

Wellbeing and self care



www.galop.org.uk

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This factsheet offers some suggestions of different ways you can work towards better wellbeing. Experiencing abuse – be it verbal, emotional or physical – can be a deeply traumatic and challenging experience. During periods of emotional turmoil and stress, when our thoughts may be focussed on simply getting through the day, it's easy to overlook small, but significant activities and behaviours that may actually benefit us and increase our ability to cope.

Sleep

Sleeping well means more than just avoiding irritability the following day – our bodies need rest to recover, recuperate and recharge. Missing out on sleep can significantly affect our energy and stress levels. Different people need different amounts of sleep to function properly, but somewhere between seven and nine hours is an average recommended daily guide. Difficulties with sleeping often go hand-in-hand with increased stress, so it may be worth speaking with your GP if this is something you're continually struggling with.

Talk

They say a problem shared is a problem halved and talking to someone you trust about how you're feeling and what's going on in your life can be a cathartic and supportive experience. People may sometimes feel shame or embarrassment about their experiences, which can make speaking up difficult, but bottling up difficult or painful feelings can contribute to feelings of stress and isolation. You can call the Samaritans (www.samaritans.org/) or the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (<http://switchboard.lgbt/>), if you'd like a friendly ear. If you feel you may benefit from either short or longer term counselling, ELOP, (www.elop.org) London Friend (londonfriend.org.uk/get-support/counselling) and the Metro Centre (www.metrocentreonline.org/mental-health/counselling) all offer counselling to LGBT people. You can also speak to your GP about this.

Eat

During times of stress, we often seek comfort in high fat and sugary food. Sugary foods may cause an initial surge of energy that soon wears off leaving you feeling tired, low or irritable, and foods high in fat can leave you feeling lethargic. Eating a balanced diet will give you the nutrients and vitamins your body requires. Guidelines suggest that we should eat five portions of fruit or vegetables per day. Although eating healthily can be expensive, there are some great tips on how to save money at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/d/diet-and-mental-health. You can also get recipe ideas on eating on a budget from Jack Monroe's website <http://cookingonabootstrap.com/category/recipes-food/>

Drink

The temptation to drown our sorrows in alcohol can be strong, in times of stress. Alcohol is a depressant, however, which means it slows down the brain and can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety. During difficult times, it might be worth considering cutting down on your alcohol consumption or reducing the frequency or volume you drink. If you feel you need help and support around drinking, you can contact Antidote for support and advice: <http://londonfriend.org.uk/get-support/drugsandalcohol/>

Caffeine is also another drug that many of us rely on to get us through our day. Caffeine is a stimulant, however, which can cause restlessness,



nervousness, gastrointestinal upset and sleeplessness. It might be worth keeping an eye on how much caffeine you're ingesting every day and considering swapping a cup of Joe for a glass of water.

Herbal teas can also offer some relief and you can now buy teas specifically to calm and relax. Camomile and lemongrass are both believed to help with relaxation and improved sleep. You can read more about the medicinal benefits of herbal teas here.

Walk

For the urban dwellers amongst us, "fresh" air might seem a little unrealistic! Most cities offer some kind of green space or park, however, and taking a wander somewhere green and peaceful can offer a welcome change of scenery and an opportunity to reflect. Urban living can sometimes be challenging, with many people squashed into a small space. Spending time in or near green spaces has also been shown to have a long lasting benefit for mental health.

Read

DH Lawrence once wrote, "One sheds one's sickness in books" and many agree that reading is a great way to take a break from reality and switch off from stress. If you haven't joined your local library, you can find out where your nearest branch is at www.gov.uk/local-library-services and learn more about the benefits of reading to your mental health here.

Unplug

Social media can be a fantastic way to connect with people, but it also has its downsides. People choose what they want other people to see, which is often a very edited version of their real

life, posting only the very positive things. This can lead people to compare the seemingly happy, shiny lives they see on Facebook with their own – and despair. Comparing your life with other peoples, and then despairing, is a common outlook of people experiencing anxiety or depression. If you're feeling particularly low, consider taking a break from social media or, at the very least, turning off notifications to emails and smartphones. It might also be worth uninstalling apps from your smartphone, so you don't have constant access.

Watch

Watching your favourite TV show or film can be another way to switch off from reality for a bit. You can stream films and TV series' online, legally and at no cost, so it's worth looking at sites such as 4OD: (www.channel4.com) and www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer. You can also rent films and series from your local library. Check out some comedy! Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's feel-good chemicals. It also decreases stress hormones and relaxes muscles.

Breathe

Deep breathing reduces stress by soothing the body's nervous system. When people tell you to take a deep breath during times of stress, listen to them! Click the links below to try some breathing exercises:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/ways-relieve-stress.aspx>
<http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html>

Be mindful

Mindfulness has seen an increase in popularity in recent years, with good reason. Mindfulness focuses on developing a non-judgemental, relaxed



observation of your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations with the aim of reducing stress and anxiety. There are many local groups that you can join to develop your mindfulness, or you can practice at home using websites such as www.headspace.com/. Read more about mindfulness here. Meditation can also work in a similar way. Your local library should have books or DVDs to help you learn more.

Exercise

Not everyone is able to exercise but, if your body allows you to, exercise can be a fantastic stress-buster, releasing feel-good chemicals. Running is free, as is cycling (providing you have a bike), and many London boroughs offer free fitness sessions in local parks – find out more at www.ourparks.org.uk. Yoga has been found to be particularly effective in stress-reduction. You can find hundreds of free guided sessions and workouts on the internet.

Be kind to yourself!

Treat yourself like you would treat a friend. Instead of letting that inner voice dominate that says you need to be stronger or better, think how you would respond to a friend experiencing the same problem. Give yourself a break! Perfection is impossible and we all make mistakes. List the things you know you're good at. This could be anything from looking after your friend's pet whilst they're away (indicates trust and reliability) or making a cracking spaghetti Bolognese.

Always dial 999 if it is an emergency and you think you are in immediate danger.