

Ways to wellbeing



Tips on emotional, mental and
physical wellness for challenging times

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is taking a look at our overall satisfaction and happiness with our lives. This includes our physical, emotional, mental and even social health. It is the 'big picture' of how we feel and function on a personal and social level.

Wellbeing takes many things into consideration which may contribute to our emotional and psychological distress. In being sensitive to our wellbeing, we look at wider personal and social factors such as diet, sleep, recreation and relaxation, spirituality or life-meaning, and socialisation.

There is no one way to measure our wellbeing, and so there is no particular method fit for all. Wellbeing is unique for each individual and requires us to reflect on the imbalances in our own lives.

How this leaflet can help

Although our wellbeing is unique to us, this leaflet will give you tips and inspiration to continue and develop your own personal wellbeing. As such, some of the activities in this leaflet may not be suitable for you. Do not feel disheartened, but instead experiment, explore and observe their effects. Their benefits may not be immediately clear but may require a little persistence and patience. It is also recommended that you do not try too much too soon. Take your time.

We wish you all the best in your wellbeing journey.

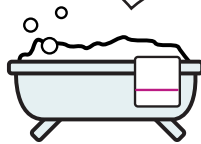
Sleep

Most of us know the importance of getting a 'good night's sleep'. Lack of sleep can significantly impact upon our immune system, double our chances of developing cancer, increase our risk of Alzheimer's, disrupt our blood sugar levels, and even lead to cardiovascular disease. Below are 5 tips on how to increase your chances of a good night's sleep and maintain a healthy sleep-pattern.



1. Stick to a pattern

Our bodies find it very difficult to readjust to changes in our sleep-pattern and an extra snooze on a weekend doesn't fully make up for lost hours during the week. It is important that we stick to a schedule. Try and avoid letting activities encroach upon your bedtime. Aim to make time for much-loved hobbies during the day and on the weekend. It will make it easier to rise early when we go to bed at a healthy hour.



2. Unwind before bed

Try to avoid overstimulation before going to bed. Try incorporating a relaxing activity into your bedtime routine such as a hot bath, a warm drink (not caffeinated or alcoholic), listening to soft music, or reading. This can help your mind to slow down and signal to your body that it's almost time for sleep.



3. Exercise during the day

Doing exercise during the day can help to burn off some of that unwanted energy that may stop you from 'shutting off' at night. Thirty-minutes of exercise is recommended. Try anything from a stroll in the woods, to weightlifting, running or swimming. Commit to your level of fitness and to what is comfortable for you.

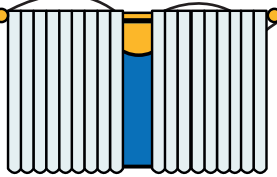
4. Food and drink

Don't eat or drink too much before going to bed. A light snack is okay, but too much can cause indigestion and frequent trips to the toilet. Avoid heavy alcohol intake before sleep. A night-cap may help relaxation, but heavy drinking inhibits rapid eye movement (REM) which ensures a truly restorative sleep. Also avoid caffeine and even nicotine. Both are stimulants and their effects can take several hours to wear off.



5. Environment

A dark, cool bedroom is an optimal condition for sleeping comfort. Avoid gadgets and distractions in the bedroom...even a ticking clock can be a nuisance! Try to find a mattress, pillow, and duvet that works for you.

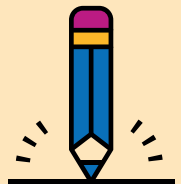


Thoughts and emotions

Dealing with our thoughts and emotions is a very challenging task. They seem to have a life of their own. Below are some small things you can do to tame your buzzing thoughts and soothe your whirling feelings.

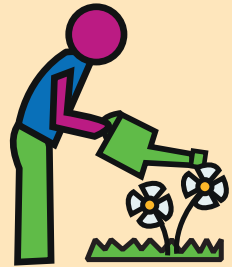
Reflect and record

Thought and mood diaries are a great way to gain perspective on your inner turmoil. It can help to alleviate their unpredictable, overwhelming and chaotic nature. You can use a piece of paper, a journal, laptop or voice recorder. Ask yourself where you were and what you were doing. What were your thoughts and feelings? Did you have any sensations? What did these thoughts and feelings mean to you?



