10 top tips for good mental health

An important part of keeping fit and healthy is to take care of your own mental health. There are plenty of things you can do to help make sure you keep yourself mentally healthy.

Get plenty of sleep

Sleep is really important for our physical and mental health. Sleep helps to regulate the chemicals in our brain that transmit information. These chemicals are important in managing our moods and emotions. If we don’t get enough sleep, we can start to feel depressed or anxious.

The Sleep Foundation provides tips on how to sleep well, and to overcome problems with sleeping.

Eat well

Eating well isn’t just important for our bodies, but it’s also important for our minds. Certain mineral deficiencies, such as iron and vitamin B12 deficiencies, can give us a low mood. Try to eat a balanced diet. If you find you’re a particularly stressed or anxious person, you should try limiting or cutting out caffeine as this can make you feel jittery and anxious.

Avoid alcohol, smoking and drugs

Drinking and smoking aren’t things which we always associate with withdrawal symptoms, but they can cause some which impact on your mental health. When you’ve had a few drinks you can feel more depressed and anxious the next day, and it can be harder to concentrate. Excessive drinking for prolonged periods can leave you with a thiamine deficiency. Thiamine is important for our brain function and a deficiency can lead to severe memory problems, motor (coordination) problems, confusion and eye problems. If you smoke, between cigarettes your body and brain go into withdrawal which makes you irritable and anxious.

Other drugs will often leave you in withdrawal and can often cause very low moods and anxiety. More severe effects of drugs include paranoia and delusions. There is some research that suggests drug use is related to developing mental disorders like schizophrenia.

Have a look at our pages on Help to stop smoking and on Alcohol and substance use for more information.

Get plenty of sunlight

Sunlight is a great source of vitamin D. Vitamin D is a really important vitamin for our bodies and our brains. It helps our brains to release chemicals which improve our mood, like endorphins and serotonin. Try to go out in the sun when you can, but make sure you keep your skin and eyes safe. 30 minutes to two hours a day of sunlight is ideal. During the winter, some people become depressed because they aren’t getting enough sunlight - this is known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Some people find using a special light-therapy lamp helps to alleviate the symptoms.

Stress

Stress is often unavoidable, but knowing what triggers your stress and knowing how to cope is key in maintaining good mental health. Try to manage your responsibilities and worries by making a list or a schedule of when you can resolve each issue. Often if you break down your worries and stresses and write them down, you realise that they are manageable. Try to avoid burying your head in the sand, and tackle problems face on. If you find you are having trouble sleeping, or are waking up thinking about all of the things that are stressing you out, write them down and reassure yourself that you can deal with them in the morning.

Activity and exercise

Activity and exercise are essential in maintaining good mental health. Being active not only gives you a sense of achievement, but it boosts the chemicals in your brain that help put you in a good mood. Exercising can help eliminate low mood, anxiety, stress and feeling tired and lazy.

You don’t need to run a marathon or play 90 minutes of football; a short walk or some another gentle activity might do the trick.

Take a look at our Exercise and sport section, or go to our Events calendar, for ideas and information on what is going on in your area.

Do something you enjoy

Try to make time for doing the fun things you enjoy. If you like going for a walk, painting or a specific TV show, try to set aside time to enjoy yourself. If we don’t spend any time doing things we enjoy, we can become irritable and unhappy.

Whether you need help to get out and about or not take a look at our Things To Do section, or go to our Events calendar, for ideas and information on what is going on in your area.

Connect with others and be sociable

Make an effort to maintain good relationships and talk to people whenever you get the chance. Having friends is important not just for your self-esteem, but also for providing support when you’re not feeling too great. Research has found that talking to others for just ten minutes can improve memory and test scores.

Whether or not you find going out and meeting people difficult you can have a look at our Social Activities pages or our Events calendar for inspiration.

Do things for others
Helping others isn’t just good for the people you’re helping; it’s good for you too. Helping someone can help with your self-esteem and make you feel good about your place in the world. Feeling as though you’re part of a community is a really important part of your mental health. You could try volunteering for a local charity, or just being neighbourly.

**Ask for help**

One of the most important ways to keep yourself mentally healthy is to recognise when you’re not feeling good, and to know when to ask for help. There’s no shame in asking someone for support if you’re feeling low or stressed. Everyone goes through patches where they don’t feel as good as they should. You can try speaking to your friends or family, or if you think your mental health is getting on top of you then you can speak to your GP.

**Other information and advice**

Please see the Other information and Advice page for organisations and services that support people with experience of mental health issues.