



Horse Guards Parade

10 DOWNING STREET

BIG BEN

Westminster Bridge

THE SUPREME COURT

OLIVER CROMWELL  
1599  
1658

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

ST THOMAS HOSPITAL

QE II CENTRE

Jewel Tower

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

# Workplace Wellbeing

## BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

 Victoria Westminster

 Victoria  
LONDON STARTS HERE



[www.charlottewiseman.com](http://www.charlottewiseman.com)

# Contents



## 1. Introduction

### 2. Daily habits to boost your mind and body

Sleep, Technology & Switching off  
Be Active  
Mindfulness  
Nutrition  
Community  
Hobbies & Learning

### 3. Leading with Wellbeing

Tips for Leaders to look after themselves  
Create health-enhancing workplaces

### 4. Understanding mental health and mental illness

An overview of positive mental health  
Mental fitness Resilience  
Mental illness

### 5. Tools and tips to support better mental health

The Stress management tool  
Tips on supporting someone with a mental health problem

### 6. Resources

Websites, apps, books and charities to support you on your wellbeing journey

**Disclaimer:** Please note this guide is a menu of ideas for you to explore. If you are under the care of a specialist, please always check with them before following any advice in this booklet. If you are unsure about the suitability of any recommendations please check with a relevant health practitioner or with your internal hr / occupational health team.



# Introduction

The [World Health Organisation defines health as mental, physical and social wellbeing](#)<sup>(1)</sup>. These are the foundations of you living a healthy, happy and fulfilled life and are the building blocks of a strong, supportive and thriving community. Research also consistently shows that [investing in staff wellbeing enhances productivity](#)<sup>(2)</sup>, [innovation](#)<sup>(3)</sup> and [staff loyalty](#)<sup>(4)</sup>, enabling organisations to [optimise performance](#)<sup>(2)</sup> and sustain it for the long-term. On the flip-side we all know that in the busy-ness of modern life it is not always easy to make the time to look after our minds and our bodies, even when we know we should. For this reason, the Victoria and Victoria Westminster BIDs have partnered with Wellbeing and Leadership expert, [Charlotte Wiseman](#)<sup>(5)</sup>, to create this practical guide of tips and ideas on how you can enhance all three aspects of your health one step at a time.

We invite you to see these tips and thoughts not as a rule book but as a menu of ideas to inspire you to live a balanced life so that you can sustain your health, boost your performance, enhance your daily satisfaction and build stronger relationships with those around you. If you don't know where to start, then here are a few thoughts on how to get started and use this guide:

- Think of the new habits you try as an experiment and not a commitment that you 'have' to adhere to forever - explore different approaches to the way you eat, sleep and play and just take notice of the impact these small changes have.
- Choose one area you wish to focus on, for example sleep or exercise, and try to adopt just 1 small change

this week for one week only. Next week try a new activity or habit or, add a second habit to your first change. Over a period of 5 weeks see which habits stick and which ones have the most impact. Then consider if you could make these habits stick for a little longer and how that could make you feel.

- Pick a new topic each week from the first section of the guide and choose just one small change you could make to improve your health in that area. Doing just one new thing each week will mean that over the next 6 weeks you will have established one new health habit in each of the core areas of wellbeing. At the end of the six weeks take a moment to reflect on how you feel and how you could continue to build on the progress made.

- Experiment and enjoy your new habits with someone. Partner with a colleague or friend and commit to making some changes together. This can hold you accountable when your willpower drops and inspire you to keep going as well as giving your social health and extra boost.
- Share your plans and your success' on social media with [#WorkingOnWellbeing](#) [@victoriabid](#) [@stepinsidewellbeing](#)

We hope this best practice guide helps you start taking a proactive approach to your wellbeing and your happiness. If you have any additional questions, feedback or suggestions for how we can support you further please feel free to get in touch.

# Daily habits to boost your mind and body



## SLEEP, TECHNOLOGY & SWITCHING OFF

### When was the last time you woke up feeling refreshed?

Whether you struggle to get to sleep, wake up during the night or just don't get enough hours in bed, most of us could do with a more restful night sleep. Sleep deprivation, whether due to insomnia or voluntarily, heightens our [stress response leading to impaired cognitive function](#)<sup>(6)</sup> which results in [decreased performance](#)<sup>(7)</sup>, [short tempers](#)<sup>(8)</sup> and [lowered mood](#)<sup>(9)</sup>. Not only does it [make us less able to deal with stress](#)<sup>(10)</sup>, but it impacts our [relationships](#)<sup>(9)</sup> at work and at home, inhibits our immune system, our digestion and vital functions and is considered by many researchers to be a [safety concern in the workplace](#)<sup>(11)</sup>.



On the flipside, getting 7-9 hours a night can improve our ability to focus, to make good decisions and to think creatively to innovate and overcome challenges; it can improve athletic performance and support health weight management; and it can improve self-esteem, extend your lifespan and boost happiness.

While sleeping, we refill our physical and psychological reserves, memories process so we can learn effectively, injuries heal, cells are generated, our bodies and minds refuel. Think about taking just 1 step to help improve your sleep habits, commit to it for one week and watch for the changes.

