



Public Health  
England



# EVERY MIND MATTERS

EBOOK

**ONE YOU**

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# MEET THE EXPERTS

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With 15 years of clinical experience at the NHS including internal medicine, immunology and general practice, Dr Chatterjee is a pioneer of progressive medicine, investigating which factors can create wellness or illness.



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Full-time psychiatrist at the NHS, Max also writes a weekly health column for The Daily Mail and is the editor of Spectator Health.

# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

INTRODUCTION

We all have moments where we feel **STRESS**, have **TROUBLE SLEEPING**, or feel **LOW** or **ANXIOUS**. It's just part of life and feeling this way can be a healthy reaction to difficult times.

For some of us, these feelings can become more difficult to manage, especially if they don't go away.

Just like your physical health, there are things you can do to look after your mental health and people who can help, should you need it.

We will look at things you can do to manage these problems and look after your mental well-being, including:  
Reframing Unhelpful Thoughts,

Being in the Present, Sleeping Better, Connecting with Others and Healthy Living.

The final section introduces Action Planning. This is a way for you to reach achievable goals by creating your own personal plan. You can create your own action plan on the Every Mind Matters website.

# WHAT COULD CAUSE CHANGES TO YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

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All of us go through difficult emotional periods, and 1 in 4 of us experience a mental health problem each year. This can be influenced by many factors including:

- Our upbringing and environment, which can bring out personality traits and ways of thinking that play a part in our mental wellbeing.
- Changes that happen to us throughout our lives, like illness or difficult relationships, can have a big impact on how we're feeling.
- Our genes, which make some of us more likely to develop certain kinds of mental health problems.

We all respond to life's challenges differently – there's no single "right way" to react.

It may be everyday events, one-off experiences, or several things building up. Even experiences that should be positive can be difficult to cope with sometimes. It's often when there are changes happening in our lives that things get tough.

It is really important to be aware of the things that can affect our mental health. Understanding what is causing difficulty can make it easier to take action when you or someone you care about is struggling.

# THINGS THAT AFFECT OUR MENTAL WELLBEING

## RELATIONSHIPS



Good relationships are really valuable for our mental health. Having someone to talk to and share experiences with is good for your mental health and can help reduce the impact of many difficulties.

When we experience difficulties or changes in a relationship – with a partner, friend or family member – it can affect our mental health in many ways. These changes could be events such as being in a difficult relationship or going through a breakup, or even positive events like having a baby.

Caring for someone else can be a positive and rewarding experience, but it can also be mentally and physically draining.

## MONEY WORRIES



Poor mental health can make managing money harder, and worrying about money can make your mental health worse. Not having enough money or being in debt can make you feel out of control, hopeless, embarrassed, guilty, depressed and anxious.



## HOME ENVIRONMENT



Whether it is moving house or dealing with poor standards of living, our home environment can have an affect on our mental health.

Damp or cold housing, overcrowding, problems with landlords and debt can all be bad for our mental wellbeing, even when we think the problem's only temporary or we know how to fix it.

Moving house can also have an effect on our mental health. It may be exciting, but it can also make us feel stressed or anxious.

## WORK AND EMPLOYMENT ISSUES



Having a job can help us feel a sense of achievement, a feeling of belonging, and connect us to others, on top of the obvious financial benefits. But if we face stressful situations in the workplace or are unable to work, it can have a big impact on our health and wellbeing.

Getting a new job or being promoted, although positive, can be very stressful and affect our mental health. Whilst being out of work can affect our sense of identity and purpose, cause money worries and make it difficult to maintain self-confidence. Even retirement – which many of us look forward to – creates challenges as our status and financial security change, and we withdraw from social networks and activities linked to work.

## CHANGES IN OUR LIVES



Life's always changing, but sometimes we face a big or sudden change that's harder to deal with. Even if the change is expected and positive, we can still struggle with the effects.

Many young adults are excited by leaving home to go to university or college, but this change can also lead to challenges in developing an adequate support system away from home, managing finances, and dealing with educational pressure.

A pregnancy is a huge change in our lives, especially if it's a first baby. It can be an exciting time, but physical changes can result in poor sleep caused by discomfort, and hormonal changes can result in up and down moods.

Ageing happens to us all and later life can be full of amazing new experiences. But many of us find the changes hard to adjust to, and can feel more isolated.

## HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE



A long-term, life-limiting or life-threatening illness can make us feel sad, worried or angry. Whether physical or mental, ill health can affect work, relationships and the way we relate to other people.

Smoking, drug use, alcohol misuse and gambling can contribute to poor mental health. Equally, poor mental health can lead to increased substance misuse, smoking and addictive behaviours. This means we can find ourselves trapped in a vicious circle.

## EVENTS THAT HAPPEN TO US



Grief affects us in different ways. When we're bereaved, we're likely to feel waves of emotions as we come to terms with loss. These can include sadness, guilt, shock and anger, and are all normal after a death.

Traumatic experiences can be devastating when they happen, but also continue to have effects that last a long time. Children who witness or experience trauma when they're young are more likely to have problems as adults. Witnesses to traumatic events can also be strongly affected by them. Traumatic events can be things like serious accidents, natural or man-made disasters, or a traumatic childbirth.

Discrimination can come in many different forms, from racial to gender, and can have a big effect on our mental health.

## LONELINESS



Feeling lonely is something that can affect anyone, whether you're young or old, have a busy lifestyle or a quiet one. Loneliness may come and go, or occur on specific days or at certain times of year. It can also be continuous, where we feel lonely all or most of the time.

