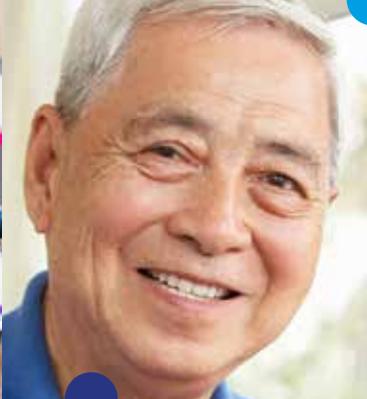


“How are you feeling?”



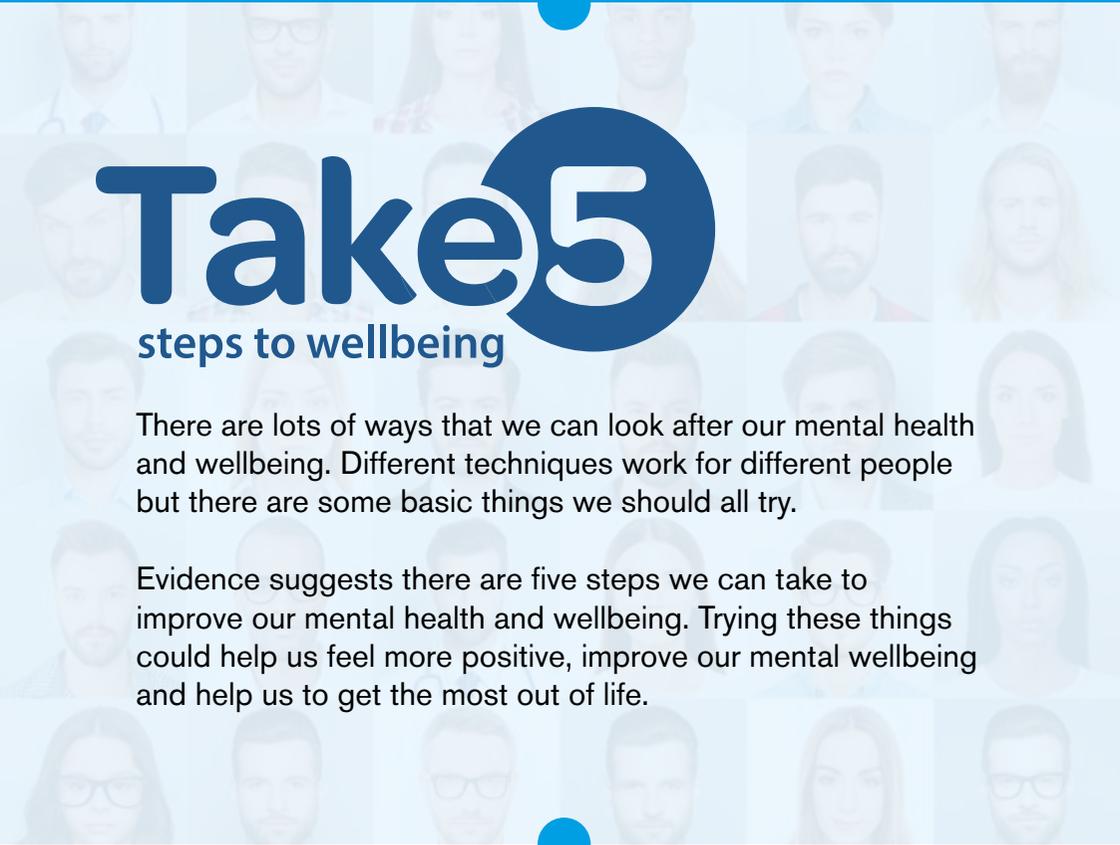
A guide to
looking after your
mental health
and wellbeing



Protecting your mental health and wellbeing

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused significant changes to the way we live, making it more important than ever that we look after our mental and emotional wellbeing. CovidWellbeingNI is an online hub to support mental health and emotional wellbeing during and after the pandemic.

It can be accessed at www.covidwellbeingni.info



Take5

steps to wellbeing

There are lots of ways that we can look after our mental health and wellbeing. Different techniques work for different people but there are some basic things we should all try.

Evidence suggests there are five steps we can take to improve our mental health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help us feel more positive, improve our mental wellbeing and help us to get the most out of life.