## 10 TOP TIPS

- 1** Avoid caffeine after 3pm and stop drinking alcohol at least 3-4 hours before bed, ensuring you drink plenty of water in the interim.
- 2** Think about your evening meal. Try to include a mix of complex carbs, cooked vegetables and protein, avoiding spicy, fatty, large or heavy meals late at night.
- 3** Include exercise in your daily routine, just 10 minutes a day of light to moderate exercise has been shown to improve sleep. For optimal sleep you should aim for 30-40 minutes of exercise to be done first thing in the morning on 3-4 days a week.
- 4** Set a Tech Curfew – A main reason we all struggle to sleep is that we use our phones until the last minute of the day, try to stop using any screens (including phone & TV) at least 1-2 hours before bed.
- 5** Try to create an evening routine which you follow regardless of when you are going to bed, some good options are reading, having a bath and having a hot drink.
- 6** Less good options are watching emotional or dramatic television, replying to emails or doing intense exercise.
- 7** Consider the temperature of your bedroom, this should be slightly cooler than you would want during the day as this will help your sleep.
- 8** Declutter your bedroom and remove technology including TV's, tablets and phones.
- 9** If you tend to worry, try writing down your to do list for the following day about 2-hours before bed include everything that is on your mind on this list even if the things seem small.
- 10** A 10-minute mindfulness practice before you go to bed can help to calm the nervous system (see page 8). You can then practice this technique as you lie in bed and try to sleep.
- 10** Experiment with not using your phone in the first 15 minutes of waking up, how we start our day has an impact on how we sleep the following night.

### BE ACTIVE

**We all know we need to stay active to promote good health, but we often forget that this does not have to be going for an intense gym session or for a run four times a week.**

For most of us exercise is something we do to maintain our physical health but we often forget the benefits of movement for our [mental strength](#)<sup>(12)</sup> and [psychological health](#)<sup>(13)</sup>. Not only has research shown that it helps to reduce stress, but [studies have also shown that doing just 15 minutes of exercise improves our capacity to learn new things](#)<sup>(14)</sup> as well as [enhancing productivity at work](#)<sup>(15)</sup> and [reducing our risk of dementia](#)<sup>(16)</sup>.

On a physical level, it is [not possible to undo the effects of a sedentary lifestyle](#)<sup>(17)</sup> (sitting for 12-16 hours of the day) by doing intense workouts at other times, we need to be staying mobile throughout the day. A brisk walk or jog can have a huge impact in a short space of time, [including enhanced sleep quality, reduced risk of injury, increased energy levels and better concentration](#)<sup>(18)</sup>. Making the most of all the [daily opportunities to increase the amount of activity](#)<sup>(18)</sup> in our lives is a practical way to build healthier habits so that you can sustain health of mind and body for the long-term.

We know that the benefits of regular movement are more than just physical, [regular movement improves mental health, productivity, sleep and mood](#)<sup>(13)</sup> so take a moment now to think how you can bring movement into your daily routine.



\* DISCLAIMER: PLEASE check with a GP before starting any stretching or exercise programme to ensure that it is safe for you to do so.

## 5 STEPS TO START

- 1** Walk for an extra 10 minutes a day by considering your commute – get off the bus or tube 1 stop earlier or perhaps try cycling.
- 2** Can you initiate walking meetings with colleagues? They can improve creative thinking, boost your energy and your health.
- 3** How could you add stretch breaks into your daily routine to keep your spine moving and the blood flowing?
- 4** Make a plan to exercise with a friend or colleague to stay accountable – some people exchange one trainer so that they know that if they don't turn up then the other person will also miss their workout!
- 5** Try a new class and see it as an experiment not a long-term commitment.

## MINDFULNESS

The Harvard Business Review has highlighted mindfulness meditation as a **“must-have’ for twenty-first century executives<sup>(34)</sup>** and it is a key driver in **workplace productivity<sup>(35)</sup>**. So whether you are a leader, a future leader or want to boost your performance at work, and in your personal life, this is a perfect place to start.

Mindfulness is defined as **“paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally”** (Jon Kabat-Zinn, as cited in Purser, 2015). Simply put, it is about being aware of your thoughts, emotions, senses, and surrounding environment equally so we can consciously choose how and when we need to react to these and when we need to accept them.

Mindfulness has many benefits, it can **reduce your stress levels<sup>(24)</sup>**, **improve your sleep quality<sup>(25)</sup>**, **enhance your productivity<sup>(26)</sup>**, **memory and performance<sup>(26)</sup>**, **give you better relationships<sup>(27)</sup>**, **reduce illness<sup>(28)</sup>**, **enable you to make better decisions<sup>(29)</sup>**, **boost your mood<sup>(30)</sup>**, **increase physical<sup>(31)</sup>** and **mental stamina<sup>(32)</sup>** as well as **extend your life span<sup>(33)</sup>**.





## 5 STEPS TO START

You can start it anywhere, anytime. It does not require any special equipment, posture or location. All you need to do is to take a moment to be very aware of the sensations you are feeling at any one moment. Here are a few tips to get started.

- 1** Pick an activity you do every single day like brushing your teeth, having a shower or drinking your morning coffee.
- 2** The next time you do this, take a moment to think about all the senses as you do this activity; for example when brushing your teeth become aware of the changing texture of the toothpaste in your mouth, notice the movements of your arm, your tongue and the rest of the body. Notice the room and sounds around you. What more can you experience in this moment?
- 3** Notice when your mind drifts away from the sensations to think of something else. You may want to register where it drifted to but know you can change the focus now, bringing your attention back to focus on the sensations and feelings. Be aware that it is good that you have noticed the wandering mind as this gives you the chance to strengthen your brain by refocusing your attention.

**4** When your mind wanders bring it back to focus on the sensations again... It will wander again... Bring back again and again and again.

**5** Just like going to the gym and expanding and contracting a muscle the mind wandering off and coming back, that repetition builds the muscle of the mind.