Loneliness can sometimes be triggered by life events – things like leaving school, moving house or having a baby. We might also find that we feel lonely because we have experienced something difficult that's hard to share with others.

Remember loneliness is not the same as being alone. You might feel lonely because you don't see or talk to others very often. Or it might be the case that even though you're surrounded by people, you feel that they don't understand you.

When we're feeling lonely it's often hard to talk to others about it. But sharing your feelings with another person is one of the most effective ways of improving your mental wellbeing.

A simple way to ease feelings of loneliness is to try and meet some new people. Think about something you're interested in. Could you take a class in it or join a group? Volunteering is also a good way to meet new people, and helping others can give us a real feeling of satisfaction.

Remember, when you're feeling lonely don't compare yourself to others. People are not always as they seem from the outside. Social media can sometimes make us feel like we're the only ones who are lonely but people often feel very different to how they portray themselves online.

Some of us are more deeply affected by these things than others. How we deal with things can also be affected by how well other parts of our life are going or how supported we feel.

Being aware of the things that can affect our mental health can make it easier to understand when you or someone you care about is struggling.

There are lots of things you can do and organisations that can help. You can find more information and advice on where to seek help on the possible causes section of the Every Mind Matters website.

# COMMON PROBLEMS

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The following section will cover the most common mental health problems; stress, low mood, anxiety and sleep trouble. If you would like more information on any of these mental health concerns, each is covered in more detail on the Every Mind Matters website.

While it is normal to feel stress, anxiety, have a low mood or trouble sleeping it is important to recognise when you might need more help. If you have been experiencing any of these feelings for a prolonged period of time or these feelings persist for several weeks, affecting your everyday life, you should consider further support.

You can find links to organisations that can help on the Every Mind Matters website. If these feelings are more intense and you are having thoughts about self-harm, visit our urgent support page.

# STRESS

## COMMON PROBLEMS

**Everyone feels stressed, a little bit of pressure can be motivating and help us to meet the demands of home, work and family life.**

Everyone feels stressed sometimes. Stress is caused by our body's inbuilt reaction to feeling threatened.

But sometimes, too much pressure can be unhealthy. When we feel pressure for too long, it can make us feel as though we're unable to cope. This is when stress stops being helpful and starts having a negative impact.

Stress causes a surge of hormones in your body. These hormones are released to enable you to deal with pressures or threats. You may notice that your heart pounds, your breathing

quickens, your muscles tense, and you start to sweat. This is sometimes known as the fight or flight response.

Once the pressure or threat has passed, our stress hormone levels will usually return to normal. However, if we are constantly experiencing this pressure, these hormones will remain in our bodies, leading to more intense feelings of stress.

# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

"Stress can be caused by negative life events, financial problems, pressure at work and relationship difficulties. One of the first things that you should do when you're experiencing stress is identify what the exact source of that stress is. Taking control of a situation when you're feeling stressed is really empowering and it can help you find a solution to the way you're feeling."



PROF. ANNA WHITTAKER





# SIGNS OF STRESS

## 1. EMOTIONALLY



How you may feel emotionally:

- Overwhelmed
- Anxious or fearful
- Irritable or wound up

## 2. MENTALLY



How you may feel mentally:

- Racing thoughts
- Constant worrying
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low self-esteem

## 3. PHYSICALLY



How you may feel physically:

- Headaches
- Muscle tension or pain
- Dizziness
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Eating too much or too little

## 4. BEHAVIOUR



How you may behave:

- Drinking or smoking more
- Snapping at people
- Avoiding things or people you are having problems with





“Stress is really unbearable. I felt physically tired and sleepy with no energy. It started when my marriage was breaking up. I felt really lonely and lost my energy, like no one was there for me. I had four kids, I had to feed them. How I could help myself out of this situation?”

## CHANDRA

“It was negative experiences as a child that have lead to mental health, wellbeing and stress problems in my adulthood. The kind of situations where I feel stressed would be things like meeting new people, going to new places, anything that’s unknown. When I’m stressed I tend to stay away from talking to other people, I become quiet, I’ll avoid meeting new people, I’ll avoid conversations that I don’t need to have.”



## DOMINIC

If you often become overwhelmed by stress, you may start to become anxious, irritable and have racing thoughts, which can have a negative impact on your day to day life. Sometimes it’s easy to identify what’s causing stress, and sometimes it’s less clear. Living with continuous stress can be extremely difficult.

If these feelings sound familiar and you feel they may be affecting your daily life, don’t leave things to build up. Prioritise your health and look at steps you can take to improve how you feel. Practising being more in the present moment is a really positive way to manage your stress and focus on what is going on around you. Find out more in the Things You Can Do section.

# ANXIETY

## COMMON PROBLEMS

Anxiety is our body's natural reaction to perceived danger, and can help people to assess and react to threatening situations more effectively – if there is a real danger this allows us to focus our attention and gives us a release of adrenaline enabling us to fight or run away. In these cases anxiety can push us to perform our best but for many it is a difficult feeling.

We all have days where we feel worried or anxious. Sometimes anxiety kicks in before a job interview, an important event or even something positive like a wedding or moving house.

Anxiety can become difficult to manage when these feelings are disproportionate to the risk situation being faced. For some, anxiety can start to occur more often, last longer, or become more intense.

