

4 PILLARS OF WELLBEING

Is your Life in Balance?

Below you can find areas of life that are valued by some people. This questionnaire will help clarify your own quality of life in these areas.

Rate the importance of each area (by circling a number) on a scale of 1-10 (1 means that area is *not important*, 10 means that area is *very important*).

Not everyone will value all of these areas, or value all areas the same. Rate each area according to **your own personal sense of importance**.

Area	Not Important ←----- -→ Very Important									
Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Intimate Relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Parenting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Friends/Social Life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Education/Training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Recreation/Fun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Spirituality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Health	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Time, Effort and Head Space

Now, give a rating to how much time, effort and head space you currently put into each area.

In other words, how in line with your values are you? Are you living your life in accordance with your values?

1 = little time, effort and 'head space'

10 = Maximum time, effort and 'head space'

Area	Minimum Time ←-----→ Maximum Time									
Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Intimate Relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Parenting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Friends/Social Life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Value to step closer to:

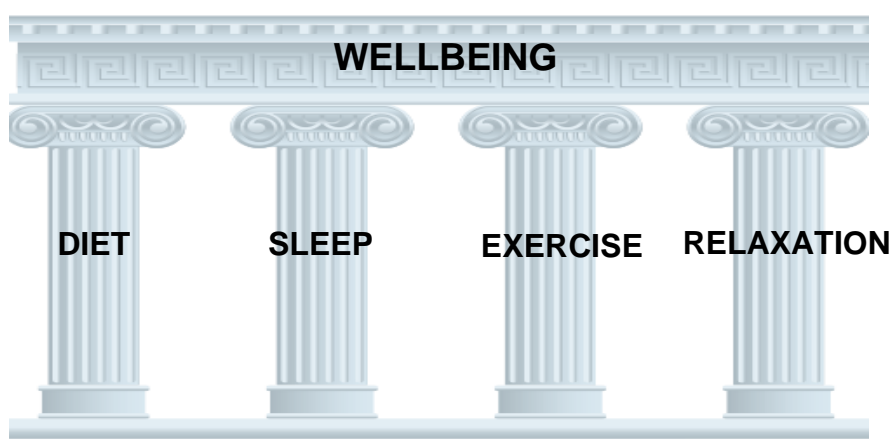
Goal:.....

Four Pillars of Managing Stress

Improving mental health can be a hard journey; however without change everything stays the same. Well done on getting over those first two hurdles – acknowledgement & asking for help. Sometimes when we are feeling down or anxious it's hard to know where to start making changes. If you are stuck, think about focusing on one of these four areas...

<p>Diet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are what we eat! • Regular & balanced diet is important – Regulates energy and mood • Alcohol & caffeine can negatively impact mood and anxiety • Reduce 'Added Sugar' intake • Drink plenty of water 	<p>Exercise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise increases energy levels & endorphins • Ideally 30 minutes most day • Build into everyday activities – i.e. walk further (parking/next bus stop), take the stairs, walk to next bus stop
<p>Sleep</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have different stages of sleep • Body – don't eat & drink too late • Environment – no screens/TV • Routine – baths, milky drinks, relaxation • 20 minute rule – get up if you cannot sleep and try again when sleepy 	<p>Relaxation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hobbies and interests • Be more aware of the present moment • Use - breathing exercises, Progressive Muscular Relaxation, Mindfulness • Take time out for you

While there might be lots of reasons for changes in our mental health, but often our self-care can be forgotten when we feel down or anxious. Our wellbeing is supported by these 4 areas, like 4 pillars supporting a building. If one or two of them are being neglected, they become wobbly and this can make the building become unstable. Evidence suggests that these four areas can provide us with a solid foundation to start making changes which might help us feel better.



Diet

Healthy Eating

Eating healthily is not only good for us physically; it can be just as important for our mental health. Eating a balanced diet including slow release energy foods can be beneficial for regulating our energy levels and mood. It's recommended to eat at regular times throughout the day. High sugar foods (ready meals, cereal bars, snacks) can cause spikes in our mood and maintain stress levels.

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant; it can increase the heart rate and brain activity. Excessive amounts can create a 'high' feeling; however when caffeine leaves the body a 'low' feeling can quickly follow. Excessive amounts can cause physical symptoms similar to anxiety. Drinking caffeine can also cause sleep disturbance. Aim to limit to no more than 2-3x coffee per day.



Alcohol



When we are stressed, in the short term alcohol appear to relieve symptoms of stress, but in the long-term, prolonged and excessive use of alcohol can lead to a whole host of problems. Alcohol is a depressant but when processing alcohol in the days after drinking our body simulates the symptoms of anxiety – so it can also actually increase both feelings of depression and anxiety. Alcohol has a depressant effect and can lead to rapid deterioration in mood.

