

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A guide

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1. WHY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IS IMPORTANT

At the Open University, we recognise that mental health and wellbeing impacts on all aspects of our lives in terms of how we feel, function and interact with others.

With one in four of us experiencing a mental health difficulty at some point in our lives, we're all much more aware of the need to maintain good mental health and wellbeing. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of looking after our mental health and wellbeing further.

This guide provides help, tools and advice on what to do and who you can speak to if you feel your mental health or wellbeing has been affected, or if you or someone you know needs some support.



2. INCREASING MY UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Wellbeing describes our mental and physical health and how these elements interconnect. If one is impacted, it can affect the other and plays a big part in how happy and comfortable we are in our everyday lives and at work.

We often know what's best for our own mental health and wellbeing, but don't always take the time to focus on looking after ourselves.

Use this guide to reflect on where you do things well, and the areas that you may want to improve.

Visit [Wellbeing+](#) to find out about what support is available to help your mental health and wellbeing

3. WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

With at least one in six people experiencing common mental health problems in the workplace, it is likely that you or someone you know has been through difficulties.

Research shows that there are lots of simple things we can do to look after and improve our mental health.

These actions are known as the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Why not take some time to reflect on which ones you are doing well, and which ones need more attention?



Connect



Be active



Take notice



Learn



Give

The [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) are a set of evidence-based public health messages developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of the whole population.

3.1 Connect



Staying in touch with friends, loved ones and colleagues can make us happier and feel more secure. Often, just having a chat can lift our mood.

We can make the most of technology to stay in touch more easily. Video-chat apps like Skype and FaceTime are useful, especially at times when we can't see people, such as due to Covid-19.

Speaking to people at work is important too. Think about ways to connect with your manager and team, such as arranging a coffee, a short walk, or even a virtual coffee. Try to talk about things other than just work.

At home it's easy to slip into patterns where we don't communicate properly. Try switching off the TV or screen to talk or play a game with your children, friends or family.

3.2 Be active

Being active isn't just good for our physical health, it's also proven to have a positive effect on our mental health and wellbeing.

- Encourage yourself by taking part in exercise that you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.
- Look for opportunities to build exercise into your daily routine.
- It can be as simple as going for a walk, a bike ride, or dancing to your favourite music around the house.

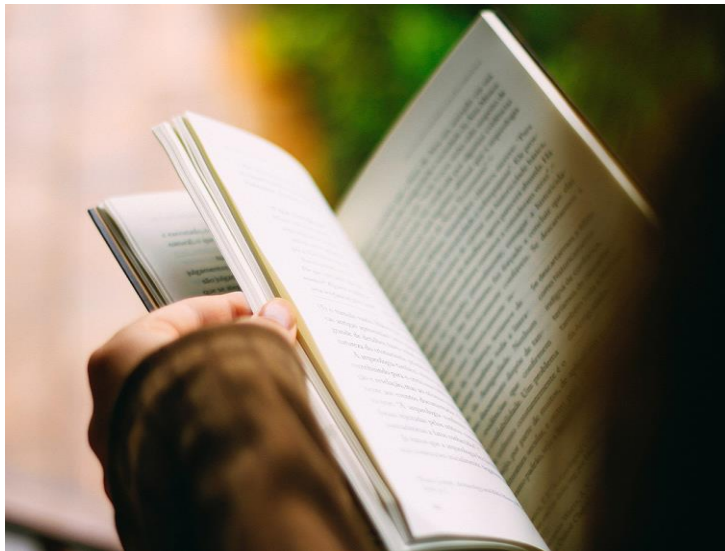


3.3 Take notice

Taking notice is about being aware of the present, whether you're spending time with friends or taking a moment for yourself. Be curious, take time to see beauty around you and notice things that are out of the ordinary. Enjoy the moment.

- Spend time outside, nature is great for your mental health. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling.
- Give yourself permission to take time for relaxation and try to reduce stress.
- Acknowledge if you are feeling anxious or stressed speak up if you are finding things difficult.

3.4 Learn



Learning enhances our self-esteem and confidence and can be a great way to meet new people. Set a challenge that will give you a sense of achievement and enjoyment.

- Look for opportunities to learn something new.
- Spend time reflecting on what has gone well each week and what you could do differently.
- Rediscover old interests/hobbies.

3.5 Give

Giving your time can be very rewarding. People who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.

- Look for opportunities to carry out a small kindness for a friend or neighbour.
- Volunteer your time for a charity or other good cause.
- Say thank you to someone for something they have done for you.

4. WELLBEING AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Paying attention to our physical health is widely spoken about and we all know the health benefits of exercise.

Over the Covid-19 lockdowns, a number of people reported drinking excessively, over-eating and reducing exercise.

How well have you stuck to your physical health routines and habits over the last few months?
What more could you do?



- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet and limit alcohol, as this is an important part of maintaining good physical health.
- Try to give yourself enough sleep every night. Where possible, wake up and go to bed at the same time every morning and night.

If you're interested in finding out more, take a look at the online module, a [Healthy Lifestyle](#), which looks at the benefits of physical activity and a healthy balanced diet.

5. WELLBEING AT WORK



With remote working, we are spending more time working from home and the way we work and connect with each other has changed.

This has led to additional pressures on our workload and a tension between work and home life.

We know that you can work in ways that allow you to balance work with the other demands in your life.

Take the time that you need and know that you are trusted to achieve your work in the way that works for you. Your manager, policies and procedures are all there to support you if needed.