Anxiety can be triggered by all sorts of different situations in our lives. We might be having problems in our families or with our relationships, there

might be difficulties at work, we might have a big test or exam coming up and we're feeling really nervous and under prepared and that's very normal and the anxiety response can actually help us to focus.

There are many different ways anxiety presents itself. It can make us feel restless, overly worried, or filled with a sense of dread. Anxiety can affect you both physically and mentally. Experience of anxiety varies from person to person. Some people have only one or two signs of anxiety, while others have many more. Some people may have personalities that make them prone to worrying, feeling anxious or low.

It's important to recognise triggers that cause us to experience poor mental health as well as understanding things we can do to help us feel better. Then we can put an action plan in place to take steps each day to improve our mental health, so that we're better prepared to tackle difficult situations in the future.

# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

“Anxiety can affect the way that we behave and also affect our thoughts and our feelings. Some of the signs of anxiety might include us feeling restless or worried or anxious or having a sense of dread. Other signs of anxiety might include things like us feeling our heart beating in our chest as if we’re having palpitations or struggling to catch our breath, being short of breath, or shaking or having sweaty hands. Sometimes people might feel sick or even be sick.

It can also affect the way we behave and so we might find that we’re avoiding certain situations or that we’re putting off doing certain things that make us anxious and in the long term that will make our anxiety worse. Unhelpful thoughts are one of the main causes of anxiety, what’s important to realise is that we can all take control of our thoughts and change the way that we feel about them.”



**DR. MAX PEMBERTON**



"When I'm feeling anxious I sometimes get a stress headache. I get butterflies in my stomach. It's that fear: 'Is something going to happen to me? Is something going to happen to my family?' and you can't make sense of it. It used to be really debilitating to the point where I would just stay at home because you feel safe at home."



JUDE



"It could be something as little as just, me worrying that I wouldn't get somewhere on time, and I'd get really anxious. With anxiety, I know something is not really that much of a big deal but I run through it a hundred times."

CHER

## IF YOU HAVE **ANXIETY** YOU MAY ALSO FEEL:

- Easily irritated
- Constantly "on edge"
- Have difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Find you are frequently seeking reassurance from others about decisions you have made

If these feelings are familiar you may be experiencing anxiety. A positive first step to managing anxiety is recognising the thoughts which are reinforcing our anxiety. Reframing unhelpful thoughts is one of the ways you can manage anxiety. This and other methods are discussed fully in the Things You Can Do section.

# SOME OF THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY ARE:

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Difficulty falling or staying asleep

☐

Muscle aches & tension

☐

Pins and needles

☐

Excessive sweating

☐

Trembling or shaking

☐

Stomach ache

☐

Shortness of breath

☐

Heart palpitations

☐

Dry mouth

☐

Feeling sick

☐

Headaches

☐

Tiredness

☐

Dizziness

☐



# LOW MOOD

## COMMON PROBLEMS

**Feeling low is a part of all of our lives at some stage. Everyone feels upset, worried or angry from time to time.**

Low mood can be brought on by many things. It could be a difficult life event, like a bereavement or relationship breakdown. Or it could be an ongoing worry like money problems or the pressure of taking care of our children.

Sometimes we feel low for no apparent reason. Having a low mood can make us feel sad, irritable, or worried as well as affecting our self-esteem. It can make it more difficult to concentrate, do things we need to do or enjoy doing, like seeing friends or even leaving the house. We may feel tired a lot of the time and not get enjoyment out of things we previously liked to do. We can also feel angry, frustrated or hopeless. Sometimes it affects our appetite and we may comfort eat or in some cases lose interest in food.

Generally these feelings are manageable and do pass but for some of us our low mood doesn't shift, making it harder to live our everyday lives.

It might be that we need to resolve a difficult situation or talk to someone about how we're feeling. Perhaps we need to improve our activity levels or get more sleep. These small changes can make a big difference.

When we have low mood it's quite common to have self-attacking thoughts. These can include feeling worthless or hopeless. Sometimes these automatic thoughts can make us dislike ourselves and this makes us feel even lower in mood.

# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

"Low mood can become persistent and that's when it leads to difficulties. When people are unable to think optimistically about their lives and their futures but become preoccupied by their low mood. Low mood consists of sadness or feeling depressed, worthless or hopeless. It can involve negative thinking and being pessimistic about one's future and about one's life situation. You may become isolated and more anxious and irritable and therefore it can effect relationships."



**PROF. KAMALDEEP BHUI**



# A LOW MOOD CAN INCLUDE



Worrying



Hopelessness



Low  
self-esteem



Tiredness



Lack of  
concentration



Pessimism



Anxiety



Sadness



Comfort eating/  
loss of appetite



Anger





“If I’m in a bad mood I won’t go to an event or an occasion because I don’t want to bring everyone else’s mood down with me. So I just stay away. The community that I grew up in you don’t really talk about mental health.”

**RICHARD**

“I’d say I have probably had it since I was a teenager. You just take it as normality, but I can now look back retrospectively and realise that it was happening for months at a time. And it’s easy to convince yourself how bad the world is when it feels like that at the time.”



**ASHLEY**

## FIND OUT MORE

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There are a number of ways of managing low mood. Talking to someone about how we’re feeling, can be really beneficial. It may be useful to read the Connecting With Others section of this eBook or watching some of the modules on Every Mind Matters website.

