WINTER OF WELLBEING

Looking after our mental health

As much as we want to stay physically well in the face of Covid-19, taking care of our minds really matters, too. Read our guide to protecting your mental wellbeing this winter

MID the uncertainty of 2020, we're more aware of our mental health than ever. Not only are we tuning in to the way we feel, we're also asking more people how they are feeling, too.

"As humans, we naturally want to exert an influence over our lives," says consultant clinical psychologist Dr Adam Huxley, co-founder of the wellbeing platform Thrive.

"When that is taken away, it creates feelings of uncertainty, which can lead to anxiety, low mood or even panic.

"It's important that we don't assume everyone is fine, and instead make additional checks on family and friends, especially if we're not seeing them."

Here, we explore the wealth of free tools and advice on offer to cope with whatever you're feeling, as well as fun ways to help children.



WORKING WELL

We've learned to work in many new ways this year: whether it's a different environment or the roles themselves have been lost or changed. Business psychologist Elissa Makris (above) explains the benefits of

"Boundaries get blurred when we work from home, making it harder to switch off," she says.

"We are creatures of habit, so setting a routine that includes sleeping, eating and working out at the same times can encourage our bodies to keep a healthy circadian rhythm, which contributes to both our physical and mental wellbeing."

When things get too much, Elissa recommends communicating with a team member or manager - an easy act to overlook now that face-time is limited.

"If we feel an imbalance between our resources and job demands it can lead to stress and ultimately burnout," she says. "Whatever the problem, make sure you address it so you can be supported."

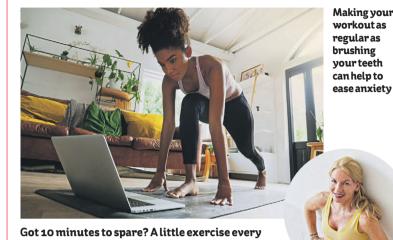
3 QUICK TIPS FOR WFH ANXIETY

Set boundaries "It's easy to lose" track of time so make sure to manage your expectations."

Get fresh air "Take frequent breaks to maintain your energy levels

and productivity. Unwind before bed "Sleep is extremely important for replenishing our psychological and physiological resources so we can cope better with stressors.

EXERCISE AWAY ANXIETY



day can help relieve feelings of stress and fatigue. Personal trainer Claire Finlay, right, shows us how

day can be your 'medicine' when anxiety sets in," says Claire, who founded Fulham fitness studio Transition Zone in London seven years ago. She says workouts don't need to be long; if they become as regular as brushing your teeth, they can help relieve feelings of anxiety

and depression over time. "When you begin to spot the signs, call upon your 'anxiety tool box'. It could include a short time for breathing techniques and meditation, practising yoga or getting out for a walk, cycle or run. lust a 10-minute workout in your home will make a difference.'

"Introducing regularity into your

CLAIRE'S 10-MINUTE FEELGOOD ROUTINE

What? A short circuit. high-intensity workout

- just add music!

When? Complete as many rounds as possible for 6-10 minutes. How?

- Push-ups x 6
- Squats x 6
- Shoulder taps x 12
- Burpees x 6

YOUNG MINDS

With school back in session and Christmas on the horizon, it feels like our children are bouncing back from a tough year. In fact, Dr Adam Huxley says optimism is exactly the attitude that could make a difference.

"One positive of lockdown has been parents reconnecting with their children: watching movies, painting, walking – things we might not have had time for before," he says. "And we've seen how incredibly resilient children can be. As we head to the new year, remaining optimistic is important, including reassuring the there will be an endpoint to this."

Besides spending time together, Dr Huxley suggests that a listening ear is the best thing we can offer if we're worried about our children.

"Let them know they're not alone if they feel scared, worried or sad," he says. "Make sure their lives face as keeping rules and routines stable, such as rigid bedtimes. It gives them a sense of sameness and safety."