Disengage

Your thoughts can be like a bully and often the best course of action is not to play their game. Try engaging in a soothing activity or one that occupies your attention. Try gardening, going for a run, speaking to a friend, or playing video-games. You could even try creating an 'emergency box' for times of distress and stash it with your favourite items such as photos, treats, music, and so on. If in doubt, focus on your breath. Your breath is always with you no matter where you are and is an amazing focal-point for mindfulness. Do whatever works for you.



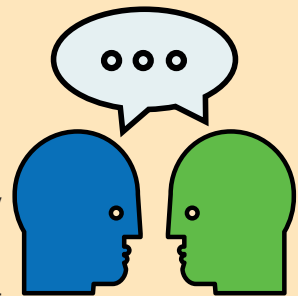
Acceptance

Observation can be a powerful tool. It can help us to distance ourselves from our thoughts and feelings, allowing us to become aware of them, accept them, and let them go. We can't control our thoughts and feelings no matter how hard we try. Rather than judging your thoughts and feelings and labelling them as wanted or unwanted, try instead to observe them with curiosity, taking note of how they 'appear' to you. Treating them like clouds, become aware of their 'shape and form' and let them drift away.



Socialise and normalise

When we hear our thoughts and feelings reflected in the experiences of others, this can be an incredible relief in showing us that we are not the only ones. Maybe try speaking to someone that you can trust over a cup of coffee or on the phone. There are many online mental health social platforms, counselling services, and forums with likeminded individuals and communities who are willing to share and hear about others' experiences - also providing the option for anonymity. Remember, you are not alone. Treating them like clouds, become aware of their 'shape and form' and let them drift away.



Connecting with others

Spending time with like-minded people such as friends, family, or our community, can help provide the opportunity to share and express our thoughts and feelings, and dissolve feelings of loneliness



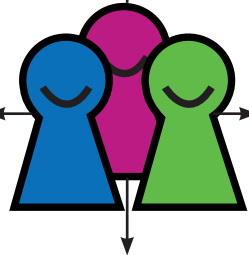
Why not try a new group?
Fitness, hobby, skills, and reservation groups are great ways to meet new people and reconnect with our community.



Our developing digital age means that there are expanding ways in which we can connect with others. Social media, forums, online gaming, all provide opportunities for socialisation.



Reading and watching fiction, poetry, music and art can help establish a sense of familiarity with characters, authors and artists and can even build our capacity to empathise.



Befriending services match individuals together to provide mutual support and activity. Why not find a befriender, or even become a voluntary befriender yourself?



Grounding ourselves

When distressed, our thoughts and feelings can become like a whirlwind, which sweep our feet from the ground and carry us away with them. Traumatic memories can throw us back into the past, and negative thoughts can spin and warp our interpretation of current circumstances. We lose touch with the present moment and, if unmanaged, the whirlwind can rip our life away from us and leave us feeling powerless. It can also be physically dangerous. Nevertheless, we can learn a few grounding skills to regain control, to help plant our feet back on the ground and pull ourselves out of the chaos.

1. Step back

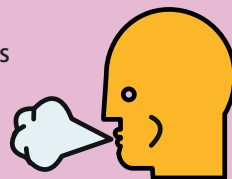
We need to realise that it's okay to redirect our attention. Our thoughts and feelings may convince us that they need our attention, they need addressing, right here, right now and that if we pull away from them, even for a second, something terribly wrong will happen. Imagine, for a moment, that you have a broken tap. We start hammering away trying to fix the problem and a water pipe bursts; there's water everywhere, gushing all over the floor. We panic and keep hammering, making it worse. The best course of action here is to remain calm, regain perspective and find the appropriate response. If not, we could flood the entire house, let alone the bathroom or kitchen floor.



Our distressed thinking can be similar. If our thoughts and feelings are chaotic, we become chaotic, our perspective becomes broken, and we continue to hammer away which floods our mind and our entire experience. If what we are thinking and feeling is truly of great concern, it is of more benefit to us that we are coming from a place of clarity and that we do not make things worse. In easing up, we can tackle our distress more efficiently, perceive the problem more clearly, and – hey - the tap may not be broken after all, we may have been turning it the wrong way all along.