# SLEEP

## PROBLEMS

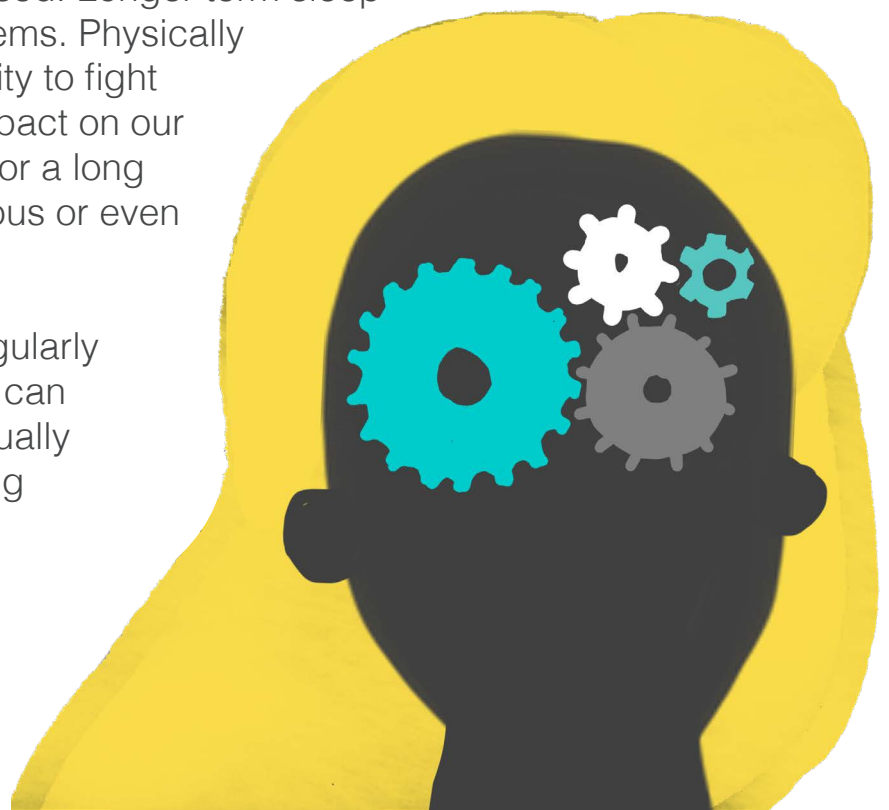
### COMMON PROBLEMS

**Good sleep is really important for our health. When we sleep our brains are actually working overtime to recover from the previous day.**

We need sleep to give our bodies rest and to improve our mental and physical health. The better our sleep, the better our energy levels, mood and ability to concentrate during the day. All of us at some time will find our sleep might not be as good as we would want it to be. We're all going to have nights when we have trouble falling asleep or have interrupted sleep.

When a person regularly experiences problems getting to sleep, or staying asleep, it can cause extreme tiredness and make usually manageable tasks harder. If we don't get enough sleep, our body clock, which helps us keep to a 24-hour rhythm, may become confused. Longer term sleep deprivation can cause bigger problems. Physically it can have a real impact on our ability to fight infection. Mentally it can have an impact on our mood and if our sleep is really bad for a long period of time we can become anxious or even depressed.

If we experience sleep problems regularly this is known as insomnia. Insomnia can last for months or even years but usually improves if you change your sleeping habits.



# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

“There are a number of common causes of sleep problems and three categories. First of all the emotional area: anxiety, low mood, stress. Then the second area is our bedroom environment. It might not be the ideal place to sleep because it could be too hot, not have enough ventilation or be too bright. And then the third area is lifestyle. Drinking too much coffee or some of the medications that we’ve got could be affecting our sleep. Or it could be that there are other things that are going on in our lives, like shift work for example.”



PROF. COLIN ESPIE

“I had a few issues at work, few issues in my personal life and it started to affect my sleep. I’ve been in the fire service now for 28 years. My shift pattern was quite steady but then I went off work sick and it changed. I would find it hard to get to sleep, because lots of things were stirring over in my mind. If I did get to sleep I then had a disturbed sleep so I would wake up numerous times during the night and find it hard to get back to sleep again.”



KEVIN



“About eight years ago I was a student midwife and I was also a single mother. As a student midwife you have a certain amount of hours that you have to do and you end up being up until midnight or later. You’re so tired and you know you want to sleep but it becomes a cycle. Then you get to that point where you kind of dread it – going to bed.”

ALICE

## YOU MAY HAVE SLEEP PROBLEMS IF YOU :



Find it difficult to sleep



Lie awake for long periods at night



Wake up several times during the night



Wake up early in the morning and are not able to get back to sleep



Not feel refreshed when you get up and are tired during the day



Feel tired and irritable during the day and have difficulty concentrating

Having trouble sleeping can be very difficult but you can take lots of steps to try and sleep better. Try getting a sleep routine by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. The sleeping better section in Things You Can Do has lots of tips on how to get better sleep.

# THINGS YOU CAN DO

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There is always something we can do to look after our mental health and wellbeing. The following sections will cover some of the things you can do to help manage your stress, anxiety, low mood or sleep troubles and your general wellbeing. In this section we will look at:

**Reframing Unhelpful Thoughts**

**Being In The Present**

**Sleeping Better**

**Connecting With Others**

**Healthy Living**

# REFRAMING UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

Changing the way we think and behave – from an unhelpful or negative cycle to a more helpful or realistic way of thinking – can help all of us improve our mental health and wellbeing.