The Take 5 steps to wellbeing are:



Connect with other people



Be physically active



Take notice of the present moment



Keep learning new skills



Give to others

This booklet will:

- explain how each step can help your wellbeing
- give ideas of activities you can try
- give examples of services that can help
- provide advice and tips for setting goals

Take 5 activities can be done by everyone. Try and build them into your everyday life. You are probably already doing some of them anyway.

Connect with other people



Good relationships are important for your mental wellbeing. They can:

- help you build a sense of belonging and self-worth
- give you an opportunity to share positive experiences
- give you an opportunity to share your concerns
- provide emotional support and allow you to support others

There are lots of things you could try to help you connect with others.

- If possible, take time each day to be with your family; you could try arranging a fixed time to eat dinner together.
- If restrictions allow, arrange a safe and distanced meet up with friends you have not seen for a while.
- Try switching off the TV or putting away your phone to talk or play a game with your children or family.
- Volunteer – why not ask around to see what you can do to help others in your community? You can also search for nearby volunteering opportunities by registering with www.volunteernow.co.uk
- Make the most of technology to stay in touch with others – pick up the phone, chat on social media or video call.
- Join community groups in your local area – why not check out your nearest church or community centre to see what group activities or social support they offer?

Community newsletters are often a great source of information on opportunities to connect.



Loneliness and social isolation

Lots of people of all ages are experiencing loneliness and social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic so it's more important than ever to connect with other people. Do it for yourself and for others, especially those people who are more isolated than you.

For more on managing loneliness and connecting when you are isolated, visit www.covidwellbeingni.info and select 'Self Help Toolkit' – scroll down for a helpful guide.

Age NI is offering a 'Check in and chat' telephone service for everyone who is over 60 in Northern Ireland who may feel isolated or lonely. As well as offering conversation, the initiative can help with basic queries and link older people to local services and further support.

To register call **Age NI Advice** on **0808 808 7575** or email info@ageni.org

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Notes

Be physically active



Being active is not just great for your physical health and fitness. Evidence also shows it can improve your mental wellbeing by:

- raising your self-esteem
- helping you to set goals or challenges and achieve them
- causing chemical changes in your brain which can help to positively change your mood

Simple steps to move more

Get into a good habit

Set a reminder (you could use the alarm or timer on your phone) to get up and move every 30 minutes during the day. Try stretching during TV ad breaks, moving about more in work or pacing around the kitchen while the kettle is boiling.

Leave for lunch

Lunchtime is a good opportunity to fit in some activity. If you are working during the day, try to take a break to stretch and unwind. You could go for a quick walk and if you are working from home, why not fit in a 10-minute home workout?

Your own stand-up routine

Try standing when you can instead of sitting – even short periods will add up and improve your strength.

Take up a hobby

Active hobbies like gardening or DIY can be great for your mind as well as your body.

Track your progress

Hitting your daily target will feel great! Using tracking apps can help, but even just a checklist on a piece of paper will do.

It's better together

If your friends and family want to be more active too, try engaging everyone's competitive side with activity challenges like seeing who can do the most steps in a day.

Go from strength to strength

Strength-building activities – like carrying heavy grocery bags, or following an online Pilates or strength workout video – help to keep muscles, joints and bones strong. Aim to do this at least twice a week.

Reward yourself

Set yourself activity goals and rewards. You could go for a long walk then treat yourself to an episode of your favourite TV show!

Find something you enjoy

Find something that's right for you and make it part of your life. Whether it's walking, running, yoga or simply dancing around your living room, it all counts.

Information on getting active, top tips and useful advice is available at www.choosetolivebetter.com/content/getting-active

Check out parks and walking routes in your local area. For sitting exercises, fitness advice for wheelchair users, physical activity guidelines for children, home exercise videos and much more, visit www.nhs.uk/fitness

As well as staying active, it's important to eat healthily, drink plenty of water and try to avoid smoking, drugs or too much alcohol. All of these things have a big impact on how we feel.

Notes

Take notice of the present moment



Paying more attention to the present moment can improve your mental wellbeing. This includes your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you.

Some people call this awareness “mindfulness”. Mindfulness can help us enjoy life more, manage our anxiety, and understand ourselves better. You can take steps to develop it in your own life.

How to be more mindful

Reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness.

Notice the everyday

Be aware of the world around you. Notice the small things, like the birds singing in the trees, the flowers in bloom and the sensations of things, like the taste of food and the movement of the air during physical activity.

