AWARE

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION. CHANGING LIVES.

LETS TALK ABOUT...

HELPING YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Small changes, Big Impact.

It's so important to look after both your physical and mental health. And it doesn't take much time or money to make some small changes that can have a big impact on your mental wellbeing.

Good mental health means you have positive thoughts and feelings towards yourself and others. You have healthy relationships with friends, family and work colleagues, and are hopeful about the future.

How to Take Care of Your Mental Health

One of the best ways to maintain good mental health or improve it when you have a mental health problem or illness, is to help yourself.

Here are some **simple activities** you can do right now to help improve your mental health.

1. Be Active

Exercising has a feel good effect. it can boost your self-confidence, help you sleep, and generally make you feel better.

You don't need to join a gym or run a marathon either, just some light exercise every day, like walking, gardening, housework, or playing with the kids can reduce stress and anxiety, and improve your physical health.

Research shows that 50 minutes brisk walking 4 times a week can significantly reduce depression. You could also try cycling, swimming, or fit what activity you can into your daily routine, like taking the stairs at work instead of the lift which can improve your mental health.

2. Be Mindful

Try to be more aware of yourself and your surroundings. What you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Mindfulness is proven method of looking after our mental health. It is a way of paying attention to the present moment, the 'here and now', using meditation and breathing. It helps us become more aware of our thoughts and feelings, so instead of being overwhelmed by them, you can manage them better.

3. Give

Do something nice for a friend or even someone you don't know.. Smile. Give your time to volunteer work, or consider joining a community group.

Being kind to others can help you feel good. Helping out can make you feel needed and valued, which boosts our self-esteem. Look for some volunteering opportunities in your area.

4. Stay in touch

Having strong relationships with family and friends can help you deal with the ups and downs of everyday life.

Connect with the people around you. Build a good support network of people that make you feel cared for and who you can share your thoughts and feelings with.

5. Keep Learning

Is there something you've always wanted to try, but never have?

Do it now, without fear. Start a new activity or rediscover an old hobby. Set yourself small challenges, enjoy trying to achieve them and celebrate when you do.

6. Relax

Whatever it is that you love to do to relax, make time to do it regularly.

A bit of reading, yoga, meditation, or just a short walk on your lunch break; be sure to get some 'me' time in when you can. Listen to your body, pay attention to it. and if you need to take five, do it. Whatever it is, it can wait.

7. Eat well

A healthy balanced diet is as important for mental health as it is physical health. Get plenty of fruit and veg into your meals and snacks. Keep caffeine and sugar to a minimum, and drink plenty of water.

Healthy food helps the brain and the body, and a poor diet can have a significant impact on your mood and overall mental health.

Note: Always see your GP when making changes to your diet, or if you have specific dietary needs.

8. Talk about it

Opening up to someone about difficult or distressing feelings can really help. Talk to a close friend or family member who will listen and who will not judge, but give support. They may offer a different perspective, and help you cope better with what you are going through.

You could also speak to your GP, or, if you are very distressed and having thoughts of self-harm or suicide, please **call Lifeline** at any time on **0808 808 8000.**

Read our guide **'Helping you with Depression, Self-harm or Suicide'** for more information.

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9. Be Creative

We all love doing something we're good at, and achieving something boosts our confidence and self-esteem.

Hobbies like gardening, cooking or listening to music can help you forget any worries for a while and lift your mood.

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10. Avoid alcohol and drugs

Drinking too much has a negative impact on your mental health. Whatever the short-term effects, alcohol is a depressant, and there are healthier ways of coping with tough times.

Drug misuse, whether it's illegal drugs, prescribed or over the counter medicine, can lead to mental health problems or even serious mental illness.

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11. Be kind to yourself

Sometimes, we are our own worst enemies with self-criticism. But remember, there are 7 billion people on the planet, and each one of us is unique, with our own strengths and weaknesses. If we were all the same the world would be a very boring place.

Yet, many often find it difficult to accept compliments, never mind self-praise. Try not to focus on whatever you think your 'faults' may be, and treat yourself the way you would treat a friend.