We often end up thinking in these unhelpful ways because of the things that happen to us. When dealing with difficult problems such as the break up of a relationship, losing your job or struggling with debt, it's completely understandable to feel low or anxious.

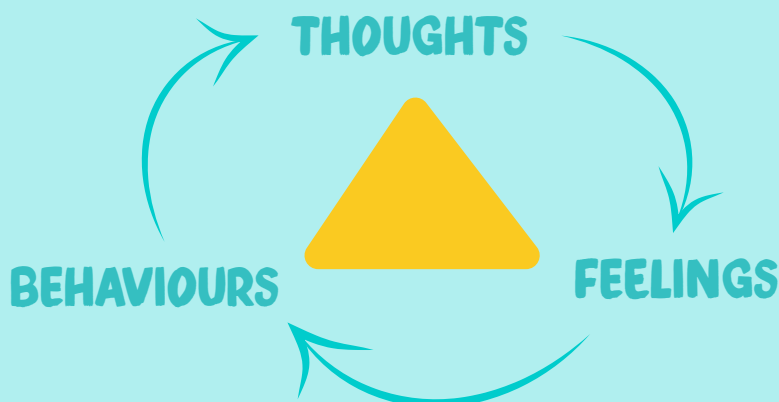
But the way we think, behave and feel are all linked. Because thoughts, feelings and behaviours continually affect each other, we can develop negative patterns of thoughts or behaviours, which can become a vicious cycle.

For example, you might think people at a party are ignoring you. You feel embarrassed and self-conscious so you decide to leave and go home.

Rather than letting this become a vicious cycle - catch your negative thoughts and try looking at them in a different, more positive way.

Rather than thinking that the people at the party are ignoring you, consider instead that they just don't know you very well, and that by staying and talking to people, you'll get to know them better.

By catching the thought, checking it and changing it, you can help break the negative cycle.



# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

"What's important is to recognise when we might be caught in a negative cycle and to realise that we can do something about it. We can change the way we think and create more helpful cycles that make us feel good about ourselves and others, and help us achieve our goals in life."



**DR. RANGAN CHATTERJEE**



**DOMINIC**

"I think it's important for me to firstly recognise what my thought patterns are. If they're negative or unhealthy I need to look at them in a different way to challenge them."

"Something else I do is write down what I'm grateful for and what I'm worried about and when you weigh up the two together, what you're worried about seems really small compared to what you are grateful for."



**CHER**



# ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO REFRAME UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS:

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Sometimes you will be able to change the thought to a positive one, but don't worry when at other times you can't. There are no right or wrong answers it's about learning to think more flexibly.

Remember to try and be kind to yourself. Imagine what you would say to a friend who was thinking the same way.

There are many sources of support available to help you, including books from the Reading Well list at your local library and apps.

These principles are explored more in a type of therapy called CBT. If you want to learn more about this, search for CBT on NHS Choices.





**If you are experiencing unhelpful thoughts, try asking the following questions:**

**1.**

**Am I focusing just on the bad things?**

e.g. "I had a really bad day yesterday" ignoring that this followed a few good days.

**2.**

**Am I exaggerating?**

e.g. "Everything is bound to go wrong, it always does."

**3.**

**Am I being unrealistic about how bad the consequences of something would be?**

e.g. "It might not be as bad as I think?"

**4.**

**Am I jumping to conclusions?**

e.g. "I have a pain in my chest therefore it must be my heart."

**5.**

**Do I have information that supports my negative thought or not? And how likely is it?**

# BEING IN THE PRESENT

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

Research shows that focusing on the present moment can help improve your mental health and alleviate negative thoughts and feelings.

Becoming aware of thoughts, feelings, sensations and our experience of the world around us can positively influence how we feel - both mentally and physically. Some people call this being more mindful.

In mindfulness, we learn to focus on what is happening right now rather than focusing on regrets about past events or anxieties about the future.

Mindfulness can be a way to help us enjoy life more and understand ourselves better.

Techniques such as mindful breathing can be really helpful in reducing stress, anxiety and in improving a low mood. However they may not be helpful for those experiencing more severe depression or social anxiety. If you're experiencing social anxiety for example, it might be more helpful to work on building your confidence in those situations you wish to avoid.



# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

“Some people can find it very difficult to practice mindfulness and let go of their worries. Mindfulness isn't about making these thoughts go away, but ‘observing’ them with an open, curious and non-judgemental attitude and letting them pass. Being mindful isn’t all about quiet, focused time. We can be more mindful by noticing and accepting our experience of the things around us; like the things we see on a walk to the shops or the trees in the park, listening into to the sounds as we hear them.”



**DR. RANGAN CHATTERJEE**

## **BREATHING WITH MINDFULNESS**

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Focusing on our breathing is an important part of mindfulness. We don't generally notice but our breathing is often shallow and relatively fast. By focusing on our breathing, we become aware of the mind's tendency to wander – often to unhelpful thoughts. By practising mindful breathing we bring ourselves back to the present moment rather than focusing on our worries.

# BREATHING EXERCISE

## 1. TIMER



First set a timer for two minutes

## 2. INHALE



Then take a deep breath in through the nose and then slowly breathe out through the mouth

## 3. RELAX



Focus on your breathing and try slowing down more with each breath. Relax your shoulders and your neck. Keep doing this until the timer finishes

"Sometimes meditation can help in terms of just focusing on what you actually want and clearing your mind. It's one of the hardest things to actually do, to quieten the mind and just not let these wild thoughts drift in."



