

"How are you feeling?"



5 simple ways
to look after your mental health
and wellbeing

We all have mental health. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also affects how we handle stress, our relationships, and our ability to make decisions. That's why it is so important to take care of it.

While the question “how are you?” is a common greeting, it can also be used as a mental health check-in. You could ask yourself how you are feeling or have a conversation about how you are really feeling when asked.

There are lots of ways to look after and improve your mental health and wellbeing. Checking in with yourself and talking to someone about how you are feeling can help. This guide shares simple things you can do every day to look after your mental health. Different things work for different people, but research shows that doing these five things can help.

The Take 5 steps to wellbeing are important for mental wellbeing. They are:

- Connect
- Keep learning
- Be active
- Take notice
- Give

Take 5 activities can be done by everyone. Try and build them into your everyday life. You are probably doing some of them already. Trying these things could help you feel more positive and able to get the most out of life.



Take 5 is a preventative approach, designed to enable you to look after and improve your mental wellbeing. If you are concerned about your mental health, help and support is available. To find the support and help you need, see the ‘Get help’ section of this leaflet or visit www.mindingyourhead.info/finding-help

Connect



Good relationships 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 can try to help you connect with others.

- Make some time in your week to speak to or be with family, friends, colleagues or neighbours.
- Try switching off the TV or putting away your phone to speak to others.
- Join a club to do something that interests you or a group in your local community.

Keep learning



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 ways to bring learning into your life. You could try some of these ideas.

- Learn to cook your favourite food or something new.
- Take on a new responsibility at work, such as joining a staff group or signing up to a training session to improve your skills.
- Work on a DIY project, such as decorating a room. There are plenty of free video tutorials online.
- Consider signing up for a course. You could try learning a practical skill like sewing or sign up for a course to improve your job opportunities.
- Find a hobby and dedicate regular time to it.

Be active



Being active is not only good for your body, it's also great for your mental health. It can boost your mood, increase self-confidence, improve energy levels and improve sleep. Try these tips to move more.

Get into a habit. Find easy ways to fit more activity into your day.

Leave for lunch. Lunchtime is a good opportunity to fit in some activity.

Your own stand-up routine. Try standing when you can – even short periods of standing will add up and improve strength.

Make it enjoyable. There are lots of physical activities you can do to be active, like walking, running, cycling, yoga, dancing or swimming.

It's better together. If your friends and family want to be more active too, try some activity challenges.

Track your progress. Tracking apps can help you track your activity and set goals, but even just a checklist on paper will do.

Take notice



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 and understand ourselves better. You can take simple steps to develop it in your own life.

Notice the everyday. Stop, pause, or take a moment to notice the small things, like the birds singing in the trees or the sun shining on your face.

Keep it regular. Reminding yourself to take notice is the first step to mindfulness. It can be helpful to pick a regular time to take notice.

Notice your thoughts. Lots of us find it difficult to control thoughts and worries. Paying attention to your breathing can be a good way to relax and focus your thoughts.



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. You could try some of these ideas.

- Volunteer in your local community.
- Say thank you to someone for something they have done for you.
- Give a smile, a compliment or encouragement.
- Ask friends, family, colleagues or neighbours how they are and really listen to their answer.
- Offer to help someone you know, like an older neighbour. While it's not always easy to know how to help, a good start is simply to stop and talk if you pass them on the street. You could then follow that up with the offer of practical help.



What Take 5 steps will you do?

Pick activities you will enjoy and that can fit into your everyday life. One activity can count for more than one step. For example, going for a walk with a friend could count towards connecting, being active and taking notice. Boosting wellbeing requires consistency and setting SMART goals can help with that.



SMART goals are:

- **Specific:** for example, walk rather than get fit.
- **Measurable:** for example, for 30 minutes, three times a week.
- **Achievable:** start small and set goals within your reach.
- **Relevant:** choose changes that work for you.
- **Timely:** set a start date, such as lunchtime every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, starting today.

To find out more, visit www.mindingyourhead.info



Get help

We all get days when we feel stressed, anxious or in a low mood but these feelings should pass after a short time. If they don't go away and if you are feeling them every day, help and support is available, and speaking to your GP is a good place to start.

There are also many services in Northern Ireland that can provide support to help you protect and improve your mental health. To look for a service that meets your needs, visit

www.mindingyourhead.info/finding-help

A selection of mental health and wellbeing apps can be found on the HSC apps library, offering self-help information and advice for adults seeking mental health support. The apps include topics such as anxiety, depression, stress, sleep and meditation. Visit **<https://apps4healthcareni.hscni.net/en-GB/adult-mental-health-and-wellbeing>**



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If you or someone you know is in distress or crisis, you can call Lifeline for free on 0808 808 8000. Trained counsellors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information, visit **www.lifelinehelpline.info**

Lifeline 0808 808 8000

If you or someone else is in immediate danger of suicide or you require urgent medical attention, call 999.

Take5

steps to wellbeing

Take 5 steps to wellbeing adapted from work by the New Economics Foundation, commissioned by the Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing – www.neweconomics.org

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