Keep it regular

It can be helpful to pick a regular time – such as while eating your breakfast or on a walk at lunchtime – during which you decide to take notice of the world around you.

Try something new

Trying new things – such as going somewhere new for a walk or sitting in a different place to work – can also help you notice the world in a new way.

Watch your thoughts

This is a tricky one. Lots of us find it difficult to control thoughts and worries. One mindfulness practice that builds awareness of thoughts is called ‘watching the weather’. Just as we might lie back in the grass on a warm autumn day and watch the sky, we sit for a moment and note thoughts as they come and go.

Name thoughts and feelings

To develop an awareness of thoughts and feelings, some people find it helpful to silently name them. “Here’s the thought that I might fail” or “this is anxiety”.

Free yourself from the past and the future

Try and take a mindful approach if you start reliving past problems or pre-living future worries.

Top tip

Avoid watching, reading or listening to too much COVID-19 news if it is causing you distress. To keep informed, try to use trusted sources. Always fact-check information you find on social media or are told by other people.

If you'd like to learn more about the practice of mindfulness, there are lots of mindfulness apps available, like Headspace and Calm. Search the App Library to find one that suits your needs - apps4healthcare.ni.hscni.net And check out www.covidwellbeing.ni.info for a '3-Step Mindful Breathing Space' guide under 'Self Help Toolkit'.

Nature can help us slow down and decrease our stress levels. The easiest way to experience nature is to get outside, so why not visit your local park or recreation area? For inspiration check out your council website; it will have lots of information on local parks and nearby beauty spots.

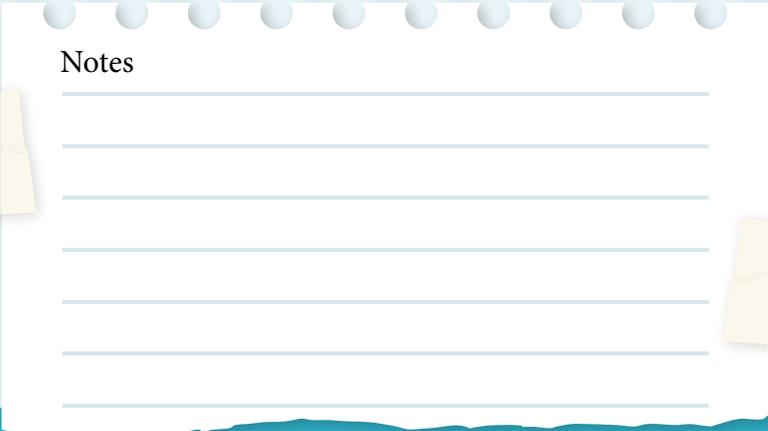
The Conservation Volunteers

You can still get the benefits of nature without going outside. For ideas check out the Conservation Volunteers' 'Little Book of nature activities to do at home'. Activities include growing tomatoes and spotting plants and animals.

Hunting for bugs, building a den, and making a boat and tree decorations are some of the activities in their children's guides.

Visit www.tcv.org.uk/getinvolved/activity-resources

Notes



Keep learning new skills



Research shows that learning new skills can also improve your mental wellbeing by:

- boosting self-confidence and raising self-esteem
- helping you to build a sense of purpose
- helping you to connect with others

There are lots of different ways to bring learning into your life. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant we've all had to learn different ways to do things and new ways to enjoy ourselves. Many people have used this time for self-discovery. If you'd like to learn something new, you could try some of these ideas.



- Learn to cook something new. Check out www.choosetolivebetter.com to get inspired. Click on 'Healthy recipes' for easy family dinner ideas, delicious desserts, and much more.
- Take on a new responsibility at work, such as mentoring another member of staff to learn new skills or signing up to a training session to improve your skills.
- Work on a DIY project, such as fixing up your garden or decorating a room. There are lots of free video tutorials online.

- Consider signing up to an online course. You could try learning a language or a practical skill like sewing. Check out what's on offer in your local community centre or visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/further-education-fe-colleges
- Teach your children new skills. Practical advice and activities galore to help with home learning can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize
- Find a hobby and throw yourself into it, such as playing an instrument, doing a jigsaw or improving your knowledge through reading. Some local libraries are running a book and collect service or you can get free eBook access from the comfort of your own home - visit www.librariesni.org.uk

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Give to others



Research suggests that acts of giving and kindness can help improve your mental wellbeing by:

- creating positive feelings and a sense of reward
- giving you a feeling of purpose and self-worth
- helping you connect with other people

It could be small acts of kindness towards other people, or larger ones like volunteering in your local community.

