

# Mind Your Mind



From the age we learn to walk and talk, we are told about the importance of looking after our bodies – why not our minds?

Whether it is parents telling us to eat our greens or adverts that stress the importance of a fit and healthy lifestyle, we are bombarded with information from a young age about keeping our bodies as healthy as possible. Yet we are very rarely encouraged in the same way to take regular care of our minds.

Only in recent years has society become better at encouraging people to seek help if they are struggling with mental health issues – let alone advocating that we incorporate care for our minds into our daily lives as we would with our bodies. As a result, many people only think to look after their mental health when they feel at crisis point, and by that stage it can be a lot harder to feel able to do so.

Though these are not substitutes for seeking help from a medical professional, therapist or counselling service if you feel that you are struggling with your mental health, there are several ways that we can support our minds in our everyday lives – just as we would look out for our bodies.

“And sometimes I have kept my feelings to myself, because I could find no language to describe them in.”

Jane Austen

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“Emotional pain is not something that should be hidden away and never spoken about. There is truth in your pain, there is growth in your pain, but only if it’s first brought out into the open.”

Jim Rohn

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“You are beautiful because you let yourself feel, and that is a brave thing indeed.”

Shinji Moon

## Write down a list of go-to support networks

Just as we keep packs of paracetamol or Lemsip at the back of the bathroom cupboard to reach for if we are feeling under the weather, it can be a good exercise to write down a list of your go-to supports that you know always make you feel good.

Whether this be people who make you laugh or cheer you up, professionals who support you, or just a favourite film, song, food or form of exercise.

If you have set supports to turn to in an accessible word document or notebook, it can feel easier to be proactive about trying to minimise these feelings when they come around rather than letting them fester.

## Try keeping a mood-log

Whenever you can, but particularly if you've had an especially good or bad day, try to take a few minutes in the evening to jot down several key things about the day in a journal or word document that you can refer back to.

Firstly, take note of factors that played into the day such as how much sleep you had the night before, how much work you had on, what you ate or drank, if you did any exercise (if so when and what), how your sex/relationships/social interactions were and how you spent your free time. Secondly, document how you felt; how was your mood and energy levels?

This should not become an obsessive exercise, and certainly shouldn't be one intended to count calories or guilt-trip yourselves for doing or not doing certain things. Instead, it can be a useful way to track any patterns between your mental well-being and day-to-day life, and make adjustments accordingly. For example, if you notice that the days you had more energy are often days you exercised in the morning, or that days you felt very anxious were also days you drank a lot of coffee, it gives you factors to experiment with when it comes to trying to improve low moods or energy levels.

Of course, persistent low mood or poor energy levels are not always caused by anything in particular and could also be attributed to mental illness. It can make you feel more in control if, after trying a mood log for a while you do find some correlations between how you feel and other factors of your day that you can adjust.



## Take time out

This one is so important, yet often neglected in practice. Making sure that you are taking breaks during the working day to walk around and look away from your screen, spending time on your days off doing things you enjoy unrelated to work, and getting enough sleep are fundamental to our mental well-being.

If you feel like your work, school, or university doesn't accommodate time for this, you have every right to voice your concern with an appropriate manager or teacher and explain why it is unsustainable and detrimental to your well-being and most likely the quality of your work.

## Distance yourself from your negative thoughts

One concept taught by many Cognitive Behavioural Therapists when treating depression or anxiety is 'decentring' – the idea that we are different from our thoughts. When you have a negative thought or worry, it can often overwhelm you and feel like it defines you.

Yet often distressing worries are so distressing because they are actually very contrary to who we are and what we know.

For example, a parent that suffers from anxieties that they might accidentally harm their child might experience such anxieties because they are, on the contrary, so conscious of protecting their child and care about them so much.

Yet instead of these rational explanations for anxiety, unpleasant thoughts such as 'I'm not trustworthy' or 'I must be a dangerous person', which in themselves can be distressing,

## 5 things to remember

### 1. It's OK to feel like this

Having a low mental health day is not a sign of weakness or something to be ashamed of. It's OK not to be OK sometimes.

### 2. You are not alone

It's vital to remember that you are not alone, ever. There is always someone who cares, someone who wants to listen and help.

Whether it's a friend, family member, or someone on the other end of the phone from the Confidential Care helpline.

It can be isolating to feel that nobody understands what you're going through, but you're not the first person to feel like this and you won't be the last.

### 3. Feelings are temporary

This day will pass! Most things in life are temporary, including feelings of despair.

So far, you've survived 100% of your worst days. Remember that you're going to survive this one too.



### 4. There is always something to be happy about

On your lowest days, it can feel overwhelming and like there's nothing in life to be happy about. But there always is – even if it's something small.

Focusing on the positive things could help you gain perspective, and find the strength to push through the most challenging times.

### 5. You do you

Do what you need to do to cope and get through the day. Self-care comes in many forms. When we're struggling mentally, it's more important to try and look after ourselves.

Whether that means cancelling plans, going for a run or hibernating on the sofa – do whatever it is that make yourself feel better.



## Different perspectives on mental health and mental illness

There are various approaches to mental health and mental illness.

Around the world. Most health professionals in the UK agree on a similar set of clinical diagnoses and treatments for mental health problems. We have chosen to reflect this approach in our information, as these are the terms and treatment models that you are most likely to come across if you seek help in England or Wales.

However, not everyone finds it helpful to think about their mental health this way. Depending on your traditions and beliefs you might have different ideas about how best to cope. In many cultures, emotional wellbeing is closely associated with religious or spiritual life. And your difficult experiences may be just one part of how you understand your identity overall.

We use the phrase 'mental health problems', as many people have told us this feels helpful for them. But you might be more familiar with terms such as 'poor emotional health', 'overloaded', 'burnt out' or 'overwhelmed'. Or you may feel that terms such as 'mental illness' or 'mental health issues' describe your experiences better, or are easier to explain to other people in your life.

However you understand your own experiences, and whatever terms you prefer to use, we hope that you will find the information in these pages useful when considering different options for care and support.

## Am I the only one who feels this way?

Experiencing a mental health problem is often upsetting, confusing and frightening – particularly at first. If you become unwell, you may feel that it's a sign of weakness, or that you are 'losing your mind'.

These fears are often reinforced by the negative (and often unrealistic) way that people experiencing mental health problems are shown on TV, in films and by the media. This may stop you from talking about your problems, or seeking help. This, in turn, is likely to increase your distress and sense of isolation.

However, in reality, mental health problems are a common human experience.

Most people know someone who has experienced a mental health problem. They can happen to all kinds of people from all walks of life. And it's likely that, when you find a combination of self-care, treatment and support that works for you, you will get better.



### Further Resources

The Mental Health section of The Metro online is full of interesting articles related to Mental Health and is well worth a visit: <https://metro.co.uk/tag/mental-health/>.

And don't forget [www.well-online.co.uk](http://www.well-online.co.uk) and the CiC Adviceline.

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