Alcohol interferes with sleep patterns which can lead to reduced energy levels. Alcohol depresses the central nervous system, and this can make our moods fluctuate. It can be used by some to help 'numb' emotions, to help people avoid confronting difficult issues. Alcohol is also associated with disruptive sleep patterns, dietary changes and nutritional deficiencies.

Tip: We're not suggesting that you can never drink alcohol or caffeine. It is important, however, to consider whether your alcohol or caffeine intake is a factor that could be maintaining your stress levels.

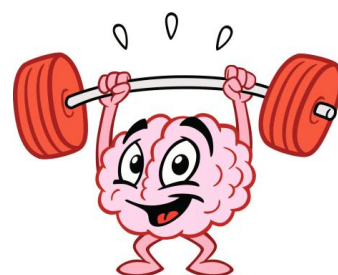
Sometimes people find that if they are going through a stressful period, it can be helpful to reduce or eliminate alcohol or caffeine, to try and help reduce some of the physical symptoms. Find the balance that works best for you!

Exercise

Physical Activity - It has long been known that regular exercise is good for our physical health; however it can also be very good for our mental health. It can improve mood, reduce anxiety and improve concentration. Exercise has an effect on certain chemicals in the brain (e.g. serotonin), that affect our mood and can make us feel happier. It can also improve energy levels and helps to regulate and improve sleep. The current guidelines are 150 minutes a week of moderate activity – this includes fast walking, housework, dancing or gardening.

Most importantly, it's about finding the type of physical activity that works for you, even breaking activity down into small bursts of exercise spread across the day. This may also mean building activity gradually, and planning a time that fits in with your life. Check back in with the SMART goals from week 1 for help with setting a goal for this.

Exercise Ideas



Exercise Plan:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Sleep

10 Rules for Sleep Hygiene

1. Limit caffeinated products
2. Avoid nicotine
3. Avoid alcohol around bedtime
4. Avoid heavy meals just before bedtime
5. Keep bedroom tidy, calm and ensure mattress and bedding are comfortable
6. Avoid HI exercise 2 hrs before bed time if possible
7. Control extremities in temperature
8. Keep bedroom quiet and darkened
9. Keep your bedroom mainly for sleeping avoiding watching TV, using computer or eating
10. Keep awake & get up time constant at all times and avoid napping during the day

Create the right atmosphere and routine

We need to create our own routine in the evening that tells our mind and body to wind down to prepare for sleep. In addition, we need to consider what we do during the day, and the bedroom environment itself – to give ourselves the best chance of sleeping.

- Moderate (not vigorous) **exercise** is great in the day to make us tired – but not in the four to six hours before bed. Gentle exercise such as stretching or gentle walking is excellent before bed.
- Finish any **caffeinated** drinks four to six hours before bed and avoid **alcohol** before bed.
- **Don't eat** too close to bedtime, and avoid spicy or very sugary foods as this can keep you awake during the night.
- **Smoking** (nicotine) will wake you up rather than calm you down.

- If you like a bath to **relax**, have it an hour or so before bed, so the body is then cooling down, which promotes sleep.
- Establish a **routine** with a regular bedtime and regular waking time.
- Try not to **nap** in the day/evening
- Keep a **notebook** by the bed to record anxious thoughts, worries or “things to do” that pay pop into your head

Make a note of anything you think could improve your sleep:

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Still having problems? Try associating bed with sleep

The more we are in bed awake, worrying, perhaps tossing and turning, watching TV, reading or using a computer, the harder it is to sleep. We start to associate bed with stress and being awake, instead of sleep.

- Don't try to sleep until you feel sleepy (whatever the clock says) – stay up until you really feel you cannot stay awake another moment. If you are not asleep after 15-20 minutes of putting out the light, or you wake in the night and are still awake after 15-20 minutes then get up, go into another room and do something relaxing or boring until you are sleepy again. **N.B. – you'll need to check the clock the first few times, but in general it's not helpful to keep checking the time if you are lying awake** Prepare for this – decide what you will do, and where you will do it. Have a warm blanket and maybe a relaxing CD ready in the room you will use, fill the kettle and find a non-caffeine drink for when you need it. Keep the light level low.
- The bedroom should be quiet, cool and dark (light is a signal to us to wake up), and free of TVs, computers and so on. If you are sharing with a partner, you may need to consider earplugs or negotiating over the weight of the duvet!
- Make your bed as comfortable and supportive as you can; mattresses can be expensive to replace, so if yours is old you could try putting a cheap duvet under the bottom sheet. Are you doing enough to use up your energy resources?

