

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

AMID 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.

HELP IS AT HAND
 The NHS offers a range of free, confidential and effective talking therapies to help with common mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and depression. Ask your GP to refer you, or go to nhs.uk/talk to refer yourself.
 If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis, find your local 24/7 mental health crisis line at nhs.uk/urgentmentalhealth. Or, if you need to talk, free listening services offer confidential advice from trained volunteers.
 ● Call Samaritans free on 116 123 or visit: samaritans.org
 ● Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 or visit: giveusashout.org/
 For those living in Northern Ireland, visit mindingyourhead.info



WORKING WELL
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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 striking a work-life balance. "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

Making your workout as regular as brushing your teeth can help to ease anxiety

Got 10 minutes to spare? A little exercise every day can help relieve feelings of stress and fatigue. Personal trainer Claire Finlay, right, shows us how.

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

"Introducing regularity into your 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. Just a 10-minute workout in your home will make a difference."

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 them 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 little disruption as possible by keeping rules and routines stable, such as rigid bedtimes. It gives them a sense of sameness and safety."



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 to keep them entertained, go bug 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. Rebecca Lockwood is a Neuro 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 yourself: 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 piece of paper and write whatever is 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 of lockdown 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 friends, 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 you look after your mental wellbeing, nhs.uk/oneyou/everymindmatters

5 apps for better mental health
 Free apps that help lift your mood and manage whatever you're facing

- Thrive** A game-based app to help you relax and manage stress.
- Cove** Express what you're feeling through the power of music.
- Feeling Good** Improve your mindset with happy thoughts.
- Catch It** Learn how to turn negative thoughts into positive ones.
- 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 alone can start to affect our 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** "If you've been a wrapped up at work or found yourself 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 >