

# Be WELL

## Your monthly wellbeing bulletin

### This months focus - looking after your mental health

Feeling mentally healthy is a state of wellbeing in which we realise our own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and are able to make a contribution to the community that we live and work in.

Mental wellbeing is about:

- How we feel about ourselves
- How we feel about others
- How we are able to meet the demands of life

#### Anxiety and worry are natural and controllable!

Almost everyone has experienced anxiety at some time in their lives; and to do so is not only natural, but probably quite sensible too. In some sense, the feeling of anxiety is like a signal to us that we need to take action – anxiety can guide us to behave in a way that is in our best interests.

However, anxiety can also become unhelpful and instead of protecting us it can imprison us – it stops us from doing what we would like to do and living our life fully.

The goal is not to live an anxiety free life – for one thing, nobody ever does; and for another, anxiety can be useful – but to live your life with acceptable levels of anxiety in a full and rich way.



#### Top tips to enhance your mental wellbeing

- Try to be more flexible in your thinking
- Be more assertive
- Deal with problems in a timely fashion
- Take time out to think about your life
- Look after yourself
- Exercise more
- Eat a little more healthily
- Gave fun

#### Useful links

- Anxiety UK
- Big White Wall
- CALM: Campaign Against Living Miserably
- Depression Alliance
- Family Lives: support and advice
- Living Life to the Full
- Mental Health Foundation
- Mind
- Money Advice Service: help with debt
- Rethink Mental Illness

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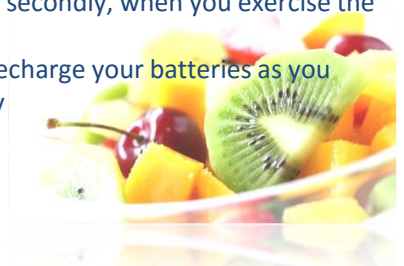
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### Boosting your resilience

Physical resilience is what we need to keep on going however tough the pressures are. Without the right levels of energy and stamina it is very difficult to consistently employ the mental coping skills and strategies you use to deal with stressful or high pressured situations.

- **Look after your body** – When stressed we tend to reach for quick fixes – stimulants like coffee or foods high in fat or sugar. But this diet compounds the problem. Chocolate and coffee give you an initial boost, but then leaves you weary. Salty crisps dehydrate the body and brain and bring on fatigue. High fat meals raise stress hormones and keep them high.
- **Boost your immune system** – To beat stress you need a strong body. That means a powerful immune system boosted by plenty of vitamins and minerals. The best source is food rather than supplements, so eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables and if you need to snack during the day, try pumpkin or sunflower seeds and fruit.
- **Eat a rainbow** – There are 350,000 different forms of edible plants on this planet. How many do you eat in a week? Variety is essential as different types and colours of food contain different vitamins and minerals; so eat a rainbow. Variety is actually good for you as your body can get stressed by trying to break down the same food time and time again.
- **Drink water** – If you want to deal with stress, drink water. The brain can only operate effectively if its cells are properly hydrated. Being properly hydrated will therefore improve your concentration, focus and mood and help you to cope better with stressful situations. A good rule is to take a few sips every 15 minutes.
- **Avoid stimulants** – Caffeine stays in the body for six hours before it starts to deplete, all the time triggering the release of stress hormones (adrenaline). Sugar, nicotine and alcohol also stimulate adrenaline – a hormone preparing you for fight or flight. Chocolate contains sugar and caffeine – a double hit!
- **Use a relaxation technique** – Stress makes your heart beat faster and your breathing become shallow. You can reverse that process through deep breathing, stretching or physical activity.
- **Get active** – Physical activity and exercise is a great stress buster on two levels. Firstly, exercise gets rid of the harmful adrenaline that is produced when you get stressed; and secondly, when you exercise the brain also releases endorphins which are feel good hormones.
- **Get your sleep** – Good quality sleep is the only way you can properly recharge your batteries as you can't deal with stressful situations well if you're 'running on half empty'



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### Breathing techniques

Our breathing patterns vary depending on our needs and emotional state. When relaxed we breathe deeply, quietly and evenly. When under pressure we breathe shallow and fast, only using the top of our lungs (known as hyperventilation or over breathing).

#### Calming breathing

- Position yourself in a quiet environment at home or work
- Make sure the air temperature is just right
- Sit comfortably in a chair or relaxed position
- Drop your shoulders naturally, so that your lungs can fully expand
- Gently lift your head and fix your eyes straight ahead of you; don't strain
- Take 5 slow steady breaths
- Begin 'Calming Breathing' by breathing in easily and gently to the count of 3, breathing out to the same count
- This breathing should not be noticeable to others, only your calmness should be visible
- Try to recognise signs of stress and identify situations that are stressful.

The earlier that you use calming breathing the more effective it will be



### Be assertive

Body language can help you to improve your assertive behaviour:

- Eye contact and facial expression: maintain direct eye contact; appear interested and alert, but not angry
- Posture: stand or sit erect, possibly leaning forward slightly. Don't fold arms across chest
- Distance and contact: stand or sit at a normal conversational distance from the other
- Gestures: use relaxed, conversational gestures
- Voice: use a factual, not emotional tone of voice. Sound determined and full of conviction, but not overbearing

## Be mindful...

Take a couple of minutes to notice your breathing.  
Notice your surroundings - look up and look around  
When you are eating, notice the colour, texture and taste of the food.