Relaxation

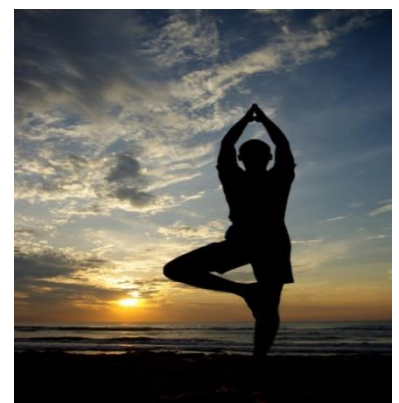
Why is relaxation helpful?

- When we are stressed the muscles in our bodies tense up and this muscular tension causes uncomfortable feelings such as headache, backache, tight chest and so on.
- These aches and pains of tension can cause us to worry about why we have aches and pains, and therefore make us even more anxious and tense. People who are tense often feel tired.
- Relaxing slows down the systems in the body that usually speed up when we get anxious. If we can learn to turn on the bodily symptoms of relaxation we can turn off the symptoms of tension. Both systems cannot run at the same time.
- Stress affects our thoughts and our perceptions of our self, others and the world around us. By focusing on relaxation, we can reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress, and allow ourselves to take a step back and think differently about things.



Relaxation as a skill

- The ability to relax is not always something that comes naturally; **it is a skill which has to be learnt**. This takes time and practice. The more we practice, the easier it becomes and the better the results. Daily practice is recommended.
- There are different methods of relaxation (including breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation, visualisation), there is evidence that relaxation is effective but nothing to suggest that one method is better than another. Find the one that works best for you!
- Try and be patient when practicing, and try not to get too frustrated if your mind wanders. The more we notice our mind drifting, the more we are able to be mindful and bring our attention back to the practice.

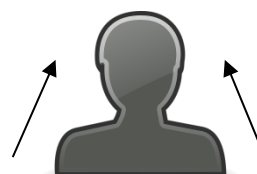


7/11 Breathing

Focusing on our breathing can be a really quick tool to help manage stressful situations. When we feel stressed we tend to trigger the sympathetic nervous system response (the arousal, or 'fight or flight' response). By regulating our breathing, we can instead trigger the parasympathetic response (our body's relaxation response). By breathing out slower than we breathe in, we can strengthen the relaxation response

The idea is simple:

Breathe in for 7 seconds...



Breathe out for 11 seconds...



Repeat for a few minutes.



Tip: Don't worry if 7 and 11 seconds is too long of a breath for you! As long as the out-breath is longer than the in-breath, then this should still have a relaxant effect. Try 3/5 seconds, or 5/7 seconds.

Tip: It's best to begin practicing this technique at a time when you are not feeling highly anxious or stress

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Relax yourself to the best of your ability. Consider the various muscle groups one at a time, and aim to learn the difference between tight and relaxed muscles.



Concentrate on the feeling in the muscle as it goes from tight to loose (holding as hard as you can for 5 seconds at a time). The instructions below start with the lower body and work upwards but you can do it in whichever order you like.

Breathing - *Slow and steady, letting yourself get more relaxed each time you breathe out.*

Calves - *Point your toes, pushing them out and feel the tightness build behind your shins; then gradually let that tightness go.*

Thighs - *Push your heels down hard against the floor, feeling the tightness in your thighs, then gradually let that go.*

Tummy - *Pull in your tummy tight, then gradually let it go, feeling it relax.*

Hands and arms - *Clench your fists, and tense your arms; feel the tightness in your hands and arms, then slowly relax them. See how far they will go, but do not push. Do not hold on at all; let everything go.*

Shoulders - *Hunch your shoulders, then gradually let them settle down - low and loose.*

Back of the neck - *Pull your chin forward on to your chest, feel tightness, then relax.*

Front of the neck - *Pull your head back, feel tightness, then relax.*

Jaw - *Bite your back teeth together, then gradually ease off, and let your jaw get heavy.*

Forehead - *Pull your eyebrows together, then gradually let your forehead smooth out.*

Eyes - *Screw up your eyes tight, then gradually let them smooth out, leaving your eyes closed, feeling your eyeballs sink, and your eyelids droop. Let them get really heavy.*

Let everything go, further and further, feeling the tension flow from your body. Feel yourself getting heavier and heavier.

The changes I will make this week:

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SMART GOALS

It may be helpful to write down some of your notes and a goal from each session.

There is evidence that setting SMART goals can be helpful way to make changes to our wellbeing. Below is an example of a poor and SMART goal. Please use this as an example when setting yourself goals for each session.

Poor goal: I want to walk the dog more.

SMART goal

Specific

I would like to be able to walk the dog for 20 minutes at least 3 times a week.

Measurable

20 minutes, 3 x week

Achievable

Do you have a dog???

Realistic

What can you do now? Is it something you want to do.

Timely

When do you want to achieve it by – remember pacing principals.