

AWARE

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

HELPING YOU LOOK
AFTER YOUR
MENTAL HEALTH

Small Changes = Big Impact

It's essential to look after your physical and mental health, and it doesn't take much time or money to make small changes that can significantly impact your mental wellbeing.

Good mental health means having positive thoughts and feelings towards yourself and others, healthy relationships with friends, family, and colleagues. You feel hopeful about the future.

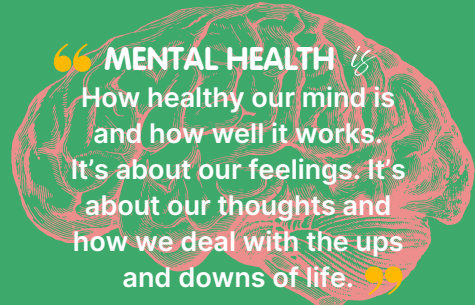
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Your mental health will vary as circumstances change, and as you go through different stages of life. Significant events and difficult experiences can put your mental health at risk depending on how you think, feel, and behave when they happen, and what support you have around to help you.

What is Mental Health?

Everyone has mental health, which is just as important as our physical health to look after! It's important to remember that mental illness IS NOT the same as mental health.



A Mental Health Problem or Mental Illness?

A mental health problem is when we experience symptoms of mental ill-health from time to time, such as stress, low mood, sadness, and anger. We all experience mental health problems from time to time.

A mental illness is diagnosable by a doctor. Illnesses such as depression, anxiety and bipolar cause major changes in a person's thinking, behaviour, feelings and physical wellbeing.



? DID YOU KNOW



Depression is very common, with as many as 1 in 5 people living with mental ill-health in Northern Ireland.

Depression can affect anyone, however, women are more likely to get depression than men.

(Mental Health Foundation NI, 2023)

How to Take Care of Your Mental Health

One of the best ways to maintain good mental health, or improve it when you have a mental health problem or illness, is to help yourself.

Here are some simple activities you can do right now to help improve your mental health.



1. Be Active

Exercising has a feel-good effect. When we're active, our bodies release hormones that improve mood, reduce anxiety and stress, and help us sleep better.

You don't need to join a gym or run a marathon; light exercises like walking, gardening, housework, or playing with your children can reduce stress and anxiety and improve your physical health.



2. Be Mindful

Try to be more aware of yourself and your surroundings - what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Mindfulness is a proven method of looking after our mental health. It is a way of paying attention to the 'here and now' using meditation and breathing. It helps us become more aware of our thoughts and feelings so that we can manage them better.



3. Give

Do something nice for a loved one or stranger. Smile, volunteer, or consider joining a community group.

Being kind to others can make you feel needed and valued, boosting your self-esteem. Look for some volunteering opportunities in your area.



4. Connect

With the people around you - family, friends or neighbours. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Having strong relationships with friends and family can help you deal with the ups and downs of life.



5. Keep Learning

Do not be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest, or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.

Set yourself small challenges, enjoy trying to achieve them and celebrate when you do.



6. Relax

Whatever it is that you love to do to relax, make time to do it regularly.

A bit of reading, yoga, meditation, or a short walk on your lunch break - be sure to get some me time when you can.



7. Eat Well

A healthy balanced diet is as important for mental health as it is physical health.

Get plenty of fruit and veg into your meals and snacks. Keep caffeine and sugar to a minimum, and drink plenty of water.



REMEMBER

Always see your GP when making changes to your diet, or if you have specific dietary needs.





8. Talk About It

Opening up to someone about difficult or distressing feelings can really help. Talk to a close family member or friend who will listen and give support.



You could also speak to your GP, or if you are distressed and having thoughts of self-harm or suicide please **call Lifeline** at any time of day on **0808 808 8000**.

Read our guide **Helping you with Depression, Self-harm or Suicide** for more information.



9. Be Creative

Hobbies like gardening or cooking can help lift your mood, boost your confidence and improve self-esteem.

Try not to worry about quality and just have fun. It doesn't have to be a masterpiece!



10. Avoid Alcohol and Drugs

Drinking too much has a negative impact on your mental health. Whatever the short-term effects, alcohol is a depressant and there are healthier ways of coping.

Drug misuse, whether it's illegal drugs, prescribed or over the counter medicine, can lead to mental health problems or even serious mental illness.



11. Be Kind To Yourself

Sometimes we are our own worst enemies with self-criticism - treat yourself how you would treat a friend!



Do One Thing:

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself. But remember to focus on doing just one thing at a time. It will help you reach the goals you set and give you a real sense of achievement.

Who to Contact for Support



Lifeline

A telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress. It is available 24/7 and free to call.

They can give you immediate support, offer face-to-face appointments, or give you information about other services in your area. **Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**

You could also:

- See your GP or call the out-of-hours GP service
- Go to the A&E department
- Call emergency services on 999
- Call Samaritans on their freephone helpline 116 123 - a confidential listening service for those in distress

AWARE NI

You can read our guides for more information about looking after your mental health.

Contact us by emailing info@aware-ni.org and visit our website at aware-ni.org

AWARE NI also have FREE mental health support groups for anyone aged 18 or over. You can find your nearest one by searching: aware-ni.org/support-groups/

