

Keeping Well Booklet

Helping you look after your mental health
and wellbeing during COVID-19.



About this booklet

We have created this booklet to reach out to people living in St.Helens Borough to offer support and guidance around keeping well both physically and mentally during these difficult times.

We want you to know that you are not alone, if you feel you are struggling with your mental health and wellbeing please get in touch, our team are here to help and can talk you through the support we offer, our contact details are on the back cover of this booklet.

The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted on our lives in many ways. We have put together some useful resources you can use to support and improve your wellbeing.

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How we are feeling

In these difficult times we may find that we are doing less of the important things that keep us feeling good and maintain our mental wellbeing. Things such as spending time with friends, family and maintaining good activity levels and regular exercise are more difficult to do under the current restrictions.

We may have more time on our hands with space for our thoughts to wander and this can of course be pleasant – but sometimes negative thinking can become a problem and this can affect our mood and even how we feel physically.

On occasion – often without any evidence – a negative thought can set off a chain reaction inside us that affects the way we feel and what we do. Bad thoughts are also known as unhelpful thinking styles.

Examples of these include:

- Focusing on the bad stuff – as if you're looking at the world through darkened glasses, you could have thoughts like "I should have gone for a longer walk today".
- Having a gloomy view of the future – expecting everything to turn out badly. "I'm not going to draw my picture well."
- Jumping to the worst conclusions such as "This is going to be a terrible day" – also known as catastrophising.



Managing unhelpful thoughts

The fact is that bad thoughts cause bad feelings and feeling bad can cause bad thoughts. So one way to feel better is to do something about the bad and negative thoughts.

Try practising the following techniques next time those unhelpful bad thoughts start to occur.

Label it

When you notice one of your bad thoughts, don't get upset or worked-up, just try stepping back and stick a label on it: "Oh that's just one of those bad thoughts that I get sometimes".

When you expose and label a bad thought, it loses its power and you realise it's just part of feeling down or being upset. It's not the truth, it's just one of those bad thoughts.

Leave it alone

Mentally turn your back on the bad thought and let it be. Bad thoughts thrive on attention so don't give it any. Maybe try writing it down on a piece of paper and see it for what it is – just a bad thought – then throw it in the bin.

Stand up to it

Bad thoughts can be like bullies. They sound strong but really they're weak underneath. And of course they tell lies. They'll tell us things like we're not good enough or that everything will go wrong. Don't be bullied – stand up to it.

Give yourself a break

Bad thoughts are how we beat ourselves up when we feel down or are upset. So if you're having trouble with a bad thought, think what a person who cares about you would say to you, right now. They'd disagree with the bad thought. They'd remind you that things haven't always gone wrong for you; they'd remind you of the things you've done well. Trust these positive things and let them help to get rid of the bad thoughts.

Look at the situation differently

Imagine what it would be like if it was someone you cared about who was having this bad thought - a parent, a child, a friend or a partner. What advice would you give them? Now give the same advice to yourself. Put your thought or worry into perspective. Will it matter in a months time? Will you even remember what you were worrying about?



Help with sleep problems

Living during the current lockdown and restrictions, activity levels may have decreased and therefore we are less active during the day. We may find that we are less tired in the evening and this can cause difficulty sleeping.

Sleep is an essential part of mental wellbeing, when we feel overwhelmed, negative thoughts and heightened emotions may interfere with our sleep. If you are currently experiencing problems sleeping try some of the following:

Exercise is good for both our physical and mental wellbeing. Get regular exercise each day, however it's best to do this at least 2 – 3 hours before going to bed and not too late in the evening. There is good evidence regular exercise improves restful sleep.

Don't take naps in the afternoon or early evening as this can make it harder to fall asleep at bedtime. Keep a regular sleep routine, try to wake up at the same time each day and go to bed at a similar time each evening.

Prior to going to bed avoid spending too much time looking at screens including a TV, computer and mobile phone – this can be overstimulating and a distraction that can deprive us of sleep. Instead try listening to relaxing music or reading.

Keep the bedroom dark and at a comfortable temperature to facilitate sleep. Keep the bedroom quiet – if you're disturbed by noise, try sleeping at the back of your house or using earplugs.

Avoid drinks containing caffeine near bedtime – including tea, cola and coffee – as it is a stimulant that will stop us feeling ready for bed.

Try muscle relaxation, such as a warm bath, to help de-stress and unwind. You could also try the relaxation techniques on the next page.

Relaxation techniques

Learning relaxation techniques that we can practice to help us feel calm can be useful and worth spending time on.

Deep breathing with its focus on full, cleansing breaths is a simple yet powerful relaxation technique. It's easy to learn and can be practiced almost anywhere.

