out we love, discover a talent we didn’t know we had or meet someone new and important.

PLAN THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Life throws all sorts at us and, during hard times, we may feel hopeless and not have the energy to plan for the future.

Having things to look forward to, including activities we find fun, can help us cope with difficult situations.



Making plans for things we enjoy can increase our sense of hope, which is important for our mental health. Our plan could be for anything from small pleasures, like a cup of tea or your favourite TV programme or dance class, through to a trip with family or friends, or going to see your favourite film, sports team or singer.

Whether it's small or a big one, the important thing is to plan it.

Decide what you're going to do, when and with who and, if needed book it. It's important to follow your plan – and repeat...

SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

Mental Health Foundation

Our website offers information on mental health, mental health problems, self-help and how to get help. www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Confidential help and support

The Samaritans provides emotional support 24 hours a day. www.samaritans.org
Email: jo@samaritans.org
Telephone: 08457 90 90 90

Counselling

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy www.bacp.co.uk
Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk
Telephone: 01455 883300

UK Council for Psychotherapy

www.psychotherapy.org.uk
Email: info@ukcp.org.uk
Telephone: 020 7014 9955

General health information

NHS 111 provides information 24 hours a day.
www.nhs.uk Telephone: 111

We hope you found this booklet informative and useful.

Please consider making a donation to help us continue our vital work:

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/donate



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