3 FUN FAMILY ACTIVITIES

● **Grow veg** A project to keep their minds occupied such as growing healthy vegetables will help them look



Pamper day: self-care is key to mental wellness and reducing anxiety

to the future, whether you've got a patch outside or just a window sill. Bug trail Getting children out in the fresh air is good enough in winter, but spotting on a woodland adventure through your local park.

Christmas decorations We've seen how cheerful paper rainbows can be, now it's time to create festive paper snowflakes for decorating the windows and walls in time for Christmas.

BETTER WELLBEING

Day-to-day, there are lots of little ways that we can improve our attitude to situations and general outlook. Linguistic Programming (NLP) coach, which involves the study of the mind and behaviour to help us understand our responses to certain experiences. She says self-care is key to mental wellness: "Be kind to vourself: self-care is especially important in times of stress. Grab a book, have a hot



bubble bath, put on good music-just let yourself go for a moment."

And, when we're contending with more negative emotions than usual, Rebecca suggests journaling as a powerful, practical exercise for reframing your inner dialogue.

"When you release your thoughts on to paper, you can begin to let go of all the self-talk," she says. "There is no right or wrong way - get a blank on your mind."

3 TIPS FOR LOW MOOD FROM

'EVERY MIND MATTERS' • Healthy living Being active, cutting back on alcohol and making sure we have a healthy balanced diet can help boost your mood and wellbeing.

One positive oflockdown has been parents reconnecting with their children - Dr Adam Huxley

• Reframe your thoughts In difficult times it can be easy to get caught up in negative thoughts, feelings and actions. It can be helpful to step back, examine the evidence for your thoughts and explore other ways of looking at the situation. This can help break a negative thought spiral and give you a new perspective. Check out the video on the 'Every Mind

Matters' website (see below). Talk to someone Trusted fr family and colleagues, or contacting a helpline (see Help Is At Hand above) can help us when we are struggling. From "Every Mind Matters", a free resource with tips and advice to help vou look after your mental wellbeing, nhs.uk/onevou/ every-mind-matters

5 apps for better mental health

Free apps that help lift your mood and manage whatever you're facing



Thrive A gamebased app to help you relax and manage stress.



Feeling Good

Improve your

thoughts into

positive ones.



mindset with happy thoughts. Catch It Learn how to turn negative



My Possible **Self** Strategies to manage fear, anxiety and stress. Without the social interaction we're used to, being alone can start to affect our mental wellbeing

- Rebecca Lockwood

ISOLATION

We all feel lonely sometimes, but since Covid-19 has made it harder to be with others, we need to find new ways to connect. "Without the social interaction we're used to, being mental wellbeing," says NLP coach Rebecca Lockwood.

Whether you live alone or you're spending less time with your household, online communities are a great way to be sociable remotely, she adds: "So many group

activities are still happening online. Social media is also an amazing way to connect although, if it makes you feel more alone, limit your time online to ensure it only supports good feelings."

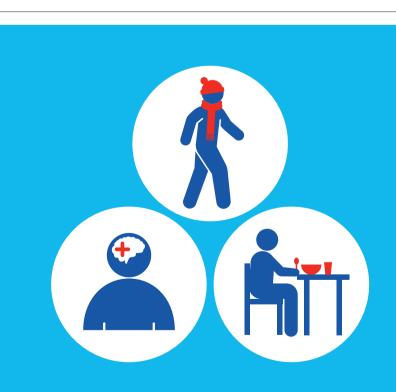
And if you're still finding it difficult to express your emotions, Rebecca recommends reaching out to a life coach, therapist or your doctor. "If you don't like being alone with your thoughts, this is a sign that you should ask for help," she advises.

3 TIPS TO TACKLE LONELINESS

Do more of what you enjoy "This will keep you occupied at times when loneliness might

affect your mood." Make time for loved ones work or found vourself spending more time alone, schedule in time to be more present."

• Feel gratitude "Gratitude is powerful - when you focus on what you already have in your life, you will think less about the things you're missing."



Keep well this winter

For tips and advice on how to keep well, please visit nhs.uk/better-health

All together