How to look after your mental health
It's important to take care of yourself and get the most from life. This booklet suggests 10 practical ways to look after your mental health.

**What is mental health?**

- Hi, how are you doing?
- I'm good thanks, glad it's the weekend. You?
- Bit fed up actually, it just feels like everything I do goes wrong.

This conversation is about mental health. Mental health is about the way you think and feel and your ability to deal with ups and downs. Being mentally healthy doesn't just mean that you don't have a mental health problem. If you're in good mental health, you can:

- make the most of your potential;
- cope with life; and
- play a full part in your family, workplace, community and among friends.
Some people call mental health ‘emotional health’ or ‘wellbeing’ and it’s just as important as good physical health.

Mental health is everyone’s business. We all have times when we feel down or stressed or frightened. Most of the time those feelings pass. But sometimes they develop into a more serious problem and that could happen to any one of us.

Everyone is different. You may bounce back from a setback while someone else may feel weighed down by it for a long time.

Your mental health doesn’t always stay the same. It can change as circumstances change and as you move through different stages of your life.

There’s a stigma attached to mental health problems. This means that people feel uncomfortable about them and don’t talk about them much. Many people don’t even feel comfortable talking about their feelings. But it’s healthy to know and say how you’re feeling.
Talk about your feelings

Talking about your feelings can help you stay in good mental health and deal with times when you feel troubled. Talking about your feelings isn’t a sign of weakness. It’s part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy.

Talking can be a way to cope with a problem you’ve been carrying around in your head for a while. Just being listened to can help you feel supported and less alone. And it works both ways. If you open up, it might encourage others to do the same.

It’s not always easy to describe how you’re feeling. If you can’t think of one word, use lots. What does it feel like inside your head? What does it make you feel like doing?
You don’t need to sit your loved ones down for a big conversation about your wellbeing. Many people feel more comfortable when these conversations develop naturally - maybe when you’re doing something together. If it feels awkward at first, give it time. Make talking about your feelings something that you do.
Experts believe exercise releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep, look and feel better. Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy.

"I get a huge buzz from my rock 'n' roll class. Hours later, my legs ache, but I'm still smiling."

Exercising doesn't just mean doing sport or going to the gym. Walks in the park, gardening or housework can also keep you active. Experts say most people should do about 30 minutes' exercise at least five days a week.
Try to make physical activity that you enjoy a part of your day.

“It's increased my confidence, as I've proved to myself that I can do things, and I'm also much fitter and have lost weight. We always have a lot of fun.”
There are strong links between what we eat and how we feel – for example, caffeine and sugar can have an immediate effect. But food can also have a long-lasting effect on your mental health. Your brain needs a mix of nutrients to stay healthy and function well, just like the other organs in your body.

A diet that’s good for your physical health is also good for your mental health.

A healthy balanced diet includes:

- lots of different types of fruit and vegetables;
- wholegrain cereals or bread;
- nuts and seeds;
- dairy products;
- oily fish; and
- plenty of water.
Eat at least three meals each day and drink a lot, though not too much alcohol. Try to limit how many high-caffeine or sugary drinks you have.

Visit our Feeding Minds webguide at www.mentalhealth.org.uk/feedingminds to find out how diet can improve your mental health.