

Wellbeing

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is a state of being happy and healthy in our bodies (physically) and in our minds (mentally).

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which an individual can cope with the normal stresses of life and can work productively. However, when a person is suffering from mental ill health their emotional wellbeing has been affected.

Just like how our physical health can change over time, so can our mental health – and the two things can impact one another. If we are diagnosed with mental ill health, such as stress, depression or anxiety – there are many things we can do to manage and recover from these illnesses.

Taking responsibility for our own wellbeing is paramount. Sleep, exercise and nutrition are three of the best tools we have for our wellbeing. Another thing we can do for our own mental health is recognise our own stress levels and the positive things we can do to try to help manage those at an optimum level (some stress is actually quite good for us – it can help us get things done and meet deadlines) to avoid reaching levels of exhaustion.

Mental ill health – signs and symptoms

The most common mental health conditions are stress, anxiety and depression. Other mental health conditions include personality disorders, eating disorders and psychosis. Psychosis, which can be caused by schizophrenia or bi-polar disorder, often presents as hallucinations, delusions or distorted reality.

Stress: The feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Signs and symptoms include lack of motivation, weight loss or weight gain, sleep disturbance, procrastination, isolating oneself, irritability or agitation, feeling overwhelmed, nervous habits such as nail biting, low sex drive, skin conditions such as eczema, and constant worry.

Depression: Ranges from lasting feelings of sadness and hopelessness to losing interest in the things you used to enjoy and feeling very tearful or anxious. People suffering with depression may lack motivation and self-esteem or have feelings such as guilt.

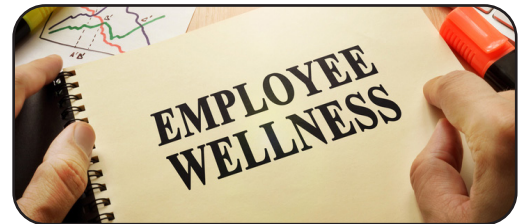
Anxiety: A feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. People suffering from anxiety may feel constantly on edge, have a feeling of impending doom and may struggle to concentrate.

Remember – there are some simple changes we can all make to help our wellbeing:

- Try not to over think things – and remember some things are out of our control.
- Remember we can all change the way we think.
- Exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Lower our intake of alcohol and caffeine and avoid illegal drugs.

Did you know?

- A survey of 2,000 British adults commissioned in 2020 by Vision Direct revealed that, on average, respondents spend 4,866 hours a year staring at screens (computers, phones, laptops, e-readers) with this representing 34 years over the course of a lifetime.
- The NHS estimates that 1 in 4 adults in the UK have a mental health condition.
- The NHS reports that in 2019/20 there were just over 1 million hospital admissions where obesity was recorded as the primary or a secondary diagnosis.



Key points:

- Action for Happiness recommend 10 key points for happier living (GREAT DREAM):
- Giving – doing things for others.
- Relating – connecting with the people and environment around you.
- Exercising – taking care of yourself.
- Awareness – living life mindfully.
- Trying – keeping learning new things.
- Dreams – goals looking forwards.
- Resilience – “Bouncebackability”.
- Emotions – look for what is good.
- Acceptance – be comfortable with who you are, accept the things you cannot change, and put your focus and energy into the things you CAN.
- Meaning – finding meaning, value and purpose in the things you do.

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Physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing – how do we look after ourselves?

Our physical health impacts our mental health, and our mental health can impact our physical health – which is why diet and exercise are crucial to wellbeing. If you have a long-term physical health condition, it can also put you at risk of developing a mental health problem such as anxiety or depression. Having a mental health problem can put us at even higher risk of developing serious physical health problems than other people.

It is recognised that the Coronavirus pandemic has affected some people's state of mental health and given rise to anxiety. Talk to your employer if you have found working at home challenging or if you are worried about returning to work post-lockdown. They will be putting measures in place to design a Covid-secure working environment and should be able to allay your concerns, or signpost you to appropriate wellbeing support.

Sleep, nutrition and exercise

Simple changes in your exercise levels can have a huge impact on your physical and mental wellbeing. Start walking at lunchtime rather than sitting at your desk, take the stairs not the lift.

Simple changes to your diet can be beneficial too. Drink more water and fewer fizzy drinks, eat a balanced diet which includes plenty of fresh ingredients, and make sure you are not skipping meals. Your brain and body need fuel.

Sleep is so important for our bodies and our minds – as it allows our bodies to repair themselves and our brains to consolidate our memories and process information.

Try not to spend hours in bed looking at a glaring screen before you go to sleep. Researchers at the Lighting Research Centre have discovered that two or more hours of exposure to backlit devices, such as a smartphone or tablet, suppresses melatonin, which helps regulate sleep.

You also need a break from work emails to make sure you get sufficient rest and recovery, before starting all over again the next day.



Changing our thinking

There is a very clear link between the things that happen to us (situations or events) and our thoughts, feelings, and actions which occur as a result of the way we perceive that event. If we change the way we think about something we can change the way we feel about it, and in turn the way we respond in our behaviour.

We all have the ability to change the way we think. It may sound hard but it's actually one of the most effective ways to manage our mental wellbeing.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) teaches us that thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all linked, so if you think upsetting thoughts, then you are likely to feel upset and then you are more likely to do something that will increase the thoughts and strengthen the feelings. This is a vicious cycle.

We all have the ability to retrain ourselves to change our perspective – as it's not an event which changes our thoughts – but our interpretation of the event and the meaning we give to it.

Being mindful

Mindfulness involves us being present and aware in the day-to-day things we do. Rather than living on autopilot, with our eyes glued to smart phones, or our thoughts worrying about something that has happened in the past, or something that may happen in the future – mindfulness teaches us to live in the present moment and appreciate everything around us.

Mindfulness can be a great way to slow ourselves down and use our brains differently, which can have great benefits for our wellbeing.

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Seeking support and guidance

There is a lot of support available for anyone who wants to look after their own wellbeing. From walking, running and nutrition groups – through to mental health support groups. Within your workplace there may be further support including HR departments and Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) or Mental Health First Aiders. EAPs are there to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their job performance, health, and wellbeing. They can be a great source of support for people suffering from mental or physical ill-health.

If you believe that you are suffering from a mental health condition, you should talk to your employer and your doctor to see if there are any adjustments that could be made in your workplace to make it easier for you to get your work done. Your doctor will find you a course of treatment that is suitable for you, whether it be through medication, behavioural therapy or by helping you understand the things that trigger certain feelings, and learning how best to deal with them. It is important to get support and talk about your feelings, as keeping everything in can actually make you feel worse.

Remember – it's OK not to be OK, but you must ask for help.



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