Do One Thing

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself. But remember to focus on doing just one thing at a time. It will help you to reach the goals you set, and get a real sense of achievement.

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The World Health Organisation

Your mental health will vary as circumstances change, and as you go through different stages of your life. Significant events and difficult experiences can put your mental health at risk depending on how you think, feel, and behave when they happen, and what support you have around to help you.
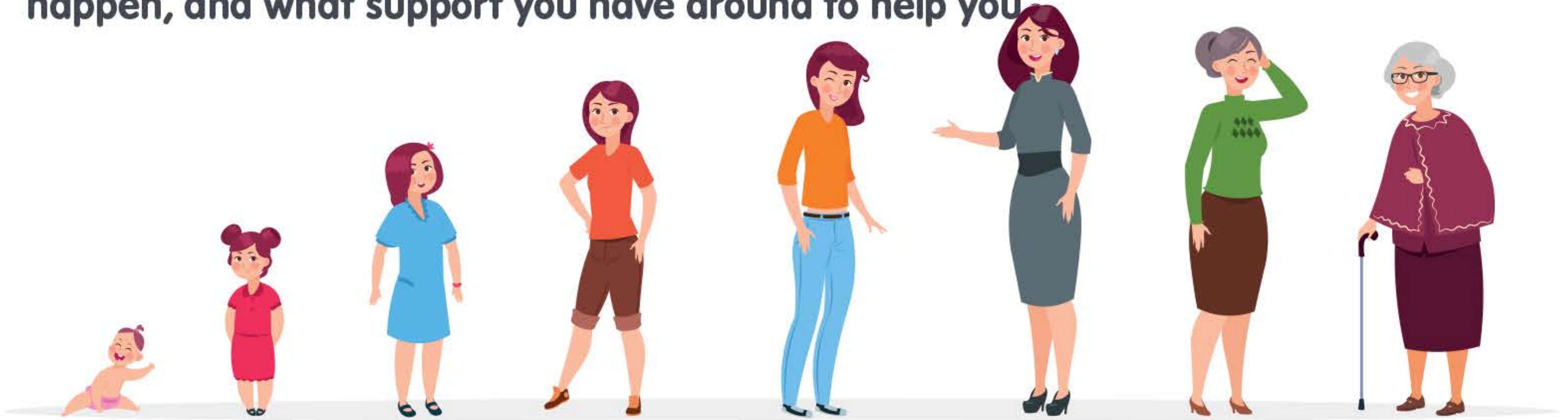
Mental health problems

We all have mental health problems now and then. This can include when you are:

- **Coping with a loss**
- **Having relationship problems**
- **Physically ill or caring for someone who is ill**
- **Under pressure at work**

You may feel down, stressed or worried, but you normally recover after a relatively short period of time. However, if these difficulties and feelings become long term, and you don't have good support, you may be at risk of developing a mental illness.

Mental Illness

A mental illness is a diagnosable condition that causes major changes in your thinking, behaviour and physical and emotional feelings. It affects your ability to work and have healthy relationships.

The most common mental illnesses are depression and anxiety affecting one in four of us in a lifetime. The more severe illnesses, such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, are less common, affecting around one in ten of us.

If you are worried about your mental health or concerned that you may have a mental illness, talk to your GP as soon as possible. They will advise on suitable help or treatment if required.

Who to contact for support

Lifeline

Lifeline is a telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress or despair. It is available 24/7 and is free to call from your mobile phone.

They can give you immediate support, offer you a face-to-face appointment, or give you information about other services in your area. **Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**

You could also
- **See your doctor**
- **Call the out-of-hours GP service**
- **Go to the A&E department**
- **Call emergency services on 999**
- **Call Samaritans on their freephone helpline 116 123.**
This is a confidential service that provides a listening ear to those in distress.

You can read our other guides for more information on help with depression, and looking after your mental health.

Find out how we can help and support you.
Please visit our website or contact us:

Visit: www.aware-ni.org.uk
Email: info@aware-ni.org
Call us: Belfast 028 9035 7820
Derry/L'Derry 028 7126 0602

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