

Our Mental Wellbeing

Write things, thoughts and feeling down, whether it's a diary or a gratitude journal

Learn something new, a language or a new skill

Quitting alcohol/drugs can have a profound effect on mental health

Working from home with my husband in lockdown is a treat! Enjoy all those little benefits and luxuries of working from home which are around you

My main outdoor activity is growing food on my allotment, which has been a fantastic outlet during the lockdown. Human contact with other allotment holders and the experience of growing and nurturing plants is great for my mental and physical health

Someone once told me to find opportunities to see long distances, particularly the horizon. They said if you only see the buildings opposite you, up and down roads, or small distances in parks, then it will have a negative effect on your mental wellbeing.

One of my best friends swears by the methods used by <https://drchatterjee.com/> in his books and podcasts

It's helpful to remember that every single person will have ups and downs, good days and bad days and many people have episodes of poor mental health. So if things are particularly tough, share with someone you trust so that they can help you identify ways to support. Seeking help is a sign of strength not weakness

I've started switching off my mobile phone from Friday night to Monday morning, which feels good!

If there's a short-term issue (stress, anxiety), then the perfect way to break it is a total focus on something else. At home, this could be juggling. I can't juggle more than 3 balls and I can only do it 4 or 5 times. But just doing that, or trying to do one more time, for simply a minute or two can switch my focus away from whatever is stressful

I have seen people with pretty serious depression or anxiety improve significantly if they are volunteering for something they believe in, or caring/being responsible for something or someone else. That could be a partner, a child, a pet or a plant

Humour - If I want to feel better, I watch The Simpsons

Control how much social media and news you consume, even news from 'reliable sources', getting news from very unreliable sources like Facebook (someone posted that someone said that someone heard) type of news, can be very detrimental to people's health

Drink tea - despite the caffeine, few things are better than a cup of tea. However, it is best taken with a break, not gulped down whilst trying to fire off urgent emails - you won't appreciate it, tea deserves attention and that's when you feel it relax you

My favourite mindfulness/relaxation technique is 'grounding' - there are many versions of it. I spin through the following questions in my head:

- What can I smell?
- What can I feel?
- What can I hear?
- What can I see?
- What can I taste?

The trick is to repeat it again and again and not let yourself be distracted by the intrusive thoughts of what you have to do! When it was first suggested to me, I thought 'that will never work for me' - but I practiced it and after a while it did!

Self-reflection and inward introspection is a very powerful tool for developing the ability to learn how to disengage with thoughts that create stressful, anxious or depressing emotions. Self-reflection allows us to consider how our minds react to situations and places and what might be at the root of those reactions

What happens around us cannot be controlled, although we may think we can control certain things, the reality is that it is such a huge web of cause and effect that anything unexpected could happen at any time. The thought of this is terrifying, but at the same time it can be liberating. By letting go of the need to control, we let go of past experiences and memories steering or tainting future experiences

If you find you have been carried away with future scenarios of what might happen and are feeling burdened by them, bring yourself back to the present moment through focusing on something that is here and now, such as your breath

Over last year running has become an important part of my life. In the time of lockdown, it has helped me to deal with anxiety and the unknown. Running is my way of meditation, but more sweaty! When I am running, I hear the sounds around me, see how nature changes from day today. I feel my feet hitting the ground, my breath changing and the breeze on my skin. I feel free and happy

Crafting - I've found lap loom weaving and macramé to be quite meditative and mindful activity. You can make your own lap loom with a large photo frame and some nails - hammering in the nails is pretty therapeutic in itself! I've got a monthly craft box subscription from Makebox.co but there are plenty more kits and subscription boxes out there at a range of price points for wide variety crafts, for example pottery, kintsugi, art supplies, and knitting

Hourly screen breaks have helped with maintaining focus. Also, I have found it really important to remind myself that it is okay to have a longer break if I need one and that work will always be there later to come back to when I'm ready

My tip for keeping happy in lockdown is taking regular breaks outside in the sunshine, watering the plants and listening to the birds

I plan my days. The list of calls, emails and stuff that gets taken off line to work on without interruptions. The list is longer than I can do in a day but ticking the actions off gives a measure. The unfinished actions give shape to the following day.

I make model trains. I work in materials like wood, steel and brass. It uses skills and processes utterly removed from the day job and gives me projects with very clear start middle and end. Producing the smallest finished model gives a satisfaction far beyond the scale of any difficulty and balances some of life's other stresses.

A few things I find are useful are:

1. Consider and act on the 'take 5' advice
2. If feel tense do a breathing app such as 'I breathe'
3. I think this book is worth a read https://www.amazon.co.uk/ParadoxThe-Acclaimed-Management-Programme-Confidence/dp/B0092G790W/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_product_top?ie=UTF8
4. Good web site - <https://www.mindingyourhead.info/>
5. and enjoy a beer on a Friday!

Regular sleep pattern - Late night equals poor well-being.

