

Exploring wellbeing

We feel at our best when we feel happy, healthy and well.

When we feel like this, life feels easier and is more enjoyable. Which means being able to live a fuller and more varied life than if we're feeling unhappy or not well in ourselves.

So what do we mean by feeling 'well'?

Being well or 'well-being' refers to the state of our body, mind and spirit. Or put another way, it's about being in a state of 'well-ness' as opposed to 'ill-ness', physically, mentally and emotionally. By actively nurturing our wellness or wellbeing we're better able to handle life's challenges, and also to 'bounce back' afterwards, something that is known as resilience.

Our bodies and minds are quite good at telling us if something isn't quite what it should be. The trouble is, we don't always listen to or act on the signs and symptoms, or they can become so everyday and normalised that we can forget what feeling well feels like.

We will all experience stressful and challenging times in our lives. The difference is how we respond to these – with some people seeming able to cope or be more resilient than others. What's important is learning to notice or tune in to how we're feeling and thinking so we can pick up on when things have tipped too far and when low mood, anxiety, low energy or negative thoughts are starting to impact our lives.

So what are the things to look out for that may be your body's way of asking for a bit more balance, self-care, kindness or attention?

Use the checklist below to get a feel for some of the messages your body may be telling you. Remember though, everyone is likely to experience some or all of these in their lives. What we need to look out for is when these become everyday things and if they are starting to impact how we want to live our lives. For example, if we experience regular and frightening panic attacks that prevent us going out or we feel so low that we've lost motivation or have lost contact with friends.

Cognitive messages: constant worrying, anxious or racing thoughts, memory problems, difficulty concentrating, seeing only the negative.

Emotional messages: low mood or general unhappiness, anxiety and agitation, mood swings, irritability or anger, feeling overwhelmed, feeling lonely and isolated.

Physical messages: low energy, frequent colds or flu, headaches, shoulder or neck pain or tension, diarrhoea, constipation or other gut problems, nausea, dizziness, rapid heart rate.

Behavioural messages: eating more or less than usual, trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, withdrawing from others, loss of motivation or interest, difficulty making decisions, neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs, self harming, nervous habits (eg nail biting, pacing).

Remember though, everyone will experience some of these things at some point.

The good news is, you don't have to feel this way. By listening to your body's messages and making often small changes to what you're doing and how you're living, you can get your physical, emotional and mental wellbeing back into a healthy balance.

Sometimes we need more expert help, particularly to support our emotional and mental wellbeing. Not because we can't do it ourselves, but because Western societies and medicine in particular have focused on physical health rather than seeing the mind and body as one entity – so we've grown up learning and knowing about our bodies and how to look after them, but less about self-care of our minds.

As a result we sometimes feel it's a sign of weakness or we're embarrassed to share with anyone that we're struggling with how we're feeling. And yet if we had a bad cut or a broken bone we wouldn't hesitate to seek professional help to treat it or reset it.

So it needs to be with our minds and our emotional and mental health – if we don't feel great, we need to seek care and help to mend ourselves so we feel well again. We are all in a certain state of physical health, and so

it is that we each have a state of emotional or mental health. Sometimes we're in great shape and sometimes we need to make some adjustments or get help to feel and be healthy, happy and well again.

Looking after your body

"We are what we eat" as the old adage goes. And it's true. Like a computer – the quality of the data you get out is only as good as what you put in. It's the same with our food or clothes – if we use poor quality materials or ingredients, the end result isn't going to be so great.

To remind yourselves of what 'good' looks like to your body when it comes to food, as well as other important things like exercise and sleep, check out the following resources:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>

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Feeding your mind

Just as it's good to eat nutritious foods to maintain our mental and physical health, so we need to feed a healthy diet to our mind to keep it functioning well too.

What's meant by a diet for our minds? Our thoughts are the starting point for our feelings, and how we feel dictates how we act. So if we want healthy and positive emotions and behaviours, we need healthy and positive mind food.

Firstly, become aware of what you're feeding your mind – the films and series you watch, the social media you consume, the music and podcasts you listen to, the books or magazines you read, the people you hang out with. Negative sentiment, words and imagery directly affect the images, words and 'monkey mind' in our heads. And this directly impacts our thoughts and how we feel.

So if you feed your mind with words, sentiments and images that have a negative bent to them (e.g. scrolling through negative discussions on social media, watching violent movies or spending time with people who tend to be negative or who drain your energy), that's going to affect your mental health.

Don't just take our word for it! A study in which young people were asked to stop following their normal social media accounts and instead follow just 4 inspirational role models on their feeds showed a dramatic and positive change in how they were feeling about themselves and life in general in just a few months. Their self-esteem increased and their horizons expanded, as did their aspirations and goals. Try this pledge to see how feeding your mind with inspiring and positive things on social media affects how you feel over time.



You can also train your mind to think more positively using [apps](#) based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Other ways to wellbeing

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/>: for information and advice on key health areas, from eating and exercise to mental and sexual health and sleep.

<https://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/wellness.htm>: although a US website, it provides comprehensive and well researched information around our mental health, including excellent sections on [understanding our emotions](#) and [strengthening our mental health](#), anxiety and stress (including [signs, symptoms and causes](#), [stress management](#), [how to stop worrying](#), [relaxation techniques](#) and the [benefits of mindfulness](#)), [getting better sleep](#) and understanding [teen mental health challenges](#). You can also access a simple [toolkit](#) that explores the importance of emotional intelligence and resilience, and includes four, staged meditations to help you start to connect with your emotions.

Use this [emotional wellness checklist](#) to get a feel for which areas may need more attention and what you can do to improve how you feel.