## 5 APPS, BOOKS & PLACES

Here are a few ways to get going if you are looking for a more structured practice:

**Mindfulness** [A Practical Guide To Finding Peace In A Frantic World](#) by Danny Penman & Mark Williams

**SoundCloud** [www.soundcloud.com/stepinsidewellbeing](http://www.soundcloud.com/stepinsidewellbeing)

**Headspace** [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)

**London Mindful** [www.londonmindful.com/about-mindfulness](http://www.londonmindful.com/about-mindfulness)

**Buddhify** [www.buddhify.com](http://www.buddhify.com)

## NUTRITION

**Our food is the fuel of our lives, it powers our brains and bodies, it helps us repair and rebuild cells, and it gives us the energy to do what we want to do.**

In a time when we all feel that there is too much to do and too little time, we often forget the power of conscious eating to enhance our health, [improve our cognitive function](#)<sup>(36)</sup>, [balance our mood](#)<sup>(37)</sup> and enable us to [maintain our performance](#)<sup>(36)</sup> and wellbeing. Instead we eat from habit, boredom or just grab food on the go and hardly even notice we have eaten at all. Most of us could benefit in some way from being a little more mindful about our eating habits and it doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Here are some ideas to get you started.



## 5 ASPECTS OF EATING TO CONSIDER

**How do you eat?** The digestive process starts when we look at our food so consider if you take the time to look at your food before you start to eat and how well you chew the food you eat?

**Where do you eat?** If you always eat in front of your computer or on your phone, you are more likely to get indigestion as well as more likely to overeat. To support the digestive system and get optimal nutrition from the food take time to sit down and focus on the eating process.

**When do you eat?** There are varying theories on how regularly we should eat, so the key is to monitor how you feel before, during and after you eat – your mood, focus & energy. Rather than follow fads, tune into your own body and do what feels best for you.

**Why do you eat?** We often eat through habit, boredom, stress or for other reasons. Before you eat consider ‘how hungry am I really on a scale of 1-5 in my stomach?’, ‘what else could this hunger be?’

**What do you eat?** Of course, the contents of your food also matters and there are some tips on this to follow. Try to eat a variety of locally sourced food that is in season (not strawberries in winter) and unprocessed.

## 5 TOP NUTRITION TIPS

- Blood sugar management<sup>(38)</sup> is essential for energy, brain function and mood stability. Avoid too much sugar and remember that ‘health drinks’ and fruit juices contain high sugar content. To avoid cravings, include a combination of protein and complex carbohydrate such as sweet potato or brown rice.
- Good fats<sup>(39)</sup>: Dietary fats are the building blocks of your cells, a main component of your brain and enable our body to absorb other nutrients. Healthy fat sources include oily fish (mackerel, salmon, sardines), nuts (almond, brazil, peanuts), olive oil and avocado.
- A Rainbow Plate<sup>(40)</sup> to optimise the benefits of your 5-7 portions of fruit and veg a day, include a variety of different colours of produce. Each different colour food group contains different nutrients so the more colourful our plate is the broader range of vitamins and minerals we are getting from our food.
- Caffeine<sup>(41)</sup> for some people can trigger anxiety and sleep problems, others are totally comfortable with it in their diet, so be aware of what works for you. If you do consume it, aim for no more than 400 mg caffeine per day (single espresso = ~63mg, brewed coffee = ~90-100g, decaf = ~3mg) and stop consuming caffeine at about 3pm. Also remember that chocolate, black tea and green tea also contain high levels of caffeine too.
- Alcohol<sup>(42)</sup> there is no ‘recommended’ daily alcohol intake<sup>(43)</sup>. The maximum alcohol a man or woman should consume is 14 units per week. This is about 6 pints of 4% alcohol beer or 6 small (175ml) glasses of wine<sup>(44)</sup>. This should be spread over 3-4 days with 3-4 days alcohol free. Pregnant women should consume no alcohol at all. To track your alcohol consumption or for more guidance visit Drinkaware<sup>(42)</sup>.

## COMMUNITY, HOBBIES & LEARNING

**Social connections are as important to our health as any other part of our life and the potential risks of social isolation are extreme.** One study showed that [social isolation is as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day](#)<sup>(45)</sup>. In a world where we are so digitally connected, we can get wrapped up in text and email and forget the importance of face to face communication and [we need this to optimise our minds and our wellbeing](#)<sup>(46)</sup>.

### 5 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR SOCIAL HEALTH

- 1 Go for a coffee or lunch with a co-worker and don't take your phone.
- 2 Stop and speak to a homeless person and find out about their story.
- 3 [Random Acts of Kindness](#)<sup>(47)</sup>.
- 4 Call a friend who you have not spoken to in more than 6 months.
- 5 Smile at a stranger on the street or tube and notice how the smile spreads.

**Learning has been [highlighted as one of the five most important things to maintain optimal wellbeing](#)**<sup>(46)</sup>.

When we learn we create [new neural connections](#)<sup>(48)</sup> in the brain and [by continuing to learn we not only become more able to learn but we keep our minds healthy](#)<sup>(49)</sup>. Learning doesn't have to be formal learning as we are given the chance to learn every day if we make the most of the opportunities around us.

Here are a few ideas how...

### 5 WAYS TO KEEP LEARNING

- 1 Aim to read an article on a totally new topic each day.
- 2 Learn a new fact about someone at work each week.
- 3 Go to an evening opening of a gallery or museum each month or perhaps attend a talk or special event.
- 4 Search [hotcourses.com](#) or [www.city-academy.com](#) for a local evening course or visit [Eventbrite](#) for evening talks and workshops.
- 5 At the end of each day write down 3 things you have learnt, about yourself, the world or anything else.

## 5 TIPS TO START A NEW HOBBY TODAY

Hobbies we once loved can often be pushed to the side when we start work, but they are essential to promote creative thinking, maintain productivity<sup>(50)</sup>, reduce stress and keep our minds healthy<sup>(51)</sup>. They also offer the chance to meet new people, learn new things and discover hidden talents.

