

Looking after yourself

This leaflet gives some ideas to help you cope if things are feeling more difficult. If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this leaflet, please speak to a doctor, nurse or psychologist caring for you.

Some young people tell us that living with a physical health condition, or needing to visit the hospital, has a big impact on how they feel. It is important to look after your physical **and** psychological health.

What is psychological wellbeing?

'Psychological wellbeing' is often how we describe mental health. This includes our ability to use helpful coping strategies in difficult situations. All of us face stressful situations at times, and we can all have times when we feel more overwhelmed, sad, worried or frustrated. Putting our psychological wellbeing first can help us to cope better with these difficult feelings and experiences.

Making a 'wellbeing plan'

Just like a cup overflows when it's too full, if we have a lot of distress or difficult experiences, we can feel overwhelmed. One way to help us to feel better is to 'empty' some of the water out of our cup by doing things that make us feel calmer and less overwhelmed.

We have included a wellbeing plan at the end of this leaflet. It will help you to identify things that make you feel overwhelmed, as well as things that can help you feel a bit better. It is also useful to write down things about you that other people might notice. These might be changes in your behaviour if you are finding things difficult.

We have included lots of different ideas and coping strategies here. Everyone uses slightly different strategies to help when they are feeling stressed, worried or overwhelmed. It is important to work out what works best for you.

Ways to keep yourself psychologically well

Below are some different techniques and strategies that have helped other people cope when they have felt upset or distressed. It might help to test out some of these ideas for yourself.

When you recognise that things are feeling difficult, you might need to try a few different ideas to see how helpful they feel. This way you can work out which techniques suit you best. All of the ideas are tools that we can use in our day-to-day life, even when we are not feeling upset or stressed, as a way of keeping ourselves psychologically healthy.

Practising new coping skills or techniques when you feel calm can make it easier to use them when things are feeling more difficult.

Taking deep breaths

Deep belly breathing can help you to feel calmer. Try practising this technique in a quiet and comfortable place to get used to the movements.

- Sit comfortably with a hand on your chest and the other on your tummy. When breathing in the hand on your tummy should go out, and when breathing out this hand should go in. The hand on your chest should not move too much. Try to breathe at a slower (but still comfortable pace), breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Try the above but while you are lying down. Place a small object (like a soft toy) on your tummy to check that you are breathing into your belly and not your chest. When you breathe in the object should move up, and breathing out should bring it down.
- Put your hand in front of you, or on your lap or a table. Use a finger on the other hand to trace around your hand. Breathe in while going up the finger, and out while going down, until all fingers have been traced. Make sure the breathing rate is slower than normal but still comfortable.

'Grounding' yourself

Grounding is a way to refocus your attention onto the present moment, and away from any difficult thoughts and feelings. Some of the best ways to 'ground' are by focusing on your senses and what is going on around you. You could try:

- naming 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel on your body, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell or taste, and then take 1 deep belly breath
- finding a special or interesting object and trying to notice everything you can about it using all of your senses (for example, you could touch it, look closely at it, tap it to hear the sound, or smell it)
- bringing your attention to a part of your body, and focusing on all the sensations you can feel in this area. For example, notice the weight of your bum on the seat, or try stretching and then relax. You could even try clenching your teeth and then relaxing your jaw. The important thing is to pay attention to all the places you can feel these movements, and focus on how these sensations feel.
- listening to your favourite song or piece of music
- jumping up and down, or rubbing your palms together quickly, noticing the sound this makes and the feeling and warmth it brings to different parts of your body

Practicing mindfulness

Like grounding, mindfulness can help your mind to stay in the present moment, which can stop you focusing on difficult things that happened in the past, or that might happen in the future. The NHS website has more information on mindfulness, www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/

There are also some great apps that can help young people to practice mindfulness. 'Headspace' and 'Calm' can be downloaded from your usual app provider for free, but there are some costs for certain functions.

Responding to worry

Sometimes we worry about things that are out of our control. These thoughts often start with 'What if ...?' Instead of getting into a tug of war with these thoughts by trying to solve them anyway, you can choose to recognise the worries but to 'deal with them' later.