You could try some of these examples.

- Say thank you to someone for something they have done for you.
- Give a smile, a compliment, encouragement.
- Ask friends, family, colleagues or neighbours how they are and really listen to their answer.
- Offer to help someone you know – if you have elderly neighbours or know of someone who is self-isolating, why not offer help with shopping and other errands?
- Volunteer in your local community. You could donate or volunteer your time at a foodbank – for more information visit www.trusselltrust.org Or you could get involved in a befriending scheme – lots of people are suffering from loneliness, especially older people. Visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/mentoring-and-befriending-volunteer See 'Connect with other people' for more on volunteering.

Notes

What Take 5 activities will you do?



Jot down your ideas in each of the sections. Choose activities you will enjoy and that can fit into your everyday life. One activity can count towards more than one step. For example, going for a walk with a friend could count towards connecting, being active and taking notice (notice the sky or the birds singing).

Setting **SMART** goals can help you start doing new Take 5 activities.

SMART goals are:

- **Specific:** for example, 'walk' rather than 'get fit'.
- **Measurable:** for example, for 30 minutes, 3 times a week.
- **Achievable:** start small and set goals within your reach.
- **Relevant:** choose changes that make sense for you.
- **Timely:** set a start date, such as after lunch every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, starting this week.

For further information, self-help guides, and more ways to access help to support your mental health and wellbeing, visit www.covidwellbeingni.info

Useful leaflets, including a 'Pocket Guide for Worry' and 'Steps to Deal with Stress', can also be found at www.mindingyourhead.info

Self-help and further support

Talk to your local pharmacist or GP

If you are having trouble accessing any of the websites referred to in this booklet or if you would like information on further sources of support, please ask your local pharmacist for help.

They may be able to refer you to networks and services in your local community based on your individual needs – this is called social prescribing. If you think you would benefit from social prescribing or if you would like more information on it, simply ask a member of the pharmacy team.

If you have noticed changes in the way you are thinking or feeling that concern you and if this is causing you distress, you should also consider talking to your GP. There is lots of help and support available for mental health issues through GP practices.

Stress

We all experience stress in our lives and we can all benefit from identifying our stress and managing it better. Programmes on dealing with stress are available at www.covidwellbeingni.info – select 'Self Help Toolkit', then 'Stress Programmes'.

Support for families

If your family needs extra support, help is available – visit www.familysupportni.gov.uk

Money

Money worries can have a negative impact on our mental health. Support is available.

Local advice on benefits, debt, business debt, tax credits and more is available from **Advice NI**.
Call: Freephone 0800 915 4604
Email: advice@adviceni.net
Visit: www.adviceni.net

The **Money Advice Service** also offers free and impartial money advice. It offers advice and guides to help improve your finances, and tools and calculators to help you keep track and plan ahead.
Call: Freephone 0800 138 7777
Typetalk: 18001 0800 915 4622
Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm
Visit: www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk

Affected by COVID-NI?

The **COVID-19 Community**

Helpline managed by Advice NI can offer a range of help in relation to:

- Income
- Money/debt
- Employment
- Housing
- Food/medicine

Call: Freephone 0808 802 0020

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Email: covid19@adviceni.net

Text: Action to 81025

Support for carers

Carers NI operate a regional advice and information service where trained advisors can help you access the right supports.

Call: 0808 808 7777

Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm

Email: advice@carersni.org

Website: www.carersuk.org/northernireland

Helplines NI

There are plenty of helplines providing information, advice and guidance on a wide range of health and wellbeing needs.

Visit www.helplinesni.com

Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Call: Freephone 116 123 (24/7)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

Lifeline

Lifeline is the Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service for people in distress or despair. Calls are free and will be answered by trained counsellors.

Call: Freephone 0808 808 8000 (24/7)

Website: www.lifelinehelpline.info

All information correct at time of going to print – March 2021.

Take 5 concept adapted from work by the New Economics Foundation commissioned by the Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing; www.neweconomics.org

Take 5 icons designed in association with Belfast Strategic Partnership.

For more on mental health and
wellbeing, visit
www.covidwellbeingni.info



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