- 1 Don't worry about finding a new hobby for life but consider this an exploration of interest<sup>(52)</sup>.
- 2 Do it with a friend or colleague – make a plan to do something with someone else and perhaps even alternate with them as to who is choosing the activity and surprise the other person.
- 3 Check out meet ups or start your own meet up about something you are interested in<sup>(53)</sup>.
- 4 Try a new sport or exercise class – most places offer a first session at a discounted rate or a free class.
- 5 Join a book club or set up your own one with work colleagues and meet once a month.



# Leading with wellbeing



## TIPS FOR LEADERS TO LOOK AFTER THEMSELVES

Engraining positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is not only beneficial for individuals but is essential for you as [leaders to enable you to sustain your performance and support your team](#)<sup>(54)</sup>, [attracting and retaining the best talent](#) and [driving your business to thrive](#)<sup>(55)</sup>.



If we want to see a wider, long-term improvement in wellbeing across the capital, we need to ensure that positive health behaviours are ingrained in everyday habits in and out of the workplace. While we know that [wellbeing initiatives offer a 6:1 return on investment](#)<sup>(56)</sup>, it requires more than an annual wellness week or some free fruit to see such gains. To build healthy strong and resilient teams, the [Institute of Directors](#)<sup>(57)</sup> highlight that [leaders must lead by example](#)<sup>(57)</sup>, looking after their own wellbeing; we need to know our teams and ensure we are aware of the stressors and of their strengths; and we need to embed proactive and positive health behaviours into day to day working practices.

If you want to inspire your team to move towards better wellbeing, enhanced performance and sustainable results, here are some top tips to help you get started.

## 5 WAYS TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE

96% OF LEADERS FEEL SOME DEGREE OF BURNOUT SO THESE ACTIONS ARE IMPORTANT<sup>(58)</sup>

- 1** Know what you need to be doing on a daily basis to maintain the health of your brain and body<sup>(57)</sup>. It is easy to let the pressure of work prevent you from getting to the gym, sleeping enough or taking time out. Effective leaders prioritise their health to maintain your performance and demonstrate to your team that health is the foundation of long-term career success and satisfaction.
- 2** Know your triggers<sup>(59)</sup>. We all have situations, behaviours and events which rattle us and make us irritable. Knowing what yours are will enable you to manage these more wisely<sup>(60)</sup>, so take the time to reflect on these and consider how you would like to act differently to get the best possible outcome on such occasions.
- 3** Know your releases<sup>(61)</sup>. Stress is not something we should be scared of as it can often drive our performance but becomes a problem when it is persistent and we never ‘switch-off’. Develop your own set of tactics to release and manage the pressures in your life effectively. You may want to try the Stress Management tool on page 24.
- 4** Don’t ignore the signs<sup>(62)</sup>. Lower back pain, indigestion, headaches, hair-loss and disturbed sleep are often the signs of long-term stress and decreased mental fitness. This physical discomfort is also likely to be having some impact on your performance at work. If you notice these signs, visit your doctor to get you back on track soon.
- 5** Find someone to talk to<sup>(63)</sup>. It can feel isolating and overwhelming when you have the external pressure of stakeholders as well as internal desires to succeed professionally and manage personal responsibilities. Finding someone to share your challenges with is essential to support your performance and health.

## CREATING HEALTH-ENHANCING WORKPLACES

### 5 WAYS TO INTEGRATE WELLBEING INTO THE OFFICE, EVERYDAY

- 1** Start every meeting by asking attendees 'on a scale of 1-10, how are you feeling today?'. This normalises the conversation around mental health in the workplace, gives team members the chance to be more aware of each other and therefore to collaborate and support each other more effectively.
- 2** Avoid complaints or negative comments for the first five minutes of every day<sup>(64)</sup>. Starting the day on a positive note can improve staff morale, productivity, customer service and employee satisfaction.
- 3** Add stretch breaks to your meeting agenda<sup>(65)</sup> to ensure that your team can maintain their focus, energy and engagement for longer periods of time.
- 4** Experiment with having regular wellbeing check-ins with employees. This could be something you add to performance reviews or add as a casual quarterly coffee chat.
- 5** Encourage team members to support each other. Building collective, social capital<sup>(66)</sup> in the workplace is the most effective way to support your team and enhance resilience. Encourage peer to peer mentoring or suggest team members to go for coffee with someone new each month to open communication across the organisation.





## 5 WAYS TO BUILD RESILIENCE THROUGH STRENGTHS-BASED CONVERSATIONS

Helping employees understand and use their strengths effectively has been shown to be a fundamental skill to foster resilience<sup>(67)</sup>, enabling team members to take ownership of their performance and thrive in the challenges and opportunities of the workplace. Research also demonstrates that employees who are aware of and use their strengths are up to 6 times more engaged<sup>(68)</sup> and 12.5% more productive<sup>(68)</sup>. This combination of benefits not only enhances the performance of your team and organisation but reduces some of the pressure on management. To harness the potential of character strengths, try this 5-step approach to having strengths-based conversations.

- 1** Make time to have a 1-to-1 with your team members and help them to identify their strengths\*. You could do this by using this downloadable strengths-guide, or invite them to complete this free online survey<sup>(69)</sup>.
- 2** When you have identified their top 5 strengths, help to identify how they use these within their role? Ask, when these are useful and when these might be less appropriate to use.
- 3** For those times when these qualities will not be useful, or may even inhibit performance, ask them to consider which other strengths could they use to counteract that? For example: an individual who is curious can be an asset to a team. However, when a deadline is approaching, we may need all our team to focus on 'doing' more than asking questions. In those moments the team member may be able to draw on their strength of taking perspective to see their role in the project and what is required at that moment. This may enable them to focus while still using one of their strengths.
- 4** Encourage them to become more aware of their strengths. Suggest that each week they take 10 minutes to consider which strengths they have used and how these have impacted their work, mindset and health.
- 5** You may want to then work with them to develop practice using their strengths more by inviting them to use one strength in a new way each day for a week and noting how this affects them. For more research on the topic visit [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org).

