



Self-care library

A library of self-care
activities to support
your own and others'
mental wellbeing.



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Guidance for self-care

Self-care techniques can help manage the symptoms of many mental health problems. They may also help prevent some problems from developing or getting worse.

This booklet provides some activities for looking after yourself that we hope you'll find helpful. And which you can share with others.

You may find them helpful to use by themselves or alongside support options like talking therapy or peer support.

It's okay if you don't feel able to engage in these activities or if you don't find them helpful. If you've tried something and it hasn't helped, that's ok. We're all different and some people will find these activities helpful, but not everyone will.



If you need urgent help

If you feel like you might attempt suicide, or may have seriously harmed yourself, you need urgent medical help. Please:

- Call 999 for an ambulance.
- Go straight to **A&E**, if you can.
- Call your local crisis team - if you don't already have their number, you can **find an urgent mental health helpline** on the NHS website.

If you can't do this by yourself, ask someone to help you.

Visit our **How to get help in a crisis webpage** for more information.

Mental health support

- **NHS 111:** for urgent help that isn't an emergency, get help from [NHS 111 online](#) or call 111.
- **GP:** book an appointment with a GP/doctor. They introduce people to the right mental health services for their needs.
- **Free listening services and helplines:**
 - **Our [Support line](#)** for a safe and confidential space to talk about your feelings: call 0300 102 1234 (weekdays 9am to 6pm except for bank holidays)
 - **Our [Infoline](#)** for signposting to support options: call 0300 123 3393 (weekdays 9am to 6pm except for bank holidays)
 - **[Samaritans](#):** call 116 123 (available 24/7)
 - **[SHOUT](#):** text SHOUT to 85258 (available 24/7).
- **[Side by Side](#):** an online community where you can listen, share and be heard. Available 24/7 for everyone aged 18 and over.
- **[Our website](#):** lots of information about mental health and accessing support.

Get active, feel good

Did you know that getting active can help to reduce anxiety and stress, combat low mood and boost self-esteem? It can help you feel good on the inside and out.

We know that starting something new can be challenging but there are lots of different types of exercise and physical activity. The most important thing to consider is finding something you enjoy.

Aim for balance and be mindful of the exercise you do. Try to take rest days to allow time for your body and mind to recover.

Our 'get active, feel good' pages have handy tips, resources and inspirational stories to help you get active.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/our-policy-work/sport-physical-activity-and-mental-health/get-active-feel-good/>



Wellbeing activities

Activities to support your wellbeing.



5 ways to wellbeing

1 Connect

Connecting with others helps us to feel close to people and valued for who we are. But remember being social isn't the same for everyone.

2 Be active

Many people find physical activity helps them maintain positive mental health. This doesn't have to mean running marathons or training every day at the gym.

3 Take notice

Reminding yourself to take notice can help you to be aware of how you're feeling. It can help you understand what triggers your feelings of stress or anxiety.

4 Learn

Feeling like you're learning and developing can boost your self-esteem. And sometimes, setting goals can help you to feel more productive and more in control of your life.

5 Give

There's lots of research about the effects of taking part in social and community life. Some studies have shown that people who help others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.



Have a look at our [website for examples of activities](#).

The 5 ways to wellbeing have been researched and developed by the [New Economics Foundation](#).

Wellbeing battery

As with a battery, there are things that can drain and recharge our wellbeing over time. What affects our battery is individual to us. This activity helps us to think about the things in our life that may be draining us but also what helps us to recharge.

Wellbeing battery

Things that could be draining me:

- Problems with my sleep
- Feeling isolated and lonely
- Problems with money
- Stress (at home and/or at work)
- Caring responsibilities
- Problems with drugs or alcohol
- Mental or physical health problems



Things that could help me recharge:

- Talk to someone about how I'm feeling
- Build the 5 ways to wellbeing (Connect, Be Active, Take notice, Learn, and Give) into every day
- Explore ways to get active
- Spend time connecting with people
- Give myself some tech-free time
- Try to learn something new
- Try mindfulness
- Spend time in nature
- Explore ways I can get additional support

Let's visualise our own wellness as a battery:

1. Think about what percentage your battery is right now. Add this to the battery.
2. Think about what may be draining you at the moment. Add these to the box on the left.
3. Think about what could help you recharge your battery. Add these to the box on the right.

It can be useful to refer these lists to reflect on what drains your battery and what helps to recharge it.

