

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING



# TAKE 5

Mental health refers to our state of mind and our ability to cope with the everyday things that are going on around us. Our mental health contributes to how we think, feel and behave.

Being mentally healthy does not necessarily mean that there is an absence of a diagnosable psychological illness. Rather, being mentally healthy means you have the following:

- An ability to enjoy things and have fun
- An ability to positively handle stress and bounce back from setbacks
- An ability to adapt to change
- An ability to build and maintain personal and professional relationships
- Self confidence
- Self esteem

There are a few practices you can adopt to build these attributes, mood and enjoy life.

As with many things, building our mental health requires effort and practice. As such, we recommend that you **'take 5'** to remind yourself and practice these 5 mental health strategies; **stay active**, find a **balance**, **connect** with others, maintain a healthy **diet** and pursue **meaning and purpose**.



# STAY ACTIVE



Our physical health goes hand in hand with our psychological health. When our physical health improves, our mental wellbeing automatically improves too. This is due to certain chemicals being released into our bodies, when we exercise, which lifts our mood, energy, memory and stress tolerance.

\* **Remember:** Not everyone loves to exercise. Going to the gym every day is not everyone's idea of a good time. You do not have to get to the point where you are drenched in sweat or aching to reap the benefits of good mental health. Moderate amounts of regular activity can boost your mental health.

## OUR TIPS

- **Aim for 30 minutes for overall activity per day.** Activities can include walking, dancing, cycling or playing an activity-based game with your friends, relatives or children.
- **Make it fun.** Engage in activities that interest you, listen to music, focus on how your body is feeling as you move. Choose activities that you know you can commit to and maintain.
- **Mix it up and break it down.** You do not have to engage in the same activity all the time. Change up your physical activity each day or week to suit you and keep you motivated. You can split 30 minutes of activity into small increments that suit you (for example, 10-minute sessions). This can help to fit it in with your other daily activities.

# BALANCE

Do you often find yourself thinking 'I don't have enough time' or 'I wish there were more hours in day'? or 'work takes up all of my time and energy'. When we are busy or endeavouring to juggle and meet our family and work commitments, we tend not to focus on ourselves or spend time on activities such as leisure and self-care.



\* **Remember:** Taking time out for yourself is essential not selfish. Having the right balance between work and self-care can reduce burnout and increase our energy levels.

## OUR TIPS

- **Prioritise self-care.** It is important to engage in the activities that you enjoy and more importantly, makes you feel good. Prioritise your schedule such that you can engage in at least one of these activities at least once a day.
- **Let go of work.** A big part of maintaining a healthy work/life balance is not letting the work stress negatively affect your leisure time. Engaging in relaxation techniques after work can help calm the body and help to let go. These can include music, yoga, mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing and/or progressive relaxation and can help to stop the stress and relax your mind and body.
- **Take time to reflect and be grateful.** Take time to think about the things you are grateful for. You can meditate, pray, write down the things you are grateful for in a journal. Whether you do this before you sleep or any other time during the day, it is important to take a moment to acknowledge what is positive and good in life.

# CONNECT



Investing in and devoting time to your own mental health is fantastic. However, we still need the company of others to thrive and be at our best. As humans we have an inherent need to connect and build relationships with others. Our brains are wired in such a way that even if we have had past negative experience with others, we still crave companionship.

\* **Remember:** the need to connect or reach out is not a sign of weakness nor will it make it a burden to others. In fact, most people like to help and be there for the people around them. If you feel you do not have anyone to talk to or who is a good listener, you can look to build new friendships and your social network. Here are our tips on how to connect with others.

## OUR TIPS

- **Arrange to meet up with friend or family member.** This does not have to be for a meal or coffee. If you are both busy, you can meet to do weekly chores (e.g. grocery shopping) or exercise together.
- **Reach out to an acquaintance.** Many people find making new friends can be uncomfortable and difficult. Try and be the one to reach out first. You can reconnect with an old friend, invite a colleague to coffee or ask a neighbour to join you for a walk.
- **Join.** Joining social or activity groups that meet on a regular basis can offer opportunities to meet other people with similar interests to you.
- **Smile and say hello.** We all need to connect in big and small ways. Small gestures such as making eye contact or a small smile to strangers is a good way to connect and help us feel a part of a community.

# DIET

Much of what we eat affects our mood. Eating unhealthy food can disrupt our sleep, weaken our immune system, and leave us feeling lethargic and down. On the other hand, a healthy diet (low in sugar), can boost our energy, improve our sleep, and make us feel better about ourselves- hence increasing our self- esteem and confidence.

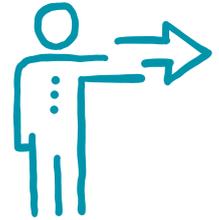


\* **Remember:** we all react differently to foods. As such, you need to experiment and consult with professionals, as needed, regarding which foods can best support your mental health.

## OUR TIPS

- **Cut and replace.** Start by cutting out the bad (sugary snacks, fried food, highly processed food, refined carbohydrates such as white rice) and replace with the good (fatty fish, nuts, avocados, beans, leafy greens, fresh fruit).
- **Enjoy your food.** Eating is often something we do when we are relaxed and spending time with our family and friends. As such, it should be something that we look forward to and can enjoy. Find recipes or order meals that are healthy, balanced and that you find tasty and still enjoyable to eat.

# FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE



We all need meaning and purpose from our life. It may be a way for us to feel needed, feel good about ourselves, a purpose to achieve, or simply a reason to get out of bed. Having meaning and purpose also helps our brain health and functioning.

- \* **Remember:** everyone finds their meaning and purpose in different ways. Having meaning and purpose for every day, boosts your mental health and wellbeing.

## OUR TIPS

- **Enjoy your work.** Going to work and providing a service gives us great meaning and purpose every day. It is natural to sometimes become fed up with work. At times like this, reflect and remind yourself why you do what you do, how you contribute and the good things about your workplace and your job.
- **Plan activities that make you feel good and productive.** Some ideas are gardening, learning something new, cooking, drawing, playing an instrument.
- **Volunteer.** Meaningful work does not only mean paid work. Helping others in your community can make you feel valued and enriched. Organisations that may need volunteers can include local schools, community centres, hospitals, charitable organisations.

# SEEKING HELP

**It is ok, not to be ok.**

If you have made consistent efforts to improve your mental health, however, feel like you are not functioning at work or home, talking to a professional can help. Seeing a mental health professional can assist you to understand why you may be feeling a certain way and help you with strategies on how to manage these feelings.

The following are some avenues to begin the process:

- Contact your Employment Assistance Provider (EAP)
- Contact your GP
- Contact **beyondblue 1300 22 4636** or **lifeline 13 11 14**





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Author: Vritika Chandra, Registered Psychologist