\* Strengths are not the same as 'skills' which are learnt but are the 'qualities' that an individual brings to a given situation. For example, an individual may have a strength of compassion or humour which they use when selling, another team member may have a love of learning or curiosity, enabling them to connect with clients in a different way. Both can sell effectively but for different reasons.

# Understanding mental health



## AN OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organisation defines health as “physical, mental and social wellbeing”<sup>(70)</sup> and yet most of us spend all our time focusing on looking after our physical and social health and ignore our mental wellbeing. It is time we all started to acknowledge that we all have mental health, every single day of our lives, and that mental health awareness is as much about looking after ourselves on a day-to-day basis or when we feel well as when we don’t or when we see someone else struggling.

For you, as an individual, mental health awareness is about knowing that your mind affects everything you do from the way you feel and think, to the way you behave (your focus, willpower, motivation and resilience), and the way you interact and communicate with others. It impacts the way your vital organs function, the way you digest your food, your susceptibility to illness<sup>(71)</sup> and the speed at which you recover from injury. It influences your performance everywhere from the boardroom<sup>(72)</sup> to the bedroom<sup>(73)</sup>. More than 25% of the population experience mental health issues each year<sup>(74)</sup> and yet most of us ignore the signs and symptoms and never get help. If you are an employer then mental ill-health is costing you an average of £1300 per employee<sup>(75)</sup> and is often the major cause of high staff turnover, low productivity or poor morale.

The other important thing to know if we are mental health aware is that having a mental illness does not have to reduce one’s enjoyment of life or one’s ability to function, as an employee, a friend, a partner or a parent. Our day to day ability to manage life, deal with stress, to work effectively, to interact socially and feel fulfilled is called our ‘mental fitness’ and this is different to whether we have a mental illness or not.

The diagram on page 18 shows the dual continuum of mental health<sup>(76)</sup>. You will see in the top left corner that someone can have a diagnosis of mental illness (such as depression or anxiety) but with the right support, treatment and self-care can have a high level of mental fitness, meaning they can be high performing and living a happy, fulfilled life. Equally, in the bottom right corner someone who has no diagnosis of illness could have a low level of mental fitness making someone unmotivated, stubborn, snappy and unfulfilled, as if they are ‘sleep-walking’ through life. We are all on this continuum somewhere. Furthermore, we are all constantly moving around it, depending on what events life throws at us, what daily actions we take to look after ourselves and manage the challenges that arise. What we all need to aim to do is stay as high on the mental fitness axis as possible and support those around us to do the same.

High mental health =  
mental fitness

A person with a diagnosis of a mental illness,  
who has adapted & learnt to manage this  
effectively = positive mental health & fitness

A person with no mental illness or  
disorder, with high mental fitness  
and positive mental health

Severe diagnosis  
of illness

**STIGMA**

**STIGMA**

No diagnosis  
of illness

A person with a diagnosis of a mental illness,  
who has not yet learnt to manage their  
health = poor mental health & fitness

A person with no diagnosed mental illness but  
who struggles to cope with day to day challenges  
effectively = poor mental health

Low mental health

**STIGMA**

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES & ILLNESS

**1 in 4 people will experience a mental illness each year<sup>(77)</sup> and yet only 25-30% get the professional help<sup>(78)</sup> they need that could enable them to recover. The reasons for not getting help include stigma, lack of awareness, professional or financial concerns and cultural boundaries but none of these need be obstacles to a better life. At the Victoria and Victoria Westminster Business Improvement Districts, we want people to get the help they need and to do this we all need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of ill-health. Here is a quick introduction to some common mental health issues you may see or hear about.**

### **Depression<sup>(79)</sup>**

- Depression is a mood disorder which can occur in isolation or in conjunction with other mental illness or disorders.
- It is often forgotten that alcohol is a major depressant and can trigger or exacerbate the problem as well as interfere with medication.
- Possible causes include major life events (e.g. bereavement, childbirth, unemployment, prolonged stress, physical illness and genetic factors.)
- The core symptoms are a persistent low mood, low energy and lack of motivation or pleasure. These symptoms must last for more than 2 weeks for a diagnosis.
- What you can do? There are a variety of treatments available including one-to-one talking therapies, on-line CBT therapy, skype support, self-help books, medication, mindfulness and acupuncture. Exercise can also have a huge impact on reducing depression and research shows that just 10-20 minutes of light exercise per day can be as effective for treating mild depression as anti-depressants.
- For more details visit [Depression UK](#) or [Mind Charity](#).

### **Anxiety Disorders<sup>(80)</sup>**

- Anxiety is a general term often used to describe Generalised Anxiety Disorder but Anxiety Disorder also include Phobias, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Acute Stress Disorder (ASD), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Panic Disorder.
- Each of these is unique but all induce a state of extreme anxiety within, which can interfere with someone's ability to work or live and may cause someone to avoid certain activities. Anxiety disorders can exist in conjunction with Depression and other illness and prolonged Anxiety can also lead to depression.
- The causes are complex but are often associated with a trauma in earlier life, prolonged stress, personality traits, major life events and genetic factors.
- The symptoms can include extreme fear or worry, avoiding situations, heightened arousal, increased heart rate and difficulty breathing.
- What you can do? There are a variety of treatments available including one-to-one talking therapies, self-help books and support groups. Nutrition and sleep can also play a big part in reducing anxiety, specifically consumption of caffeine, alcohol and sugars so if you are struggling then consider how you may be able to cut these down.
- For more details visit [Anxiety UK](#) or [Mind Charity](#).