2. Breathe

Our breathing can become shallow and fast as a response to stress. When relaxed, our breathing becomes deeper, slower and diaphragmic i.e. we breathe from our bellies rather than high up in our chest. To use your diaphragm, allow your stomach to extend outward as you inhale, and as you exhale let your stomach retract. As babies we do this unconsciously.



- Start by breathing in slowly and fully for a count of four seconds. Try not to rush.
- Hold for a count of 1 second and...
- Slowly release the breath for a count of 4 seconds. Control the breath and try not to let it get away from you.
- Pause for a count of 1 second.

Repeat this exercise until you feel your breathing has returned to a natural, steady rhythm and you feel slightly more relaxed.

3. Sensing

Let us now try to reconnect with the present moment by using our five windows to the world – our senses.

What can you smell right now, what can you hear, see, touch, and taste?

Identify an object in your surroundings and name its colour. Are there different hues, different shades to the colour? Is there a pattern? Is it shiny or matte?

What can you smell at the moment? Try to identify where it's coming from. Is it a combination of smells?

What are some of the sounds you are hearing right now? Are they loud, soft, soothing or quite disruptive?

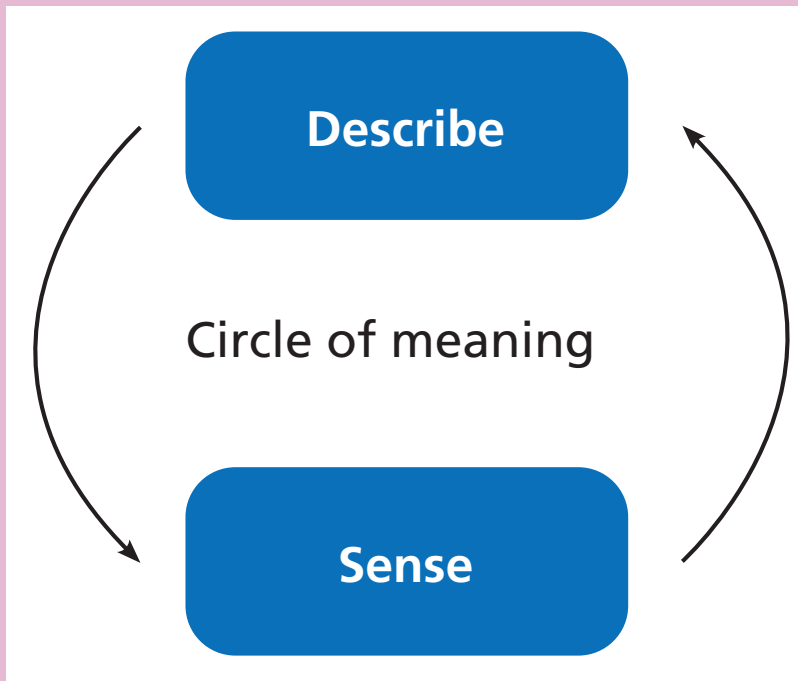
Is there anything you can safely reach out and touch? Does it feel soft, hard, rough or smooth? Is there a specific way you have to handle it?

Are you eating anything at the moment? Or do you still have an aftertaste of toothpaste or this morning's breakfast?




4. Who, what, where, when, why?

In using your senses to experience the present moment more fully, now try to describe the situation and put it into words. Simply answer who, what, where, when and why? Who is here right now? Where are you right now, where is everyone else? What time is it? How long are you doing what you are doing for? Why are you doing this? In doing this very simple exercise, you may come to realise that the clarity of your situation will increase, and the reality of the moment will become more concrete. Exercises 3 and 4 support each other in creating a 'circle of meaning', deepening our experience by describing what you sense and sensing what you describe.




5. Improve


The improve skill is all about regaining some power to improve the present moment.

I = Imagery 


Try to imagine somewhere relaxing... a happy place. For example, a safe place, a beach, or even somewhere that is completely made up in your mind.

