

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING – WHAT IS IT AND WHAT CAN WE DO?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. When we are mentally healthy we can **‘cope with the normal stresses of life, and work productively and fruitfully’*.

In this cheat sheet, we will learn more about the mental health continuum, where we are on it and what we can do to help ourselves be mentally healthy.

**World Health Organisation*



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING – WHAT IS IT?

We ALL have mental health, just as we all have physical health. The state of our mental health fluctuates, depending on external and internal factors, and how much we look after our mental wellbeing.

If we experience low mental wellbeing for some time, we are more likely to experience a mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression.

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

If we are **mentally healthy**, we are able to:

- Enjoy positive relationships with others and engage with the world around us
- Understand, experience and accept that we have a wide range of emotions
- Cope with change and uncertainty
- Problem solve and be solution-focused
- Have healthy self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect

If our **mental health and wellbeing is wobbling**, we may:

- Have temporary or mild to moderate difficulties, such as struggling to sleep, or losing our appetite
- Be struggling to successfully manage the stresses in our life or put them into perspective

If we have a **mental health problem or disorder**, we may:

- Withdraw and become more socially isolated
- Notice more extreme physical behaviours, such as becoming easily angered or depressed, being exhausted, having increased aches and pains, turning to drugs or alcohol.
- Find ourselves performing badly, struggling to concentrate or, in contrast, becoming a workaholic.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF ON THE CONTINUUM

By understanding that we can be at different stages of the mental health continuum, at different times in our lives, we can actively help ourselves.

If we are mentally and physically healthy, it's good to recognise the things that are helping us to be well in mind and body. Then we can make sure that we sustain these behaviours and, if possible, do more of them. It might be that we set ourselves a target to eat even more healthily, drink in moderation and exercise more regularly.

If we are wobbling, it may help to look at each of the stresses in our life and what we can do to reduce these, so that they don't have such a negative impact. This could involve chatting to family members to share the load of caring for an elderly relative. Or it may be speaking to our boss, to ask for help with prioritising our workload.

If we have a mental health problem or disorder, it will help to identify trusted people that we can chat to. This may be close friends, family members, health professionals or a voluntary organisation such as the Samaritans, on 116 223. It can also help to know the techniques that work for us, such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), mindfulness or meditation.

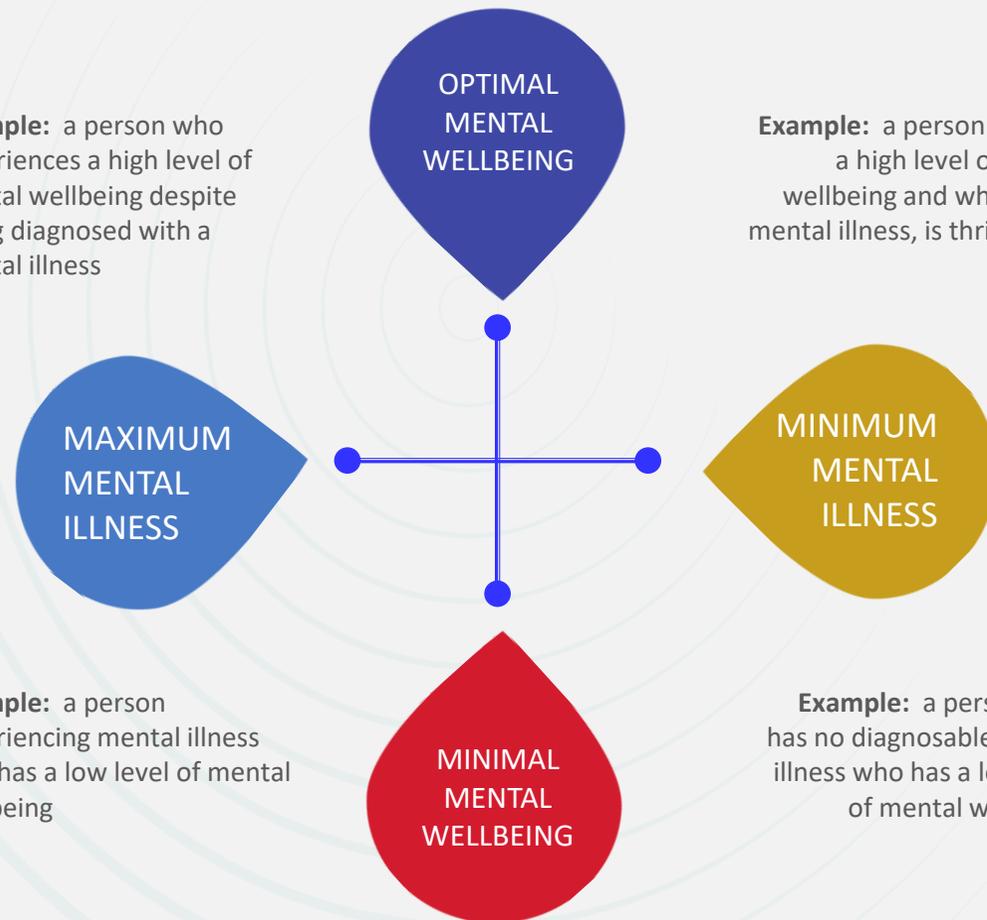
THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