I've used the Headspace app for a few years now, it's made a huge difference to my mental wellbeing. They're allowing free access to some of their content as part of C19 response.

"Be a better friend to yourself", we are sometimes our worst and hardest critics

This website has a whole load of practical advice:
<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>

Be kind and make someone's day. Be funny and make someone laugh

I suffer a lot from imposter syndrome – the feeling that I don't feel like I'm knowledgeable/competent enough to do parts of my job. I work on it by keeping track of what I HAVE accomplished—sometimes a daily ta-da! list, sometimes it's just keeping a list of bigger things. I also try to be honest in talking to other colleagues about it.

Sticking to a routine has helped - I've done yoga and meditation pretty much every morning throughout lockdown. In the past couple of weeks, I've added a daily 6 mile 'commute' out into the local hills and back to my desk at home. After consuming too much doom and gloom in the press, I'm trying to focus on the good stuff in the news and have just finished reading a book published this week <https://agreatread.co.uk/humankind-a-new-history-of-human-nature-9781408898932/> - about how most humans are pretty decent and keen to help each other - which I've found uplifting and inspirational.

Lying in bed the same thought rolling round your head? Treat your thoughts like buses – you can sit at the bus stop and watch them go past. No need to get on board.

Things I find useful for maintaining my mental wellbeing are:

- Listening to podcasts on walks/cycles such as:
 - The 'Feel Better, Live More' podcast – lots of good lifestyle advice and tips for staying healthy physically and mentally
 - The 'Food Medic' podcast – same as above ^
- Having a relaxing bath with bath salts
- Reading a good book on my kindle, I find this quite relaxing and almost like a meditation
- Les Mills On Demand app for yoga 'Body Balance' classes and strength training 'Body Pump' classes, make me feel strong physically and mentally

I highly recommend Charlie Mackesy's book *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse*. Beautiful illustrations, with lovely messages throughout whilst holding a narrative with the characters.

Knowing when to say no to things or people.

Put on some feel-good music and have a dance around the living room/whilst doing the washing up/putting the laundry away etc.

I have been struggling more than usual with panic attacks and feeling a loss of control. I decided to take a week of annual leave just to rest and not set myself any tasks or goals – and I felt so much better for it. I've now booked more frequent short breaks through the summer, and although they're not 'proper' holidays, they are a chance to step away from my desk, recharge, and come back to work more calm and able to concentrate.

It's good to recognise as well that there's likely going to be fluctuations on how you feel, because at first I thought every bad mood might lead me down the rabbit hole again, but you come to remember that feeling up and down at different times, is human!

I find going straight from my desk at home to the family after a long day can be jarring, and I can carry stress with me. So I try and have a few minutes to decompress. Reading something, playing a silly game on my phone. Something that marks a break between work and home

A 'fake commute' is good. I'm not always managing to do it, but a 20-40 minute bike ride before starting work feels really good when I do manage to do it.

Staying connected with family and friends, ringing my sister for good catch up

Ensuring weekends are different helps I find, even if the difference is pretty minimal!

Have a little bit of what you fancy sometimes, whether its chocolate, a good coffee, pint of beer, buy yourself treat, whatever makes you happy!

Not feeling guilty for doing nothing sometimes and making time for relaxation

Lighting a scented candle in the evenings whilst watching TV, nice to watch the flame flicker and makes your house smell nice!

Eat well. Lots of vegetables and fresh food are a lot better for your body than eating fast food all the time. But a take away every so often is totally okay! And cake after/during bike rides

Manage emotions by writing things down

Something that makes me really happy and relaxed is regular yoga practice. I tune into Hot yoga (<https://hotpodyoga.com/studios/glasgow/schedule/>) most nights to attend the 6.30pm class, which lasts an hour. The classes during this Coronavirus period are hosted live online, and are contribution based, so really accessible to everyone. Yoga is a totally brilliant way to relax your body and mind, and I strongly recommend it to everyone

I've found it useful to find something creative or constructive to do with my hands and concentration – a jigsaw, drawing, colouring-in, stitching, Lego, something that gives you a sense of achievement at the end...! Either in silence and let your thoughts go past, or listen to a cheery podcast or music. Anything but the news!

One of the things that I've been doing, which I'm sure has helped my mental wellbeing is taking more care of, and propagating my houseplants. I've always managed to keep them going, but recently I've been using an app to really water and care for them properly, and growing new plants from leaf cuttings has been great. We're going to run out of room to put into the pots soon though!