M = Meaning 


When bad things happen, our thoughts and feelings tend to spiral into a loop of negativity. Yet we can acknowledge that some of the most valuable lessons in life are learned from difficult and challenging experiences. This is not to say that what is happening is right, but it is about trying to see it from a new perspective.

P = Prayer 


Some people use prayer as a way of accepting and letting things go, which can help some people to move forward.

R = Relax 


When we relax our body, this can tap into the calming part of our nervous system which can help improve how we feel. Try the breathing exercise as outlined above, taking a warm bath, yoga, or the mindfulness exercises discussed further in the booklet.

O = One thing in the moment 

Often when we feel stress it is difficult to start and finish tasks, we often end up starting lots of things and not completing them which makes us feel overwhelmed. One thing in the moment is about trying to focus on one thing. If your mind wanders off we would like you to bring it back.

V = Vacation 

This doesn't necessarily mean going on holiday, but it does mean taking a little time for yourself. Allow a few minutes to relax and refocus. Do something nice for yourself.

E = Encouragement 

Be your own cheerleader and cheer yourself on. Encourage yourself by repeating positive statements such as, "I can do this!"

Getting moving

When we feel low, we often feel less inclined to be active. We can experience a dip in our motivation and struggle to find any reason to 'get moving'. Yet our mind and body are intricately connected, and when we stimulate the body, the mind becomes stimulated in return - increasing the production and reuptake of our body's happy chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine. Below are some tips on how to get active. Work only within your ability and always consult your GP or a fitness expert.



Stretching

The benefits of stretching are many, from increased range of movement and blood flow; better posture; alleviation of back pain, tension and headaches; and even mindfulness. Stretching can be done stood up, seated, or lying down. Try researching a few mild stretching exercises in fitness manuals, yoga books or see the NHS' Stretch and Flex exercise plan online. Make sure that your information is from a reputable resource to ensure safety.

Walking

A brisk walk has been shown in some cases to be just as effective as antidepressants in relieving mild to moderate depression. Regular walking can lead to a longer life, reduce risk of cancer, boost vitamin D, weight loss and much more. Even better is if we can take a stroll in nature, as nature helps with emotional regulation, improves memory, and relieves stress. Try incorporating 30-minutes of walking into your day or plan a dedicated weekly walking-day with friends or family in your local park or woodland.

Boogie time

Not only does having a little 'boogie' get your body moving but it also makes you feel good and liberated in the process. Make your living room your dance floor, hit play on your favourite song, and strut your stuff in a stylish pair of pyjamas. Just ensure you have enough space to safely and fully express yourself!

Cleaning

Sometimes the last thing we want to do when we are feeling low is clean the house or do any chores. Nevertheless, it can 'kill two birds with one stone' in clearing away clutter and giving your body a little workout. Giving the vacuum a good push around your home can really get the heart pumping. Dusting the corners of rooms and stuffing socks in drawers can help us stretch and bend.

Mindfulness

Everybody is speaking about mindfulness nowadays. It's become an activity that anyone can practise in spite of their personal beliefs. Although mindfulness is not a cure-all, it certainly has many positive benefits for our health such as reduced stress and anxiety, improved emotional regulation, self-awareness and sleep, as well as increased attention span, and then some. It might not be for everyone, but it is available to everyone.

Body scan

Set yourself some time aside in a peaceful environment where you know you will not be disturbed. For this exercise set a timer for 10 minutes, but make sure the alarm is not too loud; it can be startling when you have been relaxed for so long!

As you become more adept at these exercises, you can increase how long you do them for.

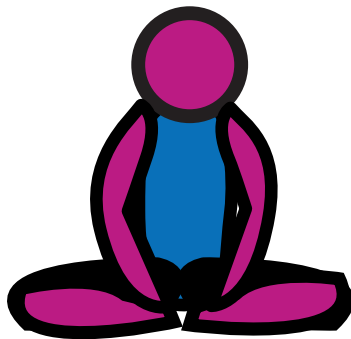
1. Sit in a chair or lay flat on the floor or on a bed. Either way, make sure it's comfortable.
2. Close your eyes and take a few slow and deep breaths.
3. Keeping your eyes closed, focus your attention on your feet. What sensations can you feel? Is there a slight tingling? A warmth? Do they ache?
4. Slowly move your attention upward through your ankles and into your legs, spend some time here and once again try to notice what sensations are present.
5. Continue to 'scan' upward through your body, focussing for a while on each major body part as you pass. As you reach your head, work your way back down to your feet.
6. Repeat the scan until the timer rings or until you feel you are ready to end the exercise.



