



Maintaining mental health

Mental health refers to our emotional and psychological wellbeing. It's about how we think, feel and behave.

One way to think about mental health is by looking at how well we function day-to-day. Being able to handle normal levels of stress, leading an independent and full life and being able to bounce back from difficult situations or life events are all signs of good mental health. Good mental health is an important part of our overall health and wellbeing and is just as important as physical health.

Experts believe that as many as one in four of us will experience a mental health problem such as depression, stress and anxiety at some point in our lives. They can have a major effect on our ability to cope with everyday living.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to look after your mental health and wellbeing and to help you avoid or cope with common mental health problems.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle

Try to eat and drink healthily. Alcohol may appear to reduce tension, but in the long run it can make problems worse. See if you can reduce the amount of caffeine in your diet (tea, coffee, chocolate, cola and energy drinks) as the effects of caffeine on the body can be similar to the effects of stress and anxiety. Caffeine can affect your ability to sleep; many people try to overcome tiredness by drinking more caffeinated drinks, creating a vicious circle. Too much sugar may also lead to energy peaks and troughs. [NHS Choices](#) has further information on healthy eating.

Increase your physical activity

Exercise can be very effective in relieving stress and making us feel good about ourselves. Even moderate physical activity, like walking to the shops and mowing the lawn, can help. Take a look at the [Everyone Active](#) website for local resources to help you get, and keep, fit.

Take time to relax

Find time for [relaxation](#). Relaxation exercises can help you to control muscular tension, which can be a particular problem for people experiencing stress and anxiety.

Get enough rest

Sleeping problems are common when you're suffering from stress, anxiety or depression. Try to ensure you get enough sleep during the night to enable you to function well during the day. Sometimes taking time just to rest can help you manage your energy better. Download some sleep tips [here](#).

Enjoy yourself and have some fun

Try to bring some fun into your life by treating yourself and doing pleasurable things. Even simple pleasures like a relaxing bath or a pleasant walk can help you deal with stress and emotional difficulties. If you're feeling low and don't have much energy, write a list of the things you might enjoy doing and give each of them a score out of ten as to how easy or difficult they are for you at the moment. Start with the easiest, and gradually work your way up the list. You'll find that doing one small thing can increase your confidence and sense of achievement and spur you on to do more.

Spend time with other people

If your mood is low, it's easy to become isolated. Make sure you set aside time for social activities; meeting up to enjoy an interest or pastime, or simply for a cup of tea and a chat. Libraries often keep information on clubs and groups that you can join.

Try to keep things in proportion and don't be too hard on yourself

We all have difficult days and none of us are perfect. Learn cognitive behavioural therapy ([CBT](#)) as a way of managing the negative thinking that can affect mood, behaviour and overall wellbeing.

Need more help?

- Oasis-Talk offers [CBT](#) as well as [workshops](#) based on CBT.
- The mental health pages on the [NHS Choices website](#) provides information on mental health, including steps to mental wellbeing
- The [Mental Health Foundation](#) website has further ideas on looking after your mental health