Wellbeing battery

Things that could be draining me:

-
-
-
-
-
-



Recharged

Drained

Things that could help me recharge:

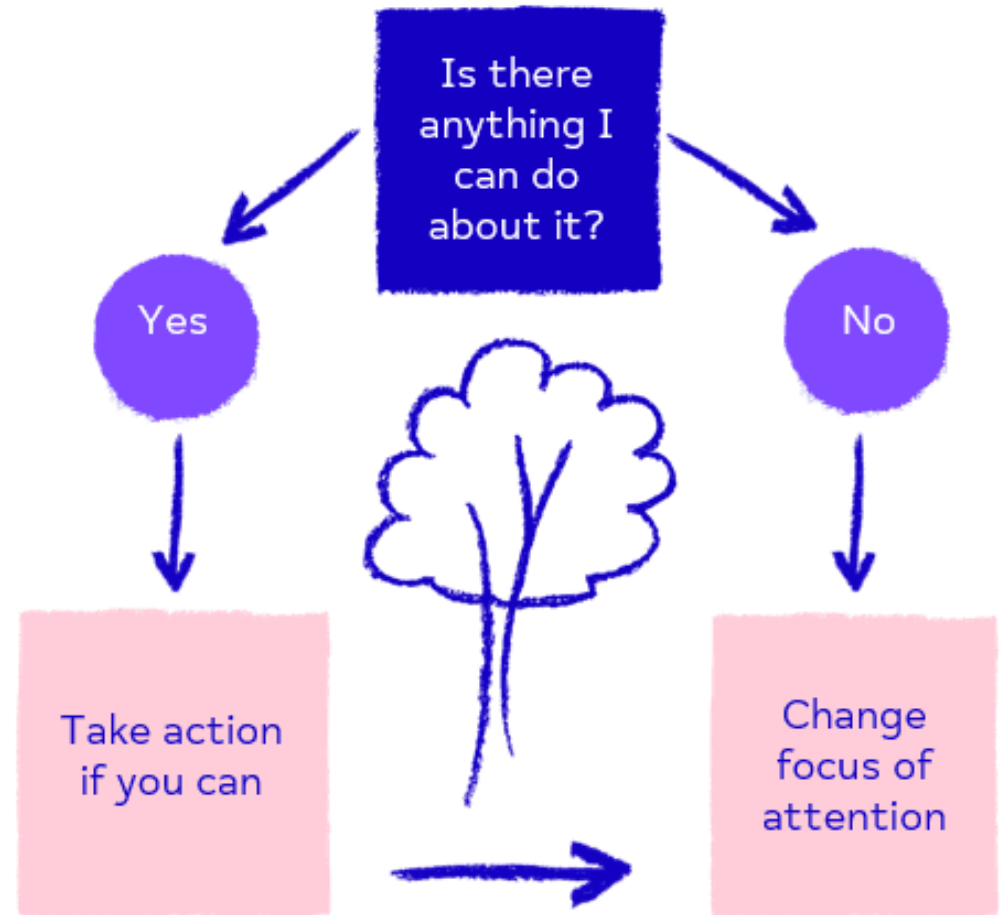
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Worry tree

Writing down worries or concerns can be a powerful way of clearing your mind. Set aside 5 minutes at the end of the day to jot down your thoughts.

If you are turning things over in your mind, follow the worry tree.

1. What is worrying you?
2. Is there anything you can do about it?
3. If yes, take action if you can.
4. If no, change your focus of your attention. Try the breathing window to help you feel more relaxed.