### **Self-harm**<sup>(81)</sup>

- Self-harm is a behaviour that some people adopt to relieve or communicate distress, to self-punish or regain a sense of control.
- It includes all non-suicidal behaviour that is inflicted and causes physical or psychological harm to a person. This is not attention seeking and is often secretive but can be a cry for help or an inner scream.
- The causes are complex including trauma and isolation and symptoms typically begin in adolescence.

- The symptoms can include signs of depression, frequent or unexplained injury, covering of the body (even in hot weather) and blood on clothing or sheets.
- What you can do? Be sensitive when asking about this and encourage the person to go to a GP or professional. Treatments include talking and on-line therapies as well as support groups. Always consider if the person needs physical first aid and if you are concerned then call 999 to seek further advice.
- For more details visit [Harmless](#) at or [Mind Charity](#).

### **Addiction**<sup>(84)</sup>

- Addictions are a complicated illness and can include alcohol, substance misuse, gambling, work, and shopping.
- These behaviours can be used as a way of relieving emotional distress and often co-exist with other illnesses.
- Alcohol and substance misuse can increase the risk of developing mental ill health, worsen pre-existing conditions and increase the risk of suicide.
- The symptoms can include secrecy around behaviours, lying and denial, social isolation or increase in social activity, difficulty managing day to day activities and other changes in behaviour.
- What you can do? Try to avoid labelling or judging the person and focus on pointing out the changes in general behaviour you have noticed. Ensure they are aware that support is available and encourage them to seek help.
- For more details visit [Addaction](#), [Talktofrank](#) or [Drinkaware](#) (details shown in 'Resources' on page 28).

### Eating disorders<sup>(82)</sup>

- The three main eating disorders are Anorexia Nervosa (not consuming enough calories), Bulimia (consuming calories and then purging to get rid of these through vomiting, laxatives or excessive exercise) and Binge-Eating Disorder (consuming large amounts of food, very quickly in a short space of time).
- These behaviours are not about food and weight but are usually about managing emotions and stress as well as feeling in control and safe.
- The causes are complex and sufferers include men and women ([25% of those experiencing eating disorder symptoms are male](#)<sup>(83)</sup>). We also know that eating disorders have a [high mortality rates as a result of premature death and suicide](#)<sup>(83)</sup>.
- The symptoms can include preoccupation with food and calories, rigid behaviours around food and eating or exercise, secrecy and hiding food, light-headedness, tiredness or weakness. Some people show dramatic weight gain or loss but not all so take care to look for other signs.
- What you can do? Do not give up hope. Early intervention is the best approach but it can take time for someone to admit they have a problem. It is essential to remember that it is never too late and with the appropriate treatment it is possible to recover from an eating disorder and live a full life. Treatments can vary but will usually include support from a psychotherapist as well as a nutritionist.
- For more details visit [BEAT-UK](#) at or [Mind Charity](#).

### Suicidal thoughts<sup>(85)</sup>

- [More than 20% of the population will have suicidal thoughts at some time](#)<sup>(86)</sup> but most people choose not to act on these.
- It is important to know that talking about suicide is a sign that someone is thinking about suicide so have the courage to address an issue should it arise.
- The [causes can include prolonged stress, history of or diagnosis of mental ill-health or physical illness, major life events \(bereavement, relationship breakup, unemployment, homelessness\), social isolation, alcohol or substance misuse](#)<sup>(87)</sup>.
- The symptoms are often similar to depression or other illness' but additional signs to look out for are 'unexplained recovery' from low mental health, putting one's affairs in order or saying goodbye to things, talking about or writing about death and suicide or saying they have no reason to live.
- [What you can do?](#) Never keep it a secret. Try to encourage the person to go with you to see a GP or Accident & Emergency but if they are unwilling to do so then call 999.
- For more details visit [Samaritans](#), [CALM \(Campaign Against Living Miserably\)](#) or [Papyrus](#) (details shown in 'Resources' on page 28).



# Tools and tips to support better mental health



## STRESS TOOL DIRECTIONS

We all have stress in our lives, and this is not a bad thing. Stress can be performance-enhancing, helping us to focus, [improving physiological functioning and enabling us to perform at our best](#)<sup>(88)</sup>. On the contrary, prolonged periods of stress can be [debilitating, causing long-term physical health problems, reducing our enjoyment of life and limiting our potential](#)<sup>(89)</sup>. The key is to find a balance, knowing how to identify when you are experiencing stress and finding ways to dissipate this in helpful ways. This helpful tool will help you explore your stress levels so you can sustain your wellbeing, productivity and pleasure of life.

1. Start by writing any stresses or current worries in the main red triangle. Include all the big concerns (perhaps relationships, health or work) as well as any simpler or smaller things that are occupying your mind.
2. In the top right box, try to identify all things you notice when are getting stressed in a negative way. These often include physiological changes (headaches, sleeping problems, back pain, indigestion or stomach problems), as well as behaviour changes (eating more take-out food, skipping meals, snapping at colleagues or family members, getting into bed too late). This is your 'stress signature'.
3. We will now explore the bottom sections – unhelpful coping strategies and helpful coping strategies. Think about the things you do when you are stressed and which of these actions help you to reduce stress or address the issue that is causing stress and what things you do are less helpful. These are likely to cross over with some of the 'signs of overflow' and that is fine.