Deep breathing is the foundation of many other relaxation practices and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. While apps and audio downloads can guide you through the process, all you really need is a few minutes and a place to sit quietly or stretch out.

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.
- If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying down. Put a small book on your stomach, and breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale.
- Concentrate on your breath and if your mind wanders (which inevitably it will) just gently bring your focus back to the breath.

Small ways to feel better

There are certain things that we can do to help us to feel better straight away. You can start to feel better in a few minutes from now. Read the following tips and then make some small, easy changes that you can do each day.

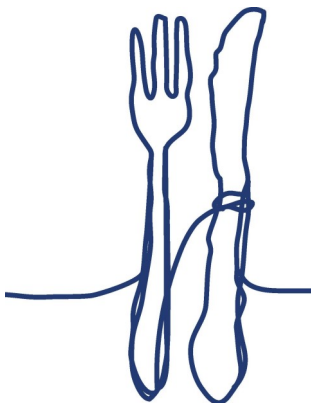
Exercise

Exercise is good for you. So good that when we do it, our body sends happy chemicals to our brains to make us feel good. However we don't need to go to a gym to get exercise, and during the current lockdown we can't go. Try going for a walk or run. Climbing the stairs is a good way to exercise without even leaving the house.



What we eat

What we eat is important and can affect our mood and how we feel. A good example of this is what happens when we eat a banana. Bananas contain an essential amino-acid called Tryptophan, which helps to produce the same happy chemical in our heads as commonly prescribed antidepressant medications.



Always try to eat breakfast. When we skip breakfast our body doesn't get the right kind of start and it can suffer during the day, demanding coffee and snacks and giving you a headache by lunchtime. By eating a bowl of cereal, toast or fruit each morning, our digestion works better and our mood improves no end.

Music

Music cheers us up. So don't sit in silence. Silence can be a place for us to think negative thoughts. Put on some of your favourite music. Better still, play it while you're exercising and it will send even more of that happy stuff to your brain.



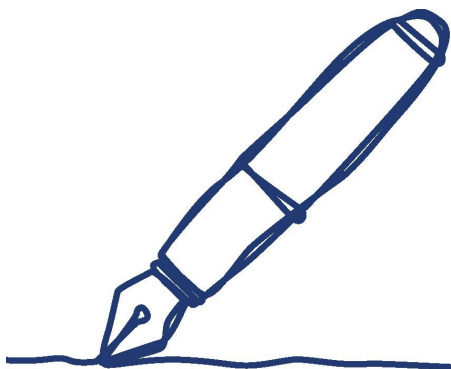
Acts of kindness

Doing something for someone else can also help us to feel good. Do a small kindness for someone else, every day, and you'll feel even better than they do. What's more, you'll feel better straight away. It doesn't have to be a big thing, you can get a lift in your mood by helping someone with their work, cooking a meal or spending time with someone who needs the company, in a socially distanced way, in line with current guidance or over the phone.

Remember good times

When feeling down it can be easy to forget the good and better times. Times when you've succeeded in something; happy times spent with others; things that make you smile; things you've done to help someone else. So remember them. Each day, spend some time writing them down. Remember the things you have enjoyed; the things that felt like a job well done; the things that helped you feel close to someone else. After a few days, you'll have a list of things that you can look back on, and this will help you feel good.

Remember, what we think about affects how we feel. Focus on the good things and feel happier for it.



Mindfulness exercises

Here are a few exercises you could try. You don't need any special equipment. Different things work for different people, so if you don't find one exercise useful, try another. You can also try adapting them so that they suit you better.

Mindful eating

This involves paying attention to the taste, sight and textures of what you eat. For example, when drinking a cup of tea or coffee you could focus on how hot and liquid it feels on your tongue, how sweet it tastes or watch the steam that it gives off.

Body scan

This is where you move your attention slowly through different parts of the body, starting from the top of your head moving all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation of different parts of your body.

Mindful colouring and drawing

Focus on the colours and the sensation of your pencil against the paper, rather than trying to draw something in particular. You could use a mindfulness colouring book or download mindfulness colouring images.

Mindful meditation

This involves sitting quietly and focusing on your breathing, sensations in your body and the things you can hear around you. Try to bring your focus back to the present, and on to your breath, if your mind starts to wander.



How to start being active

Here are 6 practical tips - whatever place you're at (physically and mentally) that will help maximise any learning opportunity that comes with 'failing' and having setbacks.

Start small

We need to break down our goals into smaller chunks and ensure our goals are SMART. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

Practical tip

Try the 2 minute rule. The focus here is taking action - start an activity that will take no more than two minutes to complete. For example:

- Getting the skipping rope out or laying the weights out.
- Putting on sports clothes or trainers.

It's only 120 seconds and it can make a difference to getting started.