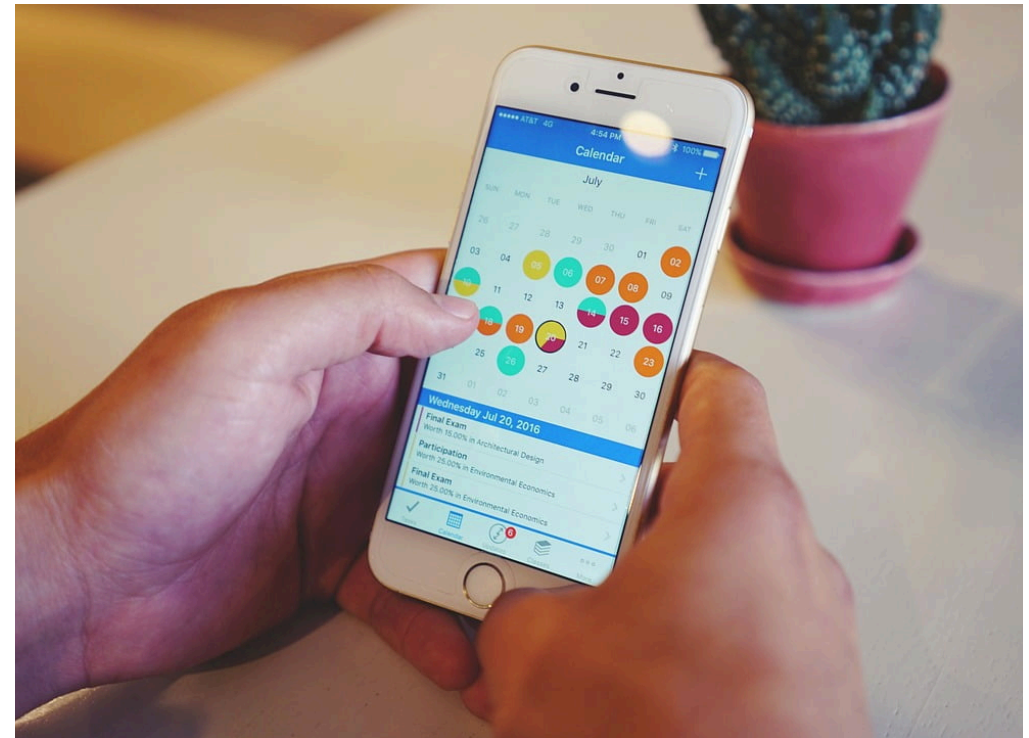
Wellbeing calendar

On a calendar (physical or digital), put in some wellbeing prompts across the coming weeks and months.

Whether it's something big or small, these prompts can help maintain awareness of wellbeing and provide fun moments across your day to day.

Examples of things you might want to include:

- Go for a walk at lunchtime.
- Message/call a friend.
- Meet a friend for lunch/cup of coffee.
- Do a 5/10-minute mindfulness practice([see our app library](#))
- Do some exercise (whatever works for you)
- Listen to a podcast or music.



Circle of giving

Research has shown that acts of kindness are linked to increases in wellbeing.¹

But sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start.

Consider:

1. What you can give to **yourself** (whether it's the opportunity to rest or a treat).
2. What you can give to **someone you know** (like a moment of your time for a lonely friend or family member), and
3. What you can give to the wider **community** (such as volunteering, or helping a stranger).

And it's okay if the things you can give right now feel small, or you feel like you can't give at all.



¹Source: Mental Health Foundation - kindness and mental health

Move your body (Five in Five)

Five in Five is a completely customisable mini-workout to help you move whatever way works for you. You can choose 5 exercises from the activity library and do each for 1 minute, adding up to a 5 minute mini workout.

- Stamp your feet
- Stretch to sky
- Take part in physical activity
- Walk or stomp it out
- March on the spot
- Jumping jacks
- ‘Box’ the air
- Dance
- Shake it out



Click the picture to find out more.

Source: <https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/ways-to-move/five-in-five>

Achievements checklist

Using time at the end of the day to look back on your day can help to celebrate your achievements and shift your focus to what is coming next: going home, socialising, going for a walk.

1. Take a moment to think about today or write down your thoughts.
2. Acknowledge and accept 3 things that were difficult.
3. Consider 3 things that went well. Hold onto them.
4. Choose an action that signals the end of the day and the change into evening
5. How will you rest and recharge?

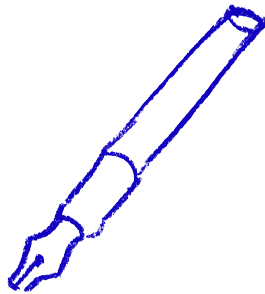


Journalling

Journalling can be a helpful technique in self-care practice.

Writing down thoughts, emotions and behaviours can provide clarity and help to identify patterns in your thinking.

Journalling can be a way of recording your personal achievements and goals



Prompts

3 things I want to accomplish...

Today I was thankful for...

Free flow writing

Write whatever comes to mind, letting your thoughts flow

Write a letter

To yourself or someone else, in the past, present or future

Mood mapping

Open full table in browser:

<https://mind.turtl.co/story/wellbeing-activities/page/2/9>

Write descriptive words about your mood or show in pictures

Positive affirmations

When we aren't feeling great, we might often put ourselves down and say negative things about ourselves.

If you find yourself doing this, it can help to take a moment to say something kind about yourself.