- Examples of helpful actions could be talking to someone about it, making lists to plan your time, going for a run or yoga class, listening to music or taking a break at lunch
- Examples of unhelpful actions could be eating more chocolate or drinking more alcohol, stopping doing exercise, bottling it up and not talking to anyone about it, working late nights and not taking a break

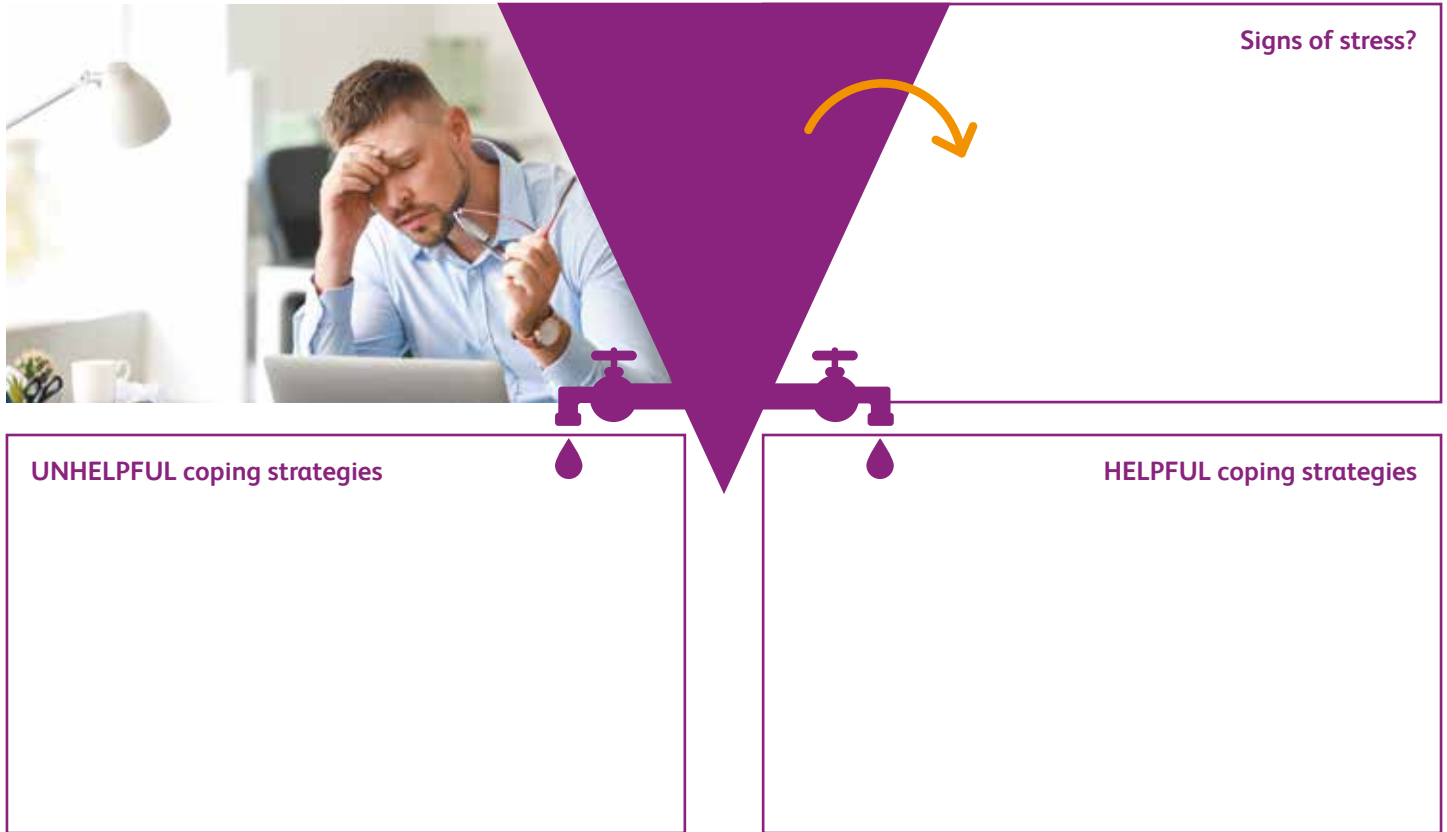
#### 4. Take a moment to reflect on this and consider

- What things in the container can you change? What things can you not change?
- How can you accept the things you cannot change?
- Do you have enough helpful coping strategies? How can you make it easier to do these in a moment of need?

What you may find is that the action of writing it down helps to clarify your thoughts and enabling you to take action where needed and making perceived stress more manageable. Give it a go for yourself or try with a friend or colleague who is struggling.



## WHAT'S IN YOUR RESILIENCE CONTAINER?



### START THE CONVERSATION

However much we look after ourselves and encourage others to do the same, [there will be times when mental health issues arise](#)<sup>(90)</sup>. On these occasions we may be approached by someone who is facing challenging times, or we may need to initiate a conversation with someone who is showing the signs that they may be struggling or has experienced a trauma of some kind. The important message is that if you notice changes it is important that you do have the courage to say something, even if that is not easy. [The quicker someone can get help, the easier and more stable the recovery process will be and the sooner they will be back to enjoying life again](#)<sup>(91)</sup>.

To help you with this conversation here is a very simple three step process.

#### 1. ASK (TWICE)

Try to find a quiet, confidential space to speak to the person. Ask them how they are feeling and, if they give the generic answer of “not bad” or “fine”, then ask again. You can encourage the person to actually think about how they are by asking them “what does fine mean?” “what’s going on” or mention any changes in their personality that you have noticed and ask if there is anything they want to chat about.

#### 2. LISTEN

We are all very good at jumping in to tell someone that they have nothing to worry about, that they have so much to be grateful for, that we know how they feel, or we try to fix the ‘problem’. It is more important that you give them the time to express how they are feeling without your judgement of whether they should or should not feel this way. Try to listen without advising. There are some phrases to help you do so on the following page.

#### 3. REASSURE & ENCOURAGE PROFESSIONAL HELP

After they have had time to express what is going for them and you have acknowledged this, you can reassure them that mental health issues are common and that there is a lot of support available to help them. The main message is that

recovery to better health is not just possible, it is probable, and that the sooner someone gets help, the quicker and easier that process will be. Do not force the person to do anything but explore options such as your organisation’s Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or insurance, a GP or local support networks. There are some helpful resources for this on page 28.

