



# Mental Wellbeing

We continue our series of articles by Dr Libby Artingstall and Dr Sile McDaid, Co-Founders and Directors of Team Mental Health.

**When it comes to our physical health, a key public health strategy to prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19 has been to effectively wash our hands, not touch our face, and engage respiratory hygiene. Often the simplest of approaches are the most effective, and the same applies when it comes to promoting good mental health and well-being and preventing mental ill health.**

The evidence suggests that the 'Five Ways to Mental Wellbeing' are positive strategies to incorporate into our daily lives.<sup>1</sup> At a time of heightened fear and stress, it's important to know that small things can make a big difference. The great thing about the 'Five Ways to Mental Wellbeing' is that they can be implemented as an individual, as a family unit or within our wider communities. For example, in healthcare workers based at the frontline of our hospitals.

Whatever we have to face going forward, these 5 simple strategies can make a difference. Never has there been more reason to implement them.

## The 5 Ways to Mental Wellbeing include:

### Connect

Social distancing and isolation can lead to loneliness, and we know that loneliness can increase the risk of mental health problems. Where possible, ensure you remain connected with family, friends, colleagues and other members of your support network. Staying in touch by phone, post or through technology enables us to share ideas, concerns or worries, and offer or receive support. If you feel your mental health is deteriorating and you need support from health care services, let someone know. If you are concerned about someone else, encourage them to seek support. More information can be found here

### Be active

Physical activity is good for our mental health. Do this in a way that's safe & right for you. Even the smallest amount can make a difference. Green space is also good for our mental health, particularly for reducing stress. If you're able to be active outside, aim to stay more than 2 meters away from others. If this isn't possible, open a window to let in fresh air and natural light.

As part of protecting our physical and mental health, it is also important for us to eat a healthy balanced diet, stay hydrated and maintain self-care. Prioritise sleep for both good mental health and an effective immune system.

### Take notice

At challenging times, our thoughts and feelings about the unknown and what may come may overwhelm us and evoke strong emotions. It's important for us to try and focus on being present and in the moment. Allowing time to recognise, understand and process our thoughts and feelings matters. Keeping perspective is also important and gathering information from reliable sources helps us to do this. In the UK, the Government, Public Health England, the NHS, and the World Health Organisation are trusted sources.

### Keep learning

Mental stimulation has been shown to protect our mental health. Establishing structure and routine alongside taking up new hobbies, rediscovering old interests, or setting ourselves small goals to achieve can have a positive impact. It's important to try to incorporate stimulating activities into our daily routine. These could include things like completing a crossword, reading a book, listening to podcasts, cooking, or working through your 'to do' list. There are also lots of fun brain training activities available online. These can be completed individually or as part of a group to engage a sense of community, or to get the competition going.

### Give

The smallest acts of kindness really can make a difference. Giving to others makes other people and you feel good by creating positive feelings and a sense of self-worth and value.

Appreciation and gratitude are also important as they help us to focus on what we have, rather than what we don't have. Think about someone you know who's done something you appreciate and let them know. Pick up the phone, write a letter, send an email or message them. If you're not able to do this, just think about someone who's done something nice for you, and mentally thank them. At the end of each day, no matter how hard it may feel and no matter how small they may be, think about and write down three positive things about your day.

Kindness, appreciation and gratitude give us hope and help us to limit negative thoughts which can become all-consuming. Ultimately, they enable us to feel positive emotions and increase our ability to cope with adversity.

As part of any public health strategy to address COVID-19, it is essential for us to consider our mental health an integral part of this. There's much that can be done, and we all have a role to play.

### Reference:

The New Economics Foundation (2008). Five ways to mental wellbeing. Government Office for Science. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing>

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