It can feel strange at first, but being kinder to ourselves can boost our self esteem over time

Use statements starting with 'I' and repeat statements that are personal to you.

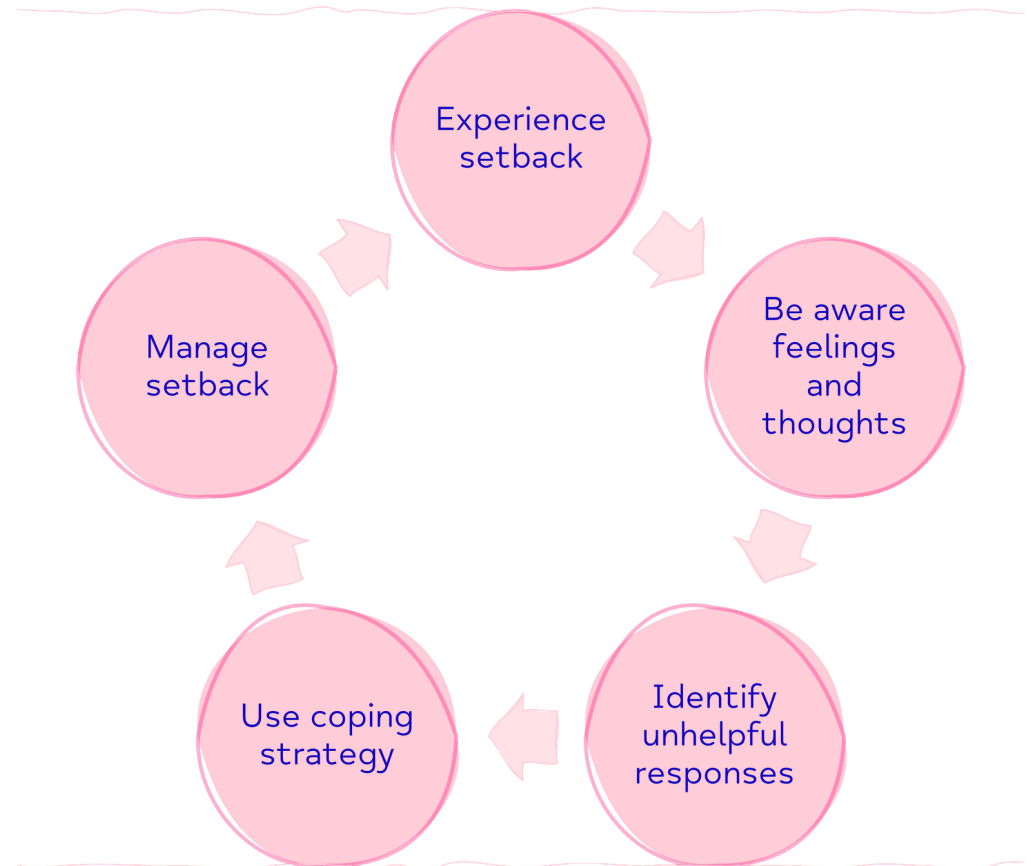


Setback plan

Having an awareness of your personal warning signs and coping strategies can be useful for self-care

By building a setback plan, you can feel prepared for situations that may otherwise be challenging.

Setback	Thoughts and feelings	Coping strategy
Missing a deadline	Negative thoughts about myself	Write down 3 positive things about myself
A friend cancels plans	They don't like me Feeling nauseous	Check in with friend to find out why they cancelled Use breathing techniques to reduce physical symptoms



Source: <https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/mental-health-maintenance-plan/>

Prayer and spirituality

For some of us, allocating time to spiritual practice or prayer can be a positive self-care strategy.

Finding new practices that create a connection with religion or spirituality might be a way of engaging in self-care.

Prayer or spiritual practice can be a way of creating space to explore your thoughts and feelings, as well as provide a sense of belonging and connection.

Source: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/treatments-and-wellbeing/spirituality-and-mental-health

Prayer or spiritual practices can be personal and look different to each individual.



Engaging with nature

Spending time in nature can be therapeutic and benefit both your mental and physical wellbeing.

Building a connection with nature can be a great form of self-care.



Examples of activities you can do in nature:

Grow your own vegetables

Meditate in nature

Go bird spotting or look for wildlife

Notice your 5 senses in nature

Open full table in browser:

Care for a houseplant

<https://mind.turtl.co/story/wellbeing-activities/page/2/13>

Creative activity

Creative activities can be a great way of expressing your emotions.