**RICHARD**



"When you meditate you really are focusing on the present. You're listening to this calming music and whoever it is that's speaking in a soothing voice and you've got to really concentrate on what's happening there and now."

**JUDE**

## **FIND OUT MORE...**

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If you feel like finding out more and learning some techniques, there are audio guides or apps that can help. The Reading Well books are also available at most local libraries and include free books on mindfulness.

You could even try taking a course or joining a group to help you learn the techniques. There are usually local sessions across the country, if you search online.

# SLEEPING

BETTER

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

Good quality sleep is associated with increased strength, stamina and energy - both physically and mentally. It is also associated with an increased ability to learn, remember, organise our lives and manage stress.

Most of the time sleep problems will sort themselves out within a month or two. However, if the problems don't go away on their own, there are a number of

steps we can take to help improve our sleep.

Keeping to regular sleep hours can re-programme the body to sleep better. This means going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time every day. Try to avoid napping, particularly in the afternoon, as this can make it more difficult to get to sleep at night.

## FIND OUT MORE...

Apps and self-help books can also help us to monitor and improve our sleep. You can find NHS-endorsed books on sleep in your local library – just ask for the Reading Well books. Links to apps can be found in the Apps section of the One You website.

Try some of these self-help actions and if they don't work and you've really been struggling with your sleep for weeks and months then maybe you should seek further help.



# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

“It’s important to think about when is the best time for us to sleep and to wake. Don’t be frightened to experiment with that. Once you’ve got those timings in your mind, try to get them into a good habit. So that becomes your regular schedule. It really helps if you’re on a wind-down curve, so if you’ve got loose ends, things you’re thinking through, then write them down, think about them tomorrow, put them to rest.”



PROF. COLIN ESPIE



# ACTIONS TO MANAGE SLEEP PROBLEMS:

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**Have a really good night time routine where you allow yourself to relax and wind down. Create a restful sleeping environment.**

- Temperature, lighting and noise should be controlled to create an environment that helps you to fall and stay asleep.
- If you tend to lie in bed thinking about everything you have to do tomorrow, set aside time before you go to sleep to make notes and plans for the next day. This will help to put your mind at rest.
- Avoid too much stimulus before bed. It can be helpful not to use phones, tablets, computers or TVs for an hour before bed to help you wind down.
- Minimising other electronics in the bedroom will also help with sleep by minimising light. Charging electronics in the bedroom is fine but keeping them out of reach will reduce the temptation to use them before bed and during the night.
- Being more active can help relieve some of the tension built up over the day and help you sleep. Walking, swimming or yoga are great ways to exercise and find relaxation.
- Try not to over-indulge in food, alcohol or cigarettes late at night. Alcohol may help you to fall asleep initially, but it will disrupt your sleep later on in the night and may lead to poor quality sleep.
- A warm bath about two hours before bedtime is also beneficial. The temperature changes that happen in your body after the bath mirror that of going to sleep. This will help you to drop off more quickly.





“You’ve got to turn away from the TV, find something else like reading a book. You’ve got to make your bedroom your den of loveliness and softness. You’ve got to remove anything that over stimulates you, anything that makes you unhappy. Only have things in your room that make you feel good about you. When you go to bed and your head begins running through things, have a notepad beside the bed and make a list so you no longer have them going through your head.”

**ALICE**

“One of the things that I have found helped me sleep was getting a routine. Finding things that relaxed me also helped, like reading a book, talking to others or a warm drink before going to bed. I think the thing that helped me the most however was just talking to lots of different people. I wasn’t secretive about it at all. If I can openly come out and say ‘look, I’ve got an issue’, hopefully it will help other people.”



**KEVIN**

## FIND OUT MORE

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Try some of these self-help actions and if they don’t work and you’ve really been struggling with your sleep for months then maybe you should seek further help by visiting the further support page of the Every Mind Matters website.

# CONNECTING

## THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH OTHERS

People who are socially connected to their family, friends or community report higher levels of wellbeing and are less likely to experience mental and physical health problems.

But it's often when we are most in need of support that we tend to isolate ourselves. It's not always about just talking through problems (although that can help if you are ready). Having contact with other people works by

protecting us even if we're not talking about what's on our mind. It's the act of having contact, especially positive contact and doing something we enjoy, which brings us benefits.

Staying connected with others is important at all times in our lives, not just if we're feeling low, stressed or anxious. Simply talking to somebody, even if that's just picking up the phone, can help you feel more connected.



# OUR EXPERT SAYS...

"Social contact is good for your mental health - even if you don't feel like engaging with other people when you're low or anxious. Think about ways you can connect with those close to you or within your local community. Some people like to have a wide circle of friends, but some prefer to have a small group. It's not about how many people are in your social network but the positive effect of contact with others. Without connecting with others, it's easy to become lonely. Loneliness can affect anyone, young and old, and people can become lonely at any time in their lives, sometimes through life events – like leaving school or work, moving house, or having a baby."



**DR. RANGAN CHATTERJEE**



"To help me manage things, I spoke to people about it. That was a big thing for me because I didn't really want to go and speak to people, but it helps you to get that reassurance that someone is there for you."