Example: a person who experiences a high level of mental wellbeing despite being diagnosed with a mental illness

Example: a person who has a high level of mental wellbeing and who has no mental illness, is thriving and happy

Example: a person experiencing mental illness who has a low level of mental wellbeing

Example: a person who has no diagnosable mental illness who has a low level of mental wellbeing



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING – HOW TO HELP YOURSELF.

Life can be tricky, and without any warning, we can find ourselves in situations that cause us upset, stress and anxiety.

If we have helpful coping strategies and routines in place, which help us to be resilient, we may be better able to manage the tricky times.

In this cheat sheet, we will learn about the different ways that we can nourish our minds, to maintain or improve our mental health and wellbeing.



KNOWING THE TRIGGERS AND SIGNS

Sometimes we can cope well with challenging situations and at other times they can knock us for six. It helps to be aware of the types of things that may cause us low mental wellbeing. These might be long-term health conditions, work-related issues, financial difficulties, the death of a loved one or the breakdown of a relationship.

If possible, it also helps to recognise some of the signs that we are wobbling. It may be that we aren't sleeping very well, perhaps we have stopped doing our regular exercise or don't see our friends and family as much. We might recognise that we are getting more angry than usual, feeling more stressed or crying more often.

By reflecting on our behaviours and thoughts, when faced with challenging times, we can identify the helpful things that we are doing and do them even more. We can also identify the things that we are doing that aren't helpful, and try to do them less.

NOURISHING OUR MINDS – THROUGH DEVELOPING COPING STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

When we are struggling, it can be easy to isolate ourselves from friends and family. However, these are the people who will make us laugh, help us to put things into perspective and support us to feel better.

If, for any reason, we don't have a circle of confidants, it can help to join a safe online group, or chat to a mental health volunteer on the phone.

SETTING OURSELVES GOALS

By setting ourselves goals, struggling, and then achieving them, we learn to cope with being out of our comfort zone and the different emotions that this brings. It helps us to become more resilient when other people or unexpected situations challenge us. We should always start off with small, easily achievable goals which will improve our confidence and self-esteem.

MAKING ME TIME

Life is hectic. To cope better, it is always a good idea to make time for ourselves; to do something that we enjoy or go somewhere that we love. If we then visualise our happy place, in times of stress, our bodies will release feel-good chemicals to help us cope.

NOURISHING OUR MINDS – THROUGH SLEEPING SOUNDLY

Sleep helps us to recover from mental, as well as physical, exertion. If we have a mental health problem, it can affect our sleep. Also, a lack of sleep can affect our mental health. By recognising the reasons why we are struggling to sleep, we can form a plan of action.

If worries are keeping us awake, we can work to put these into perspective, by chatting to a friend or our boss, and by thinking about the things that are within our circle of influence and the things that we can't do anything about.

If worries and thoughts keep popping into our head, it helps to jot them down. Just by doing this, our brain feels acknowledged and is less likely to keep on at us.

If there are physical reasons that are stopping us sleeping we might think how we can make our bedroom a more relaxing place, or change the things that we eat, drink and do before bed. Are we looking at technology, or reading a book? Are we rushing around to prepare for work tomorrow or having a warm bath?

Before a poor sleeping pattern is established it may help to seek advice from a chemist or GP.