Engaging in the arts can boost your mental health, help to build new skills and gain purpose.

You don't have to show anyone what you make or be perfect at it. It's just a way to express yourself.

Some examples of creative activities are:

- drawing and painting
- taking photographs
- playing an instrument
- writing stories or poetry
- dancing
- crafting



Grounding techniques

Grounding techniques can help you feel more connected to the present.

They might help you cope with intrusive thoughts or difficult feelings, memories and flashbacks.



3 things I'm grateful for

Gratitude can help us to celebrate the present and be an active participant in our own lives.

Valuing and appreciating people around us, ourselves, situations and circumstances, can help to focus the mind on what we already have rather than something that's absent and needed.



Sources: Robert Emmons & adapted from: www.academicwritingsuccess.com/15-fabulous-gratitude-writing-prompts.

Ideas to get you started:

- Your favourite moment recently.
- Something beautiful you saw recently.
- A random act of kindness from another person.
- Something that cheers you up when you're feeling down.
- A favourite hobby.
- Something you enjoyed watching or listening to.
- Something small you achieved today, and how you feel now.
- Something someone else did to make you happy.
- Something you did to make someone happy.
- An animal you know and what makes them special.

Tense & relax

When you're stressed your muscles can become tight and tense. This exercise helps you notice tension in your body and relax your muscles.



Source: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-exercises

1. Lie down or sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes or focus on a spot in the distance.
2. Start by clenching your toes as much as you can for a few seconds then releasing them. Notice the difference between the two feelings.
3. Match this to your breathing. Tense your muscles as you take a deep breath in, and relax as you breathe out.
4. Move up your body to your thighs, your stomach and all the way to your shoulders and hands, clenching and relaxing each muscle in turn. Take time to notice any parts of your body that feel tense, tight or tired. You can repeat if you still feel tense.
5. Take a moment to relax, then slowly and gently begin to move. When you feel ready, you can stand up slowly.

Sights & senses - 5-4-3-2-1

The 5-4-3-2-1 method has been found to help engage your 5 senses to calm feelings of anxiety.

The idea is that it can help you to shift your focus to what's currently happening around you instead of what's making you feel anxious.

Look around you and focus on:

5 things you can see.

4 things you can feel.

3 things you can hear.

2 things you can smell.

1 thing you can taste.

Source: [PsychCentral.com](https://www.psychcentral.com)



P.O.W.E.R

P.O.W.E.R is a useful tool to help manage your reaction to events and situations.

Using this acronym provides a space to reflect on what is happening at a moment in time. It can help you decide what is the most helpful way to respond. This may be different to your initial reaction was to the situation.

It can provide time for your body and mind to calm and assess what is happening in a more objective way.

Pause your thought process.

Observe your breathing. Allow your thoughts and feelings to exist without reacting to them.

Weigh up the options. If you were an outside observer, what reaction would you suggest?

Experience the recommended solution and try it out in a small way to begin with.

Review whether your small step worked? What was most helpful? What would you do next time?

Source: Taken from the MENTOR 2 booklet developed and trialled as part of the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP)

N.O.T.I.C.E

N.O.T.I.C.E. is a helpful technique to pause and notice how you are feeling.

It takes you through some questions to help you to take note of what may be causing the anxiety/feelings of being overwhelmed.

Notice you're experiencing stress or anxiety and pause.

Only focus on your breathing for a few moments.

Try to observe your thoughts and feelings. How are they impacting your body?

Is it possible to zoom out and see the situation from an outside observer's perspective?

Can you respond to this situation in a different way? What could you do?

Erase the anxiety by following the steps of N.O.T.I.C.E.



Source: Taken from the MENTOR 2 booklet developed and trialled as part of the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP)

Stress scan

This 90 second stress scan can help to recognise your stress signature, the way your body feels when it is under stress.

Learning how to recognise your stress signature, can be the first step to managing stress.

1) Scan your body from head to toe.

2) Identify any physical signs of stress, such as tense muscles, an upset stomach, or shallow breathing.

3) Now scan your mind and mood. Notice if you are snappy, easily startled or have racing thoughts.



Active mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness can be an effective way to move your focus to the present moment and away from other thoughts. Active mindfulness can be useful for those who find traditional methods such as meditation and yoga difficult. You can do it whilst walking, gardening or any other activity.

See

What do you notice about the things around you? Are there any colours that stand out, or textures that look interesting?