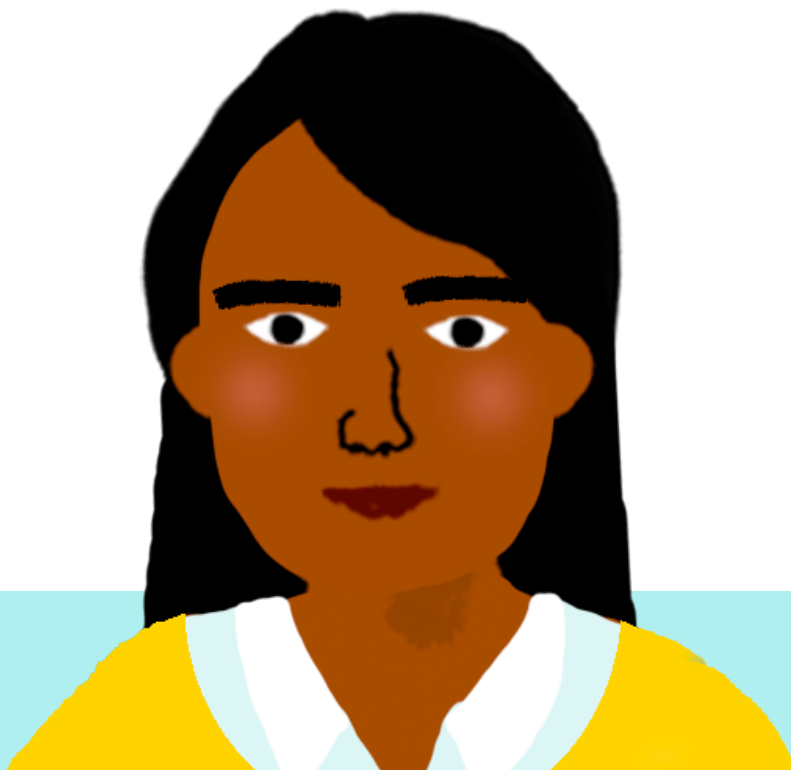
# CONNECT WITH OTHERS

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There are three main ways we can **CONNECT** with others:

- Day to day socialising - calls, texts, meeting up for food and drinks etc.
- Helping and giving time to others, such as volunteering or supporting a friend or neighbour.
- Speaking to a trusted friend or family member or even a professional or helpline if you want support with something that's on your mind.





“With the support of my friends and my family I was able to offload how I was feeling so I had an escape route.”

**KIM**

“It’s good to talk and once you open up a little bit, people actually are really, really helpful. You know, we’re all here to help each other.”



**JUDE**



“When Chris and I get together, it’s not only music but also the social side. Because there is only two of us we find that we actually talk about things other than music. It gives us a chance to talk about our lives and how we’re feeling about things.”

**DOMINIC**

# THINGS YOU CAN DO TO BE MORE SOCIALLY CONNECTED

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## 1. ARRANGE A PLAY DATE

If you have children, can you arrange a play date where you get to connect with other people as well as the kids?



## 2. MAKE PLANS

Make a plan to pick up the phone to someone you've not spoken to for a while and arrange to meet.





### 3. CONNECTING OUTDOORS

There is really good evidence that being in the outdoors and in green spaces is good for our mental health. This can be even more beneficial if you spend time with a friend. Can you find a park or green space near you and make a plan to go for a short walk this week?

### 4. VOLUNTEERING

Helping others with our time or skills is proven to be a good way to improve our mental health and wellbeing. Find something you're interested in or a local venture that's close to your heart and get in touch to see if they need any help.



### 5. FRIENDS & FAMILY

Can you find time to be with friends or family? If so, this week, invite them to visit or arrange to meet or have a phone call or skype chat.



# HEALTHY

## LIVING

### THINGS YOU CAN DO

## Living healthily can really help you look after your mental health and wellbeing.

Exercising, getting enough sleep, quitting smoking, cutting down on alcohol or simply eating your five a day can all make a huge difference to how you feel.

It can be tempting to drink and smoke more when we are struggling, or drink more caffeinated drinks to counteract tiredness.

However, this is likely to cause more problems than it solves, especially in the long term.

Caffeine, alcohol and smoking can all add to problems with our moods and our sleep.

Quitting smoking is one of the very best things you can do to improve your physical and mental health. It'll mean you can breathe easier, be more active, and save money.

What you eat, and how much, is so important for your physical health, which has a big impact on your mental health. Try and eat a healthy balanced diet and avoid too many foods that are high in sugar or fat.

A walk during your lunch break or swimming once or twice a week can really help lift your mood. Pick something you enjoy and that works with your life and ability.

# ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO LIVE MORE HEALTHILY

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PHYSICAL EXERCISE



EATING HEALTHILY



CUT BACK ON  
ALCOHOL & CAFFEINE



QUIT SMOKING

# OUR EXPERT SAYS...



"You don't need to join a gym or spend money to be physically active – just making small changes in day-to-day life is a great start. For example, get off the bus a stop early, take the stairs or pick up your pace when you're out and about."

**DR. RANGAN CHATTERJEE**

"I think helping other people is useful to me. I find that really useful because I've needed help from other people in my life and helping others, I think, is just a natural part of being a human being."



**DOMINIC**



"It's just simple things, getting up in the morning, taking the dog for a walk. You've just got to do what's good for you. With regards to my anxiety these days, it will always be with me, but it doesn't stop me doing as many things as it used to. I try and think of the bigger picture, and just try to drive my thoughts in a positive direction."



## FIND OUT MORE

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For more ideas on how to live healthily, check out the One You website, which has lots of ideas for improving your physical health. You can also try the Active 10 or Couch to 5k apps to help you get more active, you can find these in the action planing tool on the Every Mind Matters website.