[The key is to think about how you would like to be approached and be aware that you may not get the response you want but it is always worth speaking to someone if you notice the signs and symptoms. It may take 3 or 4 attempts to get to the point where someone is willing to talk freely about their issues, but it is worth being patient and persevering, you may be the ray of light that saves them.](#)

To help you get started here are a few tips on what to say and what not to say.



## 5 GOOD THINGS TO SAY

- 1 “How are you feeling today?”, “on a scale of 1 to 10, how are you?” or “is there anything you want to talk about”
- 2 “I don’t know what to say but I am so glad you have told me”, “that sounds really hard” or “I am sorry to hear you are going through this”
- 3 “Please tell me more”, “I am listening, please keep talking” or “is there anything else”
- 4 “There is a lot of support available”, “I know you can get through this” or “there is hope, recovery is possible”
- 5 “Are you getting enough support?”, “what can I do to support you?” or “what support are you getting?”

## 5 THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

- 1 “Snap out of it”, “get over it”, “get their act together” or “lighten up”
- 2 “At least you have got...”, “you should be grateful for what you have” or “there are people worse off than you”
- 3 “You shouldn’t feel that way”, “that’s not true” or “you don’t really feel that”
- 4 “Your problem is...” or “what you need to do is...” - Try to resist trying to fix them
- 5 “I know exactly how you feel” or “we all have that problem, just deal with it”

## 5 TIPS FOR WHEN SOMEONE DOESN'T WANT HELP<sup>(92)</sup>

- 1** You cannot force someone to get help but you can let them know that they don't have to wait to get to rock bottom before they do something about their issue.
- 2** Remind them that recovery from mental ill-health is not only possible but it is probable and the sooner they get help the quicker, easier and more stable that recovery will be.
- 3** Tell them that you are there for them if they want to chat again in the future and to support them through this. Try to remain optimistic as your optimism will promote quicker recovery.
- 4** Try to find out why they don't want help and understand this. For example:
  - if this is financial, consider the free options (e.g. GP or charity);
  - if it is a cultural barrier, try to find an approach that they feel comfortable (e.g. support groups or online support);
  - if this is due concern about support from management, can you speak to a manager with them
  - if this is due to lack of time then perhaps you can cover a shift or help to free up their time

- 5** Encourage them to talk to other people in their lives, managers, family, friends and loved ones.

### **ALWAYS REMEMBER**

- You are not responsible for someone's behaviour, you can be supportive and encourage the person to get help.
- You need to look after yourself too<sup>(94)</sup> by ensuring that you are not getting over-involved so that it becomes a burden on your energy and time. Consider what you need to do if you are supporting someone else, perhaps you can call your EAP or explore some new stress management techniques.
- Encourage the person to explore other support through their friends, family, colleagues and local networks. It is important for their recovery and for your wellbeing that they have a range of people to connect with.
- Be a role model by looking after your mental health as a matter of habit. The more that every single one of us sends the message that it is important to prioritise wellbeing, the more powerful the impact we can have as a community to reduce the suffering of everyone.

## RESOURCES

### NHS HEALTH ADVICE:

- 111 (freephone 24/7)

### THE SAMARITANS:

- 116 123 (freephone 24/7) / jo@thesamaritans.org
- [www.thesamaritans.org](http://www.thesamaritans.org)
- For help and advice in a crisis or any time of distress

### MIND INFOLINE:

- 0300 123 3393
- [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- Information, advice and support groups

### STAYING ALIVE:

- [www.stayingalive.org](http://www.stayingalive.org)
- Suicide Prevention App

### CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably):

- [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)
- A men's suicide prevention helpline and support service for those struggling or anyone who has been bereaved

### PAPYRUS:

- [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)
- Confidential support for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide or those worried about a young person

### THE BIG WHITE WALL

- [www.bigwhitewall.ca](http://www.bigwhitewall.ca)
- An anonymous and safe online support service for anyone struggling with mental health issues

### DRINKAWARE:

- [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)
- Website to assess drinking habits and online advice for yourself or if you are supporting someone else

### TALK TO FRANK:

- 0300 123 6600 (freephone 24/7) / TEXT: 8211
- frank@talktofrank.com
- [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)
- 24/7 support for drug addictions including illegal drugs

### ADDACTION:

- 0207 251 5860
- [www.addaction.org.uk](http://www.addaction.org.uk)
- Support for those experiencing or supporting someone with addictions

### HEADS MEDS:

- [www.headmeds.org.uk](http://www.headmeds.org.uk)
- Information on mental health medication

### HEADTALKS:

- [www.headtalks.com/videos](http://www.headtalks.com/videos)
- A range of videos of people who have experienced mental ill-health & their tips

### MQ:

- [www.mqmentalhealth.org](http://www.mqmentalhealth.org)
- A charity focused on research around mental health to improve support, care and treatments

### MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION:

- [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications)
- A range of small booklets with advice to support better mental health including anxiety, exercise and MH in later life

### MHFA LINE MANAGERS RESOURCE:

- [cdn.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/05111111/line\\_managers\\_resource.pdf](http://cdn.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/05111111/line_managers_resource.pdf)
- The downloadable resource offering guidance and advice for those in managerial positions.



[victoriabid.co.uk](http://victoriabid.co.uk)

[victoriawestminsterbid.co.uk](http://victoriawestminsterbid.co.uk)

@victoriabid

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# COLOUR ME IN TO IMPROVE WELLBEING



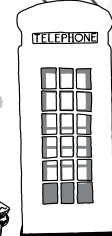
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