[Remote work wellbeing](#) has several resources and external links to support your wellbeing while working from home.

5.1 Working from home

Many of us are now working from home and with a few simple changes, we can ensure that we do this as effectively and safely as possible.

Think about the following tips to help you:

- Create a boundary between work and home - this could be a dedicated workspace or setting limits for when you are available.
- Bring some structure to your day - set out start and finish times that work for you or block out time for lunch and breaks and stick to them.
- Be thoughtful about the time of day you send emails and the signal it sends to colleagues. Try to avoid sending them late at night or during weekends, or let people know that you do not require an immediate response.
- Keep in regular touch with your manager, your team and other colleagues
- If your workload is overwhelming, speak to your manager to highlight this and help you focus on the priorities.



The [remote working toolkit](#) contains resources that support managers and colleagues to consider working practices while working remotely.

5.2 Covid-19 advice and support

We are all adapting to the way we have been affected by Covid-19. It has had an impact on all aspects of our lives, from being able to see friends, family and colleagues, through to adjustments on how and where we work.

Several resources are available to help answer your Covid-19 questions and provide you with advice and support.

- [Coronavirus FAQs](#)
- [Working from home safely](#)
- [Mental health and wellbeing support, signposting and guidance](#)

5.3 Where to go for more support



We all have times when we aren't at our best and it is tempting to try and handle this alone but speaking to others can often help.

There are plenty of people who are here to help if you are finding things difficult, or just need someone to talk to. The most important thing is to speak up to get the assistance you need. Here are some of the people who can help you:

- Your colleagues
- Your line manager
- Your People Hub
- Your union representative

5.4 Employee Assistance Programme

In partnership with Health Assured, the OU offers an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) providing resources on a wide range of topics with proactive ideas to support you with all elements of your wellbeing.

You can access the [EAP website](#) by using the following login:

User: Open

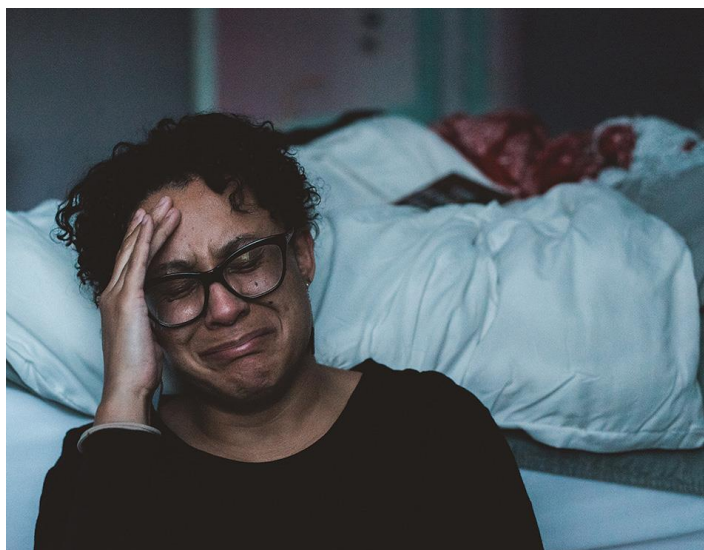
Password: Uni

You can also download the Health Assured app, My Healthy Advantage. This enables you to personalise topics that are of interest to you and access them on your mobile. Once you've downloaded the app, you will need to enter the following unique OU code the first time you log in: MHA065347.

The EAP is available to all staff and your immediate family members, including your spouse or partner (if they live with you) and your children aged between 16 and 24 in full-time education.

The confidential helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by calling 0800 0305182 (Republic of Ireland: 1800 936071). If you feel you need additional help, you can also arrange counselling sessions by calling the helpline.

5.5 Do you need urgent help?



If you or someone you know needs more immediate help, you can contact:

- [Samaritans](#) - Tel: 116 123 who are available any time and any day
 - [Mind](#) - Tel: 0300 123 3393
 - [SANEline](#) - Tel: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm-10.30pm)
 - Your local GP for medical advice by making an emergency appointment
-
- NHS (England and Wales) Tel: 111
 - NHS 24 (Scotland) Tel: 08454 242424
 - NI Direct (Northern Ireland) Tel: 0808 808 8000
 - 999 or go to Accident and Emergency (A&E) for immediate help

5.6 How to support others

You might worry that you do not know the best way to help or will say something wrong and make things worse. But the small things we say or do can make a big difference to someone.

If you know someone struggling with their mental health or wellbeing, you could start a conversation with them. Some things to think about:

- Choose an appropriate time and place to talk to them.
- Express concern and say that you can help.
- Offer your time to listen and try not to make assumptions.
- Do not force them if they don't want to talk.
- Reassure them that they are not alone and that they will be able to get the help they need.
- Encourage them to seek advice and support - refer to the additional resources page in this guide.

6. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information, click on the links below to access external websites:

[Every Mind Matters](#) gives simple and practical advice to stay mentally healthy.

[NHS - Mental health and wellbeing](#) – advice on dealing with stress, anxiety or depression.

[Action for Happiness](#) is a movement of people committed to building a happier and more caring society.

[Sleep Council](#) is an impartial, advisory organisation that raises the awareness of the importance of a good night's sleep to your health.

[Mental Health UK](#) provides information and support about mental health conditions.

[Mind](#) provides information and support about mental health

[My Wellbeing](#) website provides information about maintaining good physical and mental health.