Apps I use are: Planta and Picture This

The Pomodoro technique is a really great way of structuring your time and to prevent procrastination. Structure your time into blocks of 25 minutes of work followed by a 5 minute break. Focus on a specific task to do during each 25 minute block and time it. Everything feels a lot more manageable if you focus on one thing at a time

I suffer from anxiety and my method to cope is daily (or weekly, or whatever) check-in. Once a day at around 10:30/11ish I have a 'check-in' text with my sister. It's important to find someone that you trust to do this with – they don't necessarily have to know you very well, but that helps, you just have to be open with them and have a shared trust. I'd also recommend it's not someone you live with – as a little distance helps (but each person will find their own right person for the role). I must stress, that I found the idea of this ATROCIOUS before I started it – I dreaded the first one and the build up to it caused anxiety in the first place...but after the first couple of days I found it to be an amazing way to not let a negative start to the day stay negative

I go on a daily walk with my partner and dog each day which is lovely

I have found being really open with my team has been useful – so everyone knows where I am at and why work might be a little bit slow, I need to take some time out, etc. It has also helped prompt others to be mindful of their own mental wellbeing and maybe open up a bit more. Also, don't compare yourself to others – so what if that person ran for 4 hours? Or that person did ALL the deep cleaning of the house, your neighbour built a new shed? So what! You do YOU – that's the most important thing right now. You could donate to a mental wellbeing charity – lots of charities are struggling right now and a lot of mental wellbeing charities have had an increase of people needing their support

Sometimes a really late-night stroll when you can walk in the middle of the road and everywhere is calm and peaceful clears the mind. I'm definitely 10000% extrovert so the lack of human interaction is really tough but I have been making the most of my one-person-at-a-time hang outs and booking these in gives me something to look forward to as all other plans are scuppered

I have been continuing with my regular Pilates class, but doing it via Zoom which is surprisingly effective. Pilates, like yoga, is great for 'centering' your thoughts, focussing on your breathing and imagining how your muscle groups respond in various exercises. Great mindfulness activity, that after an hour session leaves me feeling energised and positive

I always find that if I'm feeling a bit down or negative usually towards myself, it's because I have been trying to fit too much into my day/s and haven't given myself any 'me' time. I have realised recently that if I don't allow myself this time to concentrate on what makes me feel happy then I find that everything starts to feel like a chore and just doing the essential tasks in a day like cooking, cleaning, etc, feel too big. Just stopping and doing something I enjoy, for me, really brings back my energy and my enjoyment in life

Here's what works for me:

Get some fresh air every day, go for a walk, cycle or whatever but do get out of the house.

Avoid too much social media

Remember newspapers make their money selling bad news, the good news doesn't make the headlines

Discover YouTube music – I've found Ian Blake's Crystal Maze (70's electronic hippy stuff) is good to work to

Read Max Ehrmann's Desiderata

Always have a book on the go

Be kind to your friends and family

Make a mental wellbeing self-rescue plan

When? As soon as possible! Start simple and quick, add to it when you have time and further insight.

How?

- Observe and note what gives you a mental boost (the "lifts") and what is a drain on your mental state (the "weights")
- Make time for the "lifts": discuss & share freely. Monitor the "weights", discuss/share with people that are supportive and understanding.
- Practice some of the "lifts" regularly so you form good habits that take minimal effort to continue, even when you are not feeling on top form.
- Challenge yourself to do (or deal with) some of the "weights" when you are feeling OK, to give you the strength to deal with difficult situations. Monitor the effects closely. Practice ways of declining or delegating or reducing "weights" for situations when your mental state is under pressure.
- Be aware of your balance of "lifts" and "weights" and keep adjusting according to your mental state and what life throws at you.
- Keep observing, refining, practicing, challenging and adjusting to increase your resilience.

Why?

- Some things boost your mental state, other things may be a drain on mental energy – these are personal to you and can change over time (but the "Five Ways to Wellbeing" is a good start)
- If you practice things until they are familiar and habitual, it requires less mental energy to start and maintain them.
- It takes mental energy to make plans and decisions and do unfamiliar things.
- When mental wellbeing is low, it is harder to think clearly.
- Plan and practice what you can, when you can, so you can focus on the uncertain and the unfamiliar

I have been using the app Calm (a bit like Headspace) to learn how to meditate and fit this into my day. I've also been using the excellent BeSupported service

Having skype friends at work to have a coffee with, generally skyping or calling people more and emailing less

I generally know which things help me (getting up early to do exercise/yoga/outdoor swim) but sometimes when I most need it the motivation is difficult – something that helps is committing to it with other people, even if you can't be with them in the same place currently, for example skyping/zooming a friend for an online yoga date/workout. I personally find being creative a great escape and have enjoyed online courses on writing and art – doing something different from everyday work and life that's absorbing and gets my brain diverted.

Why not do some weight training in a gym during 'normal times' and at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is known that physical activity reduces stress by releasing endorphins. Whilst both cardio and strength training stimulate your body to release endorphins, your body tends to produce more endorphins in a faster period of time, when you are weight training. Weight training can also increase antidepressant chemicals in the brain, such as dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine. During and following a weight training session, you should experience a feel-good factor. To get started why not purchase some dumbbells online? <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/uk/fitness/strength-training/a28755946/best-dumbbell-exercises/>