Top tips to look after your mental health
Some habits and activities can protect mental health. This includes getting enough sleep, exercising, having a good diet, having things to look forward to and seeing people you enjoy spending time with.

All these activities can be good for us, and can prevent mental health problems. Protecting our mental health can be easier than you might think.

We can all do it, every day with simple steps like being kind and spending time in nature.

This resource was co-produced by people seeking sanctuary, Mental Health Foundation and City of Sanctuary.
Top tips to look after your mental health

- Get closer to nature
- Be kind and help create a better world
- Talk to someone you trust
- Get more from your sleep
- Keep moving
- Eat healthy food
- Be curious and open-minded to new experiences
- Learn to understand and manage your feelings
- Be aware of using alcohol and drugs to cope with difficult feelings
- Do something you enjoy and look forward to
Nature can have a really calming effect on us. We have been living around animals and plants for thousands of years. Research shows that nature helps people feel calmer, more hopeful and less isolated.

You often don’t need to travel far to get the most of nature. Just find a quieter place around you, for example, a park, a pond, a river, or a bench. Nature is often nearby if we look for it!
Take a deep breath. Try to connect and pay attention to the nature around you. Connect with your 5 senses:

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Where could you go this week to get closer to nature?

“Keep moving, be creative, and get outside! Breathing fresh air, walking, running, dancing, singing, and joining community helped both my physical and mental health.” Patty
If you have ever felt lonely, you will know that even a small connection with someone else can help a lot. Research shows that being kind is good for both the person giving kindness, and the other, receiving!

Being kind to others can make us feel happier, more capable, and helps us connect with others. It even helps us deal with stress better.

Being kind could be simple as smiling at a stranger or someone you know, holding a door open, sharing a gift, volunteering or offering your help to someone.

Try to notice kindness around you. What’s one thing you can do to be kind to someone?

“I became a volunteer at many community organisations local to me. I met new people, learnt new things, and had fun!”

Abbas
Sometimes, we get used to keeping our emotions to ourselves. We pretend everything is okay, even when it’s not. It can be tough to open up, share our true feelings or talk about the challenges we’re facing.

Discussing things with someone you trust might change the way you see and feel about the situation in ways that are beneficial for you.

“Talking things through with someone I trust helped me release the tension I felt because of my asylum case, rather than keeping it inside. It really helped me protect my mental health and deal with times when I feel troubled.”

Bukky
Anyone who has ever had trouble sleeping knows how it can affect our bodies, minds and how well you can handle things in life.

We all have times when we sleep badly. Sometimes our life circumstances make a good night’s sleep impossible. For many people, sleep is often the first thing that suffers when we’re struggling with our mental health.

Adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night. Developing a calming bedtime routine could help you relax before you go to sleep.

Avoid watching TV and using your phone, alcohol and caffeine before bed. This will help you fall asleep and stay asleep. You could also avoid intense exercise before bed. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, including weekends.

What is one thing you can try to get better sleep?
Our bodies and our minds are connected. Keeping active also helps us prevent problems with our mental health.

Moving our bodies is a great way to improve our mental health and physical health. You might like walking, dancing, cycling, sport, cleaning or going to the gym – they all are ways of keeping active.

Exercise releases “feel good” hormones, that reduce feelings of stress and anger. It also helps us feel better about our bodies. It can improve our sleep too.

Being active with other people like being part of a team or group we see often, can also boost our mental health.

“What is your preferred way of moving? How many times could you do that this week?”

“Achuil”

“Keep moving! I did regular jogging and it helped my mental wellbeing” Achuil
Eat healthy food

Food and drink affect our bodies, brains and mood – for good or bad. Sugary snacks and drinks can give us a temporary “high” or sense of comfort that can feel tempting. But they soon leave us feeling exhausted or jittery. Caffeine in coffee, tea or energy drinks can also have this effect.

Not all of us can afford to eat lots of fresh vegetables and fruit. Choose a variety of colourful foods and include fresh food when you can. Frozen vegetables and fruit are good options and can be cheaper.

How we eat is also important. Having meals with other people can help to grow relationships – with those around us. This is really important in protecting our mental health and preventing problems.
Sometimes, we get stuck doing the same things and thinking about ourselves and the world in the same ways.

Life can feel more interesting and rewarding when we are open to trying new experiences. It can be as simple as walking a different route, trying a new skill, or visiting somewhere new.

“Thinking about the future and not being able to get a job when I received the right to work was particularly distressing for me. I reskilled and got support with writing CVs and cover letters. This helped me secure my first employment.” Fru

“Keep learning new things. Instead of waiting and being stuck in limbo, I attended ESOL classes. Then I did an Access course in college. With lots of support, I went on to university with a Sanctuary scholarship and graduated with a degree in Law.” Asher
Many of us will know when we’re upset but sometimes, we are not sure what we feel, or we can’t name the emotion. Is it sadness, fear, shame, loneliness, anger or something else? We don’t always know why we’re feeling that way. It often helps to name our feelings, give our attention to them without judging.

Talking kindly to ourselves, similar to how we might comfort a small child, is also important.

Some people feel better if they write down how they are feeling; in a notebook or on their phone.

“Therapy helped me to resolve the traumas that held me back in fear. I learned about how shame was stopping me from connecting or trusting anyone.” Tolulope
The emotional wheel

This tool can help people identify and understand their emotions.

For further information about understanding and managing feelings you can head to our website. mentalhealth.org.uk
People sometimes use drugs or alcohol to block out “difficult” feelings such as sadness, fear or shame.

No-one wants to feel bad and for some people, drugs and/or alcohol can make things feel better for a short time, but they don’t make those feelings go away. They can make things worse or create more problems. They can damage your mental and physical health, relationships and work or study.

If you notice you may be using drugs or alcohol to cope with different feelings, try to be understanding and kind to yourself, without feeling bad about it.

Talking with someone you trust could be a possible next step. Some charities offer free information and advice that will be kept private and not shared with other people. They can advise on how to reduce harmful effect of drug use.

Other ways of coping with painful feelings can be helpful, too. You could try and get help with the situation that cause those feelings. You could find a trusted person to talk to or someone who has a similar experience and could support you.
Planning activities we enjoy, no matter how small, increases our sense of hope, which helps our mental health. It could be playing football, going to a community group, spending time with a friend or going for a walk.

What can you plan this week that you will enjoy?
“In every step, from the day I arrived in the UK, to the final year at university, my journey taught me gratitude. It’s the light that guides through change, the anchor in new seas.

Embrace gratitude; it’s the silent key to resilience and mental well-being. Welcome every chapter with an open heart, and remember to be kind to yourself and others around you”

Kauther

This resource was co-produced by people seeking sanctuary, Mental Health Foundation and City of Sanctuary UK, May 2024 and is based upon: ‘Our Best Ever Mental Health Tips, Based on Research’ Mental Health Foundation.

www.mentalhealth.org.uk