- Write the worry down. This can be on your phone, in a special notebook, or on a piece of paper than you put in a special place.

- Set a time, later that day or week, to think about the worries you have written down. It might help to find someone to be with you as you go through them. Set an alarm for however long you want to think or talk about the worries (such as 10 to 15 mins). At the end of this 'worry time' put away your notes and move on from worrying by focusing on a different activity.
- Outside of this 'worry time', if you notice worries popping into your mind re-focus your attention on the present moment, for example by trying a grounding exercise or doing something more fun than worrying (such as watching your favourite show or chatting to friends or family).

Making sure you have a good routine

For many people having a good routine can really help them to stay calm and feel like they are in control. Try to establish a routine that includes time for:

- enjoyable activities
- activities that make you feel like you're achieving something
- activities that connect you with other people

Any kind of structure or routine can help, even if this is planning a short time each day to do a selected task, or if it is making sure you get up each day and get dressed. Including time to be outside, in nature, can be really important for lots of people.

Trying to get a good night's sleep

The amount of sleep that we get can have a big impact on how we feel. If you are having trouble sleeping, try to follow good sleep hygiene practices. If good sleep hygiene does not improve your sleep, or you have noticed changes to your sleep, speak to your GP.

Read information on the NHS website about how to get a good night's sleep, [web www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/)

Being active

If you can, it is helpful to try to exercise regularly or to try and move your body each day. We know that exercise is a great way to stay fit, but it's also really important in helping us to feel good about ourselves, and can boost low mood.

Try to find an exercise or movement that you enjoy. It doesn't have to be running a marathon or anything exhausting. Any movement can help, it could be a gentle walk or cycle, or even stretching.

The NHS website has tips on different types of activities, [web www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people/)

Eating well

Eating a healthy and balanced diet can help you feel more energised and can improve your mood. Try to remember to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of soft drinks, as this can also affect how we are feeling.

The NHS website has tips on how to eat a balanced diet, see [web www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/)

Writing in a diary

Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a great way to help you to understand and make sense of them, particularly if they are distressing. Some people find it useful to write in a diary or journal regularly, for example at the same time each day. You can keep a notebook or diary by your bed so you can jot down anything that is keeping you awake.

Wellbeing plan

Just like a cup can only hold a certain amount of water, when we experience lots of difficult things, or feel very distressed, we can feel overwhelmed, almost like our own cup is overflowing. It is really helpful to notice things that 'fill the cup up' (make you feel more overwhelmed) and things that help 'let out some of the water' (things that allow you to feel more psychologically well). These might be things that you, or others around you, do.

It is also important to pay attention to signs that you are feeling more overwhelmed, and signs that you are finding things a bit easier. These might be signs that you notice in yourself, or they might be important things that others might notice and can help you to look out for.

Fill in the boxes below to help remind you.

Signs that I am feeling more overwhelmed

Things that
'add to my cup'
(make me feel
more overwhelmed)

Signs that I am
finding things easier



Things that 'empty my cup'
(make things feel easier)

Support and more information

There are organisations that can provide support if you, or someone you know, are finding things more difficult.

YoungMinds (for people under 19 years old)

web www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support/

ChildLine (for people under 19 years old)

For support, **web** www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/

For coping techniques, **web** www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/

The Mix (for people under 25 years old)

web www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team

Samaritans (for all ages)

web www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/if-youre-having-difficult-time/

Papyrus (for people under 35 years old)

web www.papyrus-uk.org

phone 0800 068 4141 or 07860 039967 (both available 9am to midnight, 365 days a year)

Contact

If you are concerned that you, or someone you know, is having thoughts about wanting to harm themselves or end their own life, speak to a GP to get support and advice. In an emergency, call 999 or go to your nearest emergency department (A&E).

This resource was created by the psychology team at Evelina London Children's Hospital.

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web** www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **phone** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

email letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch, **phone** 020 7188 8815 **email** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone** 111

web www.111.nhs.uk



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