Be consistent

What is the point of going all out on day 1 and then doing nothing for 6 weeks? It's better to do something small (see point 1) and be consistent. Consistency is key to building better habits. Try to schedule and reserve a mental space for your session. It often works when paired with an existing habit. If you do something daily, such as watching a TV show or waiting for a meal to cook, try pairing it with some stretches.

Reward and celebrate

Celebrating immediately after is important as it generates feelings of success. A 'well done me' can increase the chance of repeating that behaviour. Think about what rewards you'll give yourself for making the effort.



Link up with a buddy

Get with a friend, a buddy or a partner and stick with your new fitness schedule together, subject to local social distancing guidelines. It adds fun, an extra motivation boost and accountability. Technology could be useful to stay connected, or try linking up with others in your household.

Get creative

You don't need fitness equipment and accessories to get moving more. You can use your daily routine to increase your activity, such as housework, gardening or playing around with the kids. There are lots of everyday objects that can be used for a workout, from pillows, to stairs or a chair.

Cues

Consider what 'nudges' there are around you to make moving more as easy as possible. This will help reduce the amount of barriers. For example, have the exercise mat laid out already on the floor or do 2 squats when you put the kettle on. How can you design your home environment to 'nudge' you to be more active?



Go easy on yourself

It's tough staying indoors, losing your routine and your sense of independence. This is an unusual time for everyone and we are all likely to feel vulnerable. You may be battling with feelings of frustration, loneliness, anxiety or depression but remember to go easy on yourself. You aren't going to be as productive, as relaxed, as active or as balanced as you could be. Do things that can help you cope with these difficult times, be kind and gentle.

Food planning

If your physical activity decreases, it's important to also review your dietary intake. It is understandable that in a situation like this we may eat mindlessly, or not have all we want available to satisfy our wants and needs. Some food planning and exploring the options available to you can help you move towards better and healthier eating for this period.



5 Ways to Wellbeing

During the pandemic our daily lives are very different and it is important to focus on what we can do to take care of ourselves. Research shows that there are 5 steps we can take to help improve how we feel.

Five Ways to Wellbeing

Take Notice



- Arrange a comfortable space to sit, for example by a window where you can look out over a view of trees or the sky, or watch birds and other animals.
- Look at photos of your favourite places in nature. Use them as the background on your mobile phone or computer screen, or print and put them up on your walls.
- Listen to natural sounds, like recordings or apps that play birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall. Get as much natural light as you can. Spend time in your garden if you have one, or open your front or back door and sit by the doorstep.

Keep Learning



- Keep your brain occupied and challenged. Set aside time in your routine for this. Read books, magazines and articles. Listen to the radio, watch films and do puzzles.
- Although high street library branches are closed, some libraries have apps you can use online. These allow you to borrow ebooks, audiobooks or magazines from home for free, if you're a library member.
- There are lots of apps that can help you learn things, such as a foreign language or other new skills.

Connect



- Make plans to video chat with people or groups you'd normally see in person.
- You can also arrange phone calls or send instant messages or texts.
- If you're worried that you might run out of stuff to talk about, make a plan with someone to watch a show or read a book separately so that you can discuss it when you contact each other.
- Talk to a neighbour or say hi to someone passing by.

Be Active



Build physical activity into your daily routine, where possible. Exercising at home can be done without the need for specialist equipment. Here are a few suggestions for most ages and abilities and you can adapt these as required:

- cleaning your home;
- dancing to music;
- going up and down stairs;
- seated exercises;
- online exercise workouts that you can follow; and
- sitting less - if you notice you've been sitting down for an hour, just getting up or changing position can help.

Give



- Write letters or emails to people you've been meaning to catch up with.
- Try having a clear out. You could sort through your possessions and put them away tidily, have a spring clean and put items to one side ready to donate when the charity shops are back open.
- Small acts of kindness make a big difference. Carrying out a simple act of kindness can have a positive impact on the giver and receiver.

Useful numbers

We are here to support the mental health and wellbeing of the people living in St.Helens Borough.

St.Helens Mind 01744 647089

For more information on how we can support you please call our telephone number above. If you have access to the internet, you can find contact us at admin@sthelensmind.org.uk

Here are some useful numbers for support that is available in your local area.

Chrysalis Centre for Change, for women: 01744 451309

Contact Cares: 01744 676767

Healthwatch St.Helens : 03000 68 3000

Healthy Living Team: 0300 300 0103

Hope Centre: 01744 26414

No Secrets self-harm support: 07403 476415

North West Boroughs Healthcare: 01925 664 000

St Helens Coalition of Disabled People 01744 453 343

St.Helen Carers Centre 01744 675 615

Think Wellbeing: 01744 647100



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