Sitting mindfulness

Like the above exercise, set a timer for at least 10 minutes and make sure you are in an appropriate and peaceful environment where you will not be disturbed. You can sit either on the floor or on a chair – whatever feels comfortable for you. Be aware of your posture. Try not to slouch or tilt. Remain upright, proud and strong, and draw your shoulders back slightly – sit like a mountain. Relax your hands either upon your legs or clasped below your belly button, or simply placed on the arms of the chair. You can either close your eyes fully or partially or fix your gaze upon a focal point placed in front of you, near to you, such as an ornament, flower, or a candle (nothing too distracting).

- Begin by taking a few slow and deep breaths allowing your belly to relax, to expand and contract. Then allow your breath to regain its natural rhythm.
- Focus your attention on your breath as you inhale and exhale. Become aware of its circular rhythm, its coolness and warmth as it is drawn in and out. Keep your attention here.
- You cannot stop your thoughts, no matter how hard you try, so allow them to drift through you like clouds. Simply watch them as a silent observer, placing no judgement upon them. Let them pass.
- If you get caught up in your thinking, simply become aware of it and refocus your attention back on your breath. Do this with compassion.
- It is natural to feel bored or frustrated. Simply observe these feelings.
- Embody a non-judgemental state, do not pass judgement or value upon this experience, your thoughts or feelings. Let it be. Simply experience.
- Continue this exercise until the timer has finished or you feel ready to end the activity.



Mindful eating

It is easy when we are particularly hungry or in a rush to lose the connection with our food. We can wolf down our meals barely acknowledging what we are eating, how it tastes, how it looks, its textures and smells. Our appreciation for food can be quickly overcome; we take eating for granted, as if it isn't a privilege. The below tips are really about engaging your senses when eating

- Before eating your food, take a moment to see what is in front of you. How does it look? How is it prepared, arranged or decorated? What are its colours?
- You might have to pick your food up with your hands, such as a sandwich or a piece of fruit. Take notice of how it feels. What are its textures?
- How does your food smell? Is it appetising? Can you get a sense of how it will taste from the way it smells?
- When eating, try to slow down and become mindful of the food's flavours as well as its textures when chewing. Try to discern the different ingredients and how they complement each other.
- Become mindful of how you feel once you have eaten. Try to appreciate what you have just eaten.



Five senses mindfulness

Just as we engaged our senses to become more mindful of our eating, we can apply the same method in a more generalised way to ground ourselves in the present moment at any point in time. Simply...



Name 5 things that you can see right now... What five things can you see in your immediate vicinity? If you want to make it a little more challenging, try to perceive something in the distance, or slightly hidden from view. How do they look? What shape? What colours?



Name 4 things you can touch right now... Can you reach out and touch four things in your immediate vicinity? You should not have to move very far. How do they feel? What are their textures? Do you have to hold them in any particular way?



Name 3 things you can hear right now... Listen carefully and try to discern the sounds of three things. Can you name them? Are they loud or quiet? Is it pleasant to listen to or is it disruptive?



Name 2 things you can smell right now... Can you name the smell of just two things at the present moment? The smell of rain on the pavement, car fumes, cooked food, perfume maybe. If not, what about the smell of your clothes, your breath, or something in your pocket?



Name 1 thing you can taste right now... Are you eating anything at the moment? If not, can you still taste your breakfast, dinner or tea? Maybe the aftertaste of a drink or even toothpaste?



Finally, a deep breath and refocus your attention.

Food and drink

Our stomach is often referred to as the second brain, conveying the extent to which food and drink can affect our mood. Of course, when we experience emotional or mental distress this can change our relationship with food, and we may adopt unhealthy eating habits. We may resort to quick fix meals, binge drinking, or even refrain from eating or drinking altogether. Although we cannot provide specific dietary information in this booklet, below are some small healthy tips. For more advice on your diet, consult your GP.

