



Mental Well-Being

Mental wellbeing is the capability to handle the problems and to harness the opportunities that we face in life. Such can help us to feel good about ourselves and our life and to help us to function well. Our mental well-being is on a continuum; we can all get anxious, stressed, or low in mood sometimes. By continually topping up with “positive”, adaptive, helpful behaviour, our well-being and resilience can be improved. Whilst there are many ways and personal preferences to channel our energies to improve our well-being and daily living, I outline some below.

Input and Output

- ❖ **Exercise Regularly:** Expend energy to enhance energy. Activity can enhance our mood and energy and decrease stress and anxiety. Consider the activities you might like (running, swimming, dancing); do you want your exercise to also be social, exciting, productive, solitary, and peaceful? Green spaces or spaces by the water can help too.
- ❖ **Diet:** We are what we eat. Food can affect our mood, memories, and cravings. Consider where you can cut back on sugars and refined carbs and increase fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, and pulses. If not a vegetarian, lean meat and oily fish can enhance energy and concentration. Water can flush toxins.
- ❖ **Drink and Drugs:** If you're going to do it, do it sensibly. Some use drink to relax, but it can be a depressant: Others use drink to cope or socialise; however, this doesn't enhance coping skills in the long-term. Is your drinking behaviour helping you? What are the pros and cons? Ditto drugs.
- ❖ **Screen Time:** Can help inform, relax, escape, and communicate, too much can negatively affect energy, decrease attentiveness, over-stimulate dopamine (reward) levels—affecting behaviour, sleep, memory, learning, mood.
- ❖ **Learn New Skills:** Whether on YouTube, TV, or in a school or social setting, tap into your creativity and/or learn a new skill, art, music, yoga, academia, flower arranging, whatever. Such can enhance confidence, social skills, fun, self knowledge, mood, and, of course, increase skills.

Inner Talk and Outer Talk

- ❖ **Compassion:** Inner dialogue affects mood. We can all be harsh and critical about ourselves; it can be hard to restrain from judgement all the time—be encouraging, supportive, and objective instead. Consider self-compassion remembering where you are coming from and what you have experienced, and remind self of the positive attributes and range of experiences you have had. (Ditto for thoughts on others.)
- ❖ **Pace and Perspective:** Sometimes we work in 3rd Gear, go slow, because we are a bit tired or low. Consider the demands and expectations you place on yourself; it's ok to reduce and to focus on what is being gained despite feeling low or lethargic for instance. Other times, we expect more than is possible or lose perspective on what is important. Consider your values, expectations, judgements, and meanings that you place on situations and things. Broaden your view to include long term goals or truer personal meaning, e.g., “Is this important to me?”, “Will it be important this time next year?”, “Can I view it another way?”, “Is this fact or opinion?”
- ❖ **Supportive Connections:** It's ok to ask for help; we can all feel stressed, low, or overwhelmed at times. Can you open up more with friends, family, help groups, or a counsellor? Maintaining connections helps to build reciprocal respectful, and trusting supports. Keep in frequent touch (phone, email, face to face) with family and friends especially when feeling low.
- ❖ **Make New Connections:** Enhance your social support. Get out of the house, feel less isolated; socialise, joining a club, comedy club, volunteer. Lots of these can help build confidence and self-esteem and increase a sense of belonging—volunteering can also do this but can have the added benefit of giving something to the community or to others. All of this can be a healthy distraction from own worries.

Chill Out and Time Out

- ❖ **Relaxation:** Life can be hectic, a rat race. Start by setting aside 15mins to unwind and do something enjoyable, e.g., read, write, music, meditate. Permit yourself to relax in a suitable way to you. Your breath is a good friend (imagine a balloon in your belly, inflating and deflating as you breathe in and out).
- ❖ **Sleep:** Establish and maintain a healthy sleep routine; set times of going to and getting up from bed, consider diet and screen time which can disrupt sleep.
- ❖ **Acceptance:** It is important to accept that we are not our thoughts; best to compassionately notice the distressing thoughts and feelings (let them be; this too shall pass) instead of railing against them. Some situations we can't change; some we can: Have acceptance for the former; strength for the latter; and wisdom to know the difference.