# ACTION

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## PLANNING

There are lots of things you can do to keep your **MIND** healthy and you can start by creating your own personalised **ACTION PLAN**.

The Action Plan takes everything you've read here and puts them into easy, bite-sized steps to help you keep on top of your mental health.

Evidence shows that action planning makes us significantly more likely to achieve a goal. When we reach a goal we gain a sense of achievement, which in itself can improve our mental health.

Try selecting just two or three goals initially. We're all different so it's important to try them out and see what works for you. Start small and pick the things you like the sound of. Remember we get the best results doing something we enjoy. Don't worry if you can't manage everything. Just keep at it.

# BE MORE ACTIVE

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- ☐ Aim for a 10 minute walk every day
- ☐ Download the Active 10 app
- ☐ Get off the bus/train a stop earlier and walk
- ☐ Choose the stairs when possible
- ☐ Join a walking club or keep fit class
- ☐ Find out about my local community Parkrun
- ☐ Download the Couch to 5K app
- ☐ Try some gardening



# STAY

# CONNECTED

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- ☐ Make time to chat with a friend each week
- ☐ Plan some quality time with my family or friends each week
- ☐ Find out about any community groups that I can join in my local area
- ☐ Search online for interest groups near me
- ☐ Look at University of the Third Age (U3A) and learn about a subject that interests you
- ☐ Volunteer in my community
- ☐ Talk to someone I trust about how I'm feeling
- ☐ Call a helpline to talk about how I'm feeling





# REFRAMING

# UNHELPFUL

## THOUGHTS

- ☐ Get tips on how to reframe unhelpful thoughts, try the exercise on the Every Mind Matters website
- ☐ Listen to an NHS audio guide
- ☐ Download the CatchIt app
- ☐ Try a free online course on reframing unhelpful thoughts
- ☐ Download the Feeling Good app
- ☐ Try a Reading Well book
- ☐ Learn more about Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)



# BEING IN THE PRESENT

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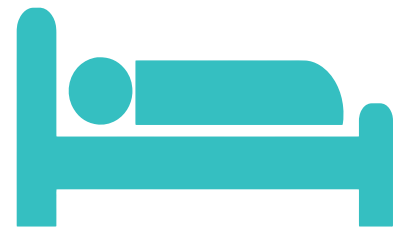
- ☐ Try a mindful breathing exercise
- ☐ Listen to an audio guide on mindfulness
- ☐ Try Tai Chi
- ☐ Have a go at yoga
- ☐ Try a course or join a group to learn mindfulness or meditation
- ☐ Try a Reading Well book
- ☐ Try a relaxation technique



# GET GOOD SLEEP

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- ☐ Get tips on improving sleep with the Every Mind Matters ‘Sleeping Better’ video
- ☐ Reduce my daily dose of caffeine, and cut out caffeine before bedtime
- ☐ Avoid alcohol or smoking on nights when I need to sleep well
- ☐ Stop looking at my devices an hour before bedtime
- ☐ Face my clock away from my bed to stop clockwatching
- ☐ Keep a sleep diary
- ☐ Write down a list of my worries before I go to bed
- ☐ Do something active every day
- ☐ Keep regular sleep hours
- ☐ Download the Pzizz app

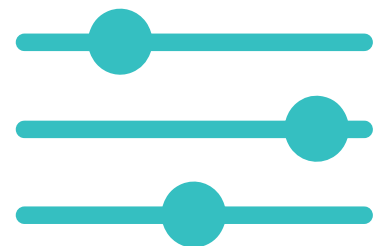


# TAKE

# CONTROL

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- ☐ Prepare for the day ahead before I go to bed
- ☐ Take regular breaks each day
- ☐ Split big tasks into small chunks to make them more manageable
- ☐ Take time each day to reflect on what went well



# HEALTHY LIVING

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- ☐ Download the Active 10 app
- ☐ Download the One You Easy Meals app
- ☐ Drink less alcohol
- ☐ Set some time aside to do something I enjoy
- ☐ Give up smoking
- ☐ Reduce my daily intake of caffeine
- ☐ Cut out recreational drugs



# TAKE ACTION ON YOUR WORRIES

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- ☐ Keep a diary to help me see what is affecting my mood
- ☐ Spend some time writing down the things I am worried about
- ☐ Pick a thing I am worried about and identify a small action I can take to help improve things
- ☐ Find out more about the issues that are affecting me
- ☐ Gradually try facing my worries



# DO SOMETHING FOR YOURSELF

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- ☐ Try a new hobby or learn a new skill
- ☐ Make time to do something I enjoy this week
- ☐ Reward myself when I achieve things
- ☐ Download the Feeling Good app
- ☐ Research local events to find interesting activities
- ☐ Try a relaxation technique





# GET HELP AND SUPPORT

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- ☐ Complete the NHS mood self-assessment quiz to better understand how I am feeling
- ☐ Ask for support from organisations that can help me
- ☐ Borrow a Reading Well library book
- ☐ Listen to a mood-boosting audio guide from the NHS
- ☐ Check out mental health helplines and support groups
- ☐ Find NHS psychological therapies services (IAPT)



# FIND OUT MORE

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Find out why these actions can support your mental health and wellbeing:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-mind/why-make-a-plan/>

You can create a digital Action Plan on the Every Mind Matters website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/for-your-mind/action-plan/>