Breakfast of champions



It can be easy to skip breakfast, but a healthy breakfast can set you up for the day in providing a steady release of energy. A breakfast high in fibre, and low in fat, sugar and salt, is recommended to kickstart the day.

Salt



Too much salt can cause high blood pressure which can lead to heart disease and strokes. Adults and children aged 11+ should have no more than 6g (teaspoon) of salt a day. Although you may not add any salt to your meals, check your food labels and their nutritional values to see how much salt is already contained.

Eat lots of fruit and veg



Sticking to your 5-a-day is easier than it sounds. You can substitute unhealthy snacks for a piece of fruit, add a side of veg to your dinner, or compose a fresh salad for a healthy meal. Getting your 5-a-day can feel like a chore, but by ensuring that you include fruit and veg to your food-shop can encourage you to include them in your meals. And by thinking ahead and planning your meals for the day can help conquer those spontaneous cravings.

Pause and reflect



If you find yourself reaching for the snack drawer, another beer, or any other unhealthy food and drink choice, pause. Pause and reflect on your actions. Ask yourself why you feel compelled to this action. Rather than carry out bad habits, use this as an opportunity to reflect on the thoughts and emotions behind your choices. Is there another, healthier activity you could do? What would your ideal-self do? Think of your long-term goals, not short-term gratifications.

Don't get thirsty



When you're thirsty, your body is already dehydrated. Try to drink water regularly throughout the day in small cupfuls or frequent sips. The government recommends 6 to 8 glasses a day, on top of water from food. Avoid drinking large amounts all in one go. Both alcohol and caffeine are diuretic which can lead to over production of urine and loss of body water. Maybe try a refillable water bottle to keep with you. There are even apps dedicated to keeping you on track with your water intake!

High Fibre vs starchy



Eating high fibre foods leads to longer, sustained energy throughout the day. Starchy foods can lead to quick highs, followed by sudden drops of energy which can lead to unstable mood regulation and weight gain. It takes longer for your body to break down high fibre foods such as fruit and vegetables and so carbohydrates are slowly and steadily released. Avoid sugary treats and try steaming your veg rather than putting them in the oven as this helps retain some of their fibre bonds.

Expanding your horizons

Learning new skills can boost our self-confidence and lead to the development of transferrable knowledge; becoming flexible and agile thinkers in the face of novel experiences. New skills can enrich our lives and make us much more 'well-rounded' individuals. Here are some suggestions and points of reference to expand your horizons.

The Recovery and Wellbeing College

The Recovery and Wellbeing College is led by South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and supported by Calderdale and Kirklees Councils. The college runs several courses to develop new skills with a wellbeing focus; to improve social confidence, purpose and life-meaning and our educational and employment possibilities.

Website: <https://www.calderdalekirkleesrc.nhs.uk>

Tel: 07717 867911

The Open University

The Open University provides over 1,000 free courses. There are many subject areas to choose from such as Languages, History and The Arts, Education and Development, Money and Business, and many more – available to complete flexibly online. An excellent resource to boost your CV and open those doors!

Website: <http://www.open.ac.uk>

Tel: 0300 303 5303

Khan Academy

The Khan Academy is a fantastic, free educational platform to develop your maths, English, science and more, at both a foundational and advanced level. Subjects are broken down into grades and topics in digestible chunks, with knowledge and end-of-grade tests to track your progress.

Website: <https://www.khanacademy.org>

Support 2 Recovery - Create Space

S2R Create Space is a voluntary service providing hands-on outdoor and indoor activities and projects. Workshops create the opportunity to learn new skills or attend to existing hobbies in a supportive, community environment.

Website: <https://www.s2r.org.uk>

Tel: 07933353487

Useful resources

Why we sleep. Matthew Walker. 2018. Penguin

Strength and Flex exercise plan - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Eat well - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

Mindfulness Exercises (Worksheet) - Therapist Aid (www.therapistaid.com)





If you require a copy of this information in any other format or language please contact your healthcare worker at the Trust.