

Understanding Mental Health

Factsheet



Understanding Mental Health

What is mental health?

Sometimes called emotional health or mental wellbeing, mental health is how you think, feel and react to situations. It's just as important to look after your mental health as it is your physical health. It can affect how you manage stress and how you interact with others.

The difference between poor mental health and mental illness

Often mistaken for being the same thing, poor mental health and mental illness (or mental health disorder) are very different.

- Mental health like physical health is fluid rather than static. Some days it can be better or worse than other days.
- Mental illness (such as depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia) is when a mental health problem is diagnosed by a health professional. The mental illness will impact quality of life and often needs clinical treatment or therapy.

What can cause mental illness?

Most mental illnesses don't have one specific cause, but a number of causes called risk factors. The more risk factors you have, the higher chance you have of developing a mental illness.

Risk factors:

- Genetics
- A stressful environment
- Childhood trauma
- Stressful events
- Negative thoughts
- Unhealthy habits
- Drugs and alcohol
- Brain chemistry

**One in four
people are
affected
by mental
health
problems.**

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Ways to nurture your mind

Being proactive and caring for your mental wellbeing is an essential part of staying healthy and lowers your risk of illness.

Having good mental health will help you to live a happy life. You'll build resilience, improve how you cope with stress, and you'll enjoy increased energy and productivity.

Make time every day to do something that will benefit your mental health. It doesn't have to be anything expensive or time consuming.

Try these tips to get started:



Share how you feel

If you're worrying about something, talking to someone you trust isn't a sign of weakness, it will help you feel supported and less alone.



Release your feel-good hormones

Regular exercise doesn't just keep your body healthy, it produces chemicals in your brain that lifts your mood and relieves stress and anxiety, too.



Feed your mind

Your brain needs a balanced diet to stay healthy, just like the other organs in your body. Limit sugar, alcohol and caffeine, stay well hydrated and eat a good mix of nutrients.



Stay connected

Close family bonds and trusted friends can help you to cope when you have a problem. And social interactions can boost the oxytocin hormone which increases feelings of happiness.



Take time out

Whether it's five minutes or an entire day off, stopping for a break is important. Giving your body and mind time to unwind will help you to feel calm and restored.



Enjoy yourself

What are you good at? What makes you smile? Make time to do an activity that makes you happy and you'll boost your self-esteem and flood your system with positive energy.



Sleep well

Getting enough sleep is essential for maintaining good mental and physical health. Sleep lets your body repair itself and can directly affect your mood, energy and concentration levels.



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Reach your full potential with the art of self-acceptance

We're all unique with different qualities, that's what makes humans amazing. Accepting ourselves fully along with our personality traits, regardless of whether they're positive or negative, can build confidence and boost self-esteem. It's important for overall good mental health.

Release your positive emotions and achieve better self-acceptance with these top tips:

- Let go of things you can't change
- Don't compare yourself to others
- Celebrate your strengths
- See mistakes as opportunities to learn
- Surround yourself with people who believe in you
- Move on from past regrets and disappointments
- Forgive yourself



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Conversations change lives

People with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination can make their difficulties worse and make it harder to recover. Talking openly about mental wellbeing can help stop this negative attitude.

If someone you know opens up about a mental health worry, it can feel tricky to know what to say. But it needn't be awkward. Just being there for someone can make a significant difference.

If someone confides in you:

- Ask questions and listen
- Talk while you're doing something else like driving or cooking to make it feel easier
- Don't try and fix the problem. Just being there to listen will help them feel supported
- Treat them as you did before and don't exclude them
- Be patient. Not everyone will want to open up straight away



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Poor mental health symptoms

If you're experiencing symptoms that considerably affect your daily life it can be distressing and hard to cope with.

Get help from your doctor as soon as possible so you can discuss options and treatments available to help you feel better.

- Being anxious and irritable
- A low mood
- Finding it difficult to concentrate or remember things
- Sleeping less or too much
- Changes in mood
- Finding it difficult to manage everyday life, such as preparing food and washing
- Feeling teary
- Becoming suspicious or paranoid
- Becoming isolated and withdrawn
- Having suicidal thoughts
- Believing that your family and friends want to do you harm
- Believing that people or organisations are out to get you
- Experiencing hallucinations
- Believing that you have special powers or are on a mission
- Excessive spending and problems managing your money
- Having flashbacks or nightmares after a traumatic event

Where to get help

NHS self-help depression and anxiety quiz

Mind

Rethink

Mental Health Foundation

Samaritans

SANEline

The Mix

Shout

Sources:

nhs.uk, mind.org.uk, mentalhealth.org.uk, mypossibleself.com, screening.mha.org, rethink.org, timetotalkday.co.uk

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