Touch

How do the things you're handling feel? Or even the air on your skin? What are the textures of the things around you?

Smell

What can you smell as you move about your activity? Are there changes? How would you describe those smells?

Hear

Can you identify the layers of sound around you? How do these change as you go about your activity?

Many people find practising mindfulness helps them manage their day-to-day wellbeing. But it doesn't always work for everyone.

Breathing techniques

Learning to breathe more deeply can help you feel a lot calmer. It takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.



Breathing window

It can take just 90 seconds to manage a strong emotional response¹.

Allow yourself 90 seconds to step back from a situation which causes panic, stress or anger.

Use the Breathing window technique to help you step away.

Some people can feel anxious if they're unable to hold their breath or breath out for the advised length of time. If this is the case for you, remove the numbers and inhale and exhale for a period of time that is comfortable for you.



¹Although the 90 seconds to manage an emotional response is backed up by evidence, we're not suggesting people are 'out of control' or otherwise if they're not calm after 90 seconds. For example, some [panic attacks](#) can last for 5 minutes.

5 finger breathing

This mindfulness technique can help to relieve stress and anxiety. It can take your focus away from worries and stressors by enabling us to pause and use our fingers to take 5 deep breaths.

1. Stretch out 1 of your hands nice and wide.
2. Use your index finger from your other hand to slowly trace up your thumb from the bottom to the top. As you do this, slowly breathe in through your nose.
3. Once you get to the top of your thumb, trace your index finger down the other side. As you do this, slowly breathe out through your mouth.
4. Keep going until you have traced your whole hand.



Source: www.embracecalmerkids.com.au/free-printables

3/5 breathing

3/5 breathing can help you to restore the correct balance of oxygen in your body. And help you to feel calmer.

When we get stressed our rate of breathing often increases. We tend to take a lot of short, shallow breaths, which can make the situation worse. If we take in too much oxygen, it's likely to lead to light-headedness that can make us feel panicky. This is known as hyperventilating.

Some people can feel anxious if they're unable to hold their breath or breath out for the advised length of time. If this is the case for you, remove the numbers and inhale and exhale for a period of time that is comfortable for you.

- 1. Breathe in and count to 3 as you do so.**
- 2. Hold for 2 seconds.**
- 3. Now breathe out and count to 5.**
- 4. Keep doing this until you feel more relaxed.**

Source: Taken from the MENTOR 2 booklet developed and trialled as part of the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP)

Mindful breathing exercise

Take a deep breath in and a long exhale out – feels good, doesn't it?

Try this mindful breathing exercise video to help you feel more calm and present.

Source: [Every Mind Matters Mindful](#)



Deep breathing

People experiencing stress tend to take short, shallow breaths from the upper part of the chest rather than from the diaphragm.

Fast, shallow breathing can worsen feelings of stress and anxiety. Whereas breathing more deeply, from the diaphragm, can increase feelings of calmness and wellbeing.

You could try the following deep breathing technique for 10 minutes as part of a regular routine to help you manage stress. Or you could use it when you notice your stress levels rise.

Only try this if it feels comfortable to do so. You can take a break at any time if this isn't working for you

- 1. Make sure you are sitting or standing comfortably, with a straight back.**
- 2. Place 1 hand on your chest and the other on your belly.**
- 3. Take a deep breath in through your nose, ensuring the hand on your belly rises and you breathe in enough air to inflate your lungs.**
- 4. Breathe out slowly.**
- 5. Notice how you feel. Many people find this simple technique can help them to feel calmer.**

Source: Taken from the MENTOR 2 booklet developed and trialled as part of the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP)

Alternate nostril breathing

This is an old but simple technique. It may sound strange at first, but many people have found it helps them to feel calmer and more focused. It can be effective at night for helping you get to sleep.

1. Place your thumb on your right nostril and inhale deeply through your left nostril.
2. Place your index finger on your left nostril briefly.
3. Remove your thumb and breath out through your right nostril and breath.
4. Switch the pattern around, inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left.
5. Continue for a few minutes, switching nostrils each time.

Some people say that inhaling through the left and exhaling through the right, helps you to feel calmer.

And that inhaling through the right and exhaling through the left, helps you to feel more positive.

This type of breathing may not work for everyone. If it makes you feel uncomfortable, try another activity that may work better for you.

Source: Taken from the MENTOR 2 booklet developed and trialled as part of the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP)

Thank you for reading

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