

How to help others?

- Just listen
- Provide welcoming and non judgemental environments
- Check in on friends and colleagues
- Inform peers and colleagues about information, campaigns and services
- Don't feel like you have to have all the answers



 **mind** Havant and East Hants

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Physical and mental health



At HEH Mind we work to promote good mental health within our locality. We seek to support and empower people to lead a full life as part of their local community. Our services include

- Adult wellbeing
- Family wellbeing
- Children and young peoples wellbeing
- Training and workplace wellbeing
- Advocacy
- Volunteering
- Anti stigma/ discrimination campaigning
- Fund and awareness raising

HEH Mind services and support are available across the Havant Borough and East Hampshire District, including areas such as: Hayling Island, Waterloooville, Emsworth, Petersfield, Alton, Bordon and Bentley. Further details regarding the services at HEH Mind can be found in our 'About us' booklet.

Getting active isn't working

While many people find physical activity helpful, not everyone does. We may find that there are times when it is helpful, and times when it isn't.

For example:

- If we are unwell, injured or unable to exercise.
- There may be times when physical activity doesn't make us feel better. Then we'll need other types of support.
- For some exercise can make mental health worse. It can trigger anxiety, be part of a mental health problem.
- We may be taking medication or have a physical health condition that means we can't exercise or need to take particular care when doing any physical activity.

If physical activity is not working for us right now:

- Try changing our routine, or doing a different type of activity.
- Do what we can when we can. It's completely normal to have days when we wake up excited and other days when things feel like a challenge.
- Be gentle with ourselves. If we don't manage to do what we had planned, that's ok.
- Try other activities, like mindfulness and nature.

If we are struggling to manage our mental health on our own, we can talk to our GP about possible treatments, such as medication or a talking therapy.

Before I start getting active

If we have a mental health problem, or if we are physically unwell, there may be certain things that might affect the type and amount of activity we can do. It's important to think about these before we start getting active, to make sure what we are doing is safe.

For example, we may need to think about how much activity, and what types of activity, we can do if we:

- Are taking medication
- Experience anxiety or panic attacks
- Have an eating problem
- Have compulsive or addictive feelings about exercise
- Have a physical health condition



What is physical activity?

Being physically active means sitting down less and moving our bodies more. Many people find that physical activity helps maintain positive mental health, either on its own, or in combination with other treatments.

This does not have to mean running marathons or training every day at the gym. There are lots of different things you can do to be a bit more active.



How can physical activity help my mental health?

There are many studies which have shown that physical activity can improve mental health. It can help with:

- better sleep – by making us feel more tired at the end of the day.
- happier moods – physical activity releases feel good hormones that make us feel better in ourselves and give us more energy.
- managing stress, anxiety or intrusive and racing thoughts – doing something physical releases cortisol which helps us manage stress. Being physically active also gives our brain something to focus on and can be a positive coping strategy for difficult times
- better self-esteem – being more active can make us feel better about ourselves as we train and improve.
- reducing the risk of depression – studies have shown that doing regular physical activity can reduce the likelihood of experiencing a period of depression
- connecting with people – group or team activities can help us meet like-minded people, and make new friends.

However, physical activity is not always helpful for everyone's mental health. We may find that it is helpful at some times and not others, or just that it does not work for us. For some physical activity can start to have a negative impact on our mental health, for example, if we have an eating problem or tend to over train.

How much activity is ok?

How can I stop myself from overtraining?

If we feel like we may be overtraining, it can help to:

- Re-assess why we wanted to be active in the first place and what we enjoy about it.
- Try a new activity or mix up our routine.
- Try a less competitive sport or atmosphere – like tai chi, yoga or pilates, or a different class or instructor.
- Limit our exercise time to a healthy schedule – for example, sessions of 30 minutes, 5 times a week.
- Listen to our body – have some time off if we need it, or if we are in pain or unwell.
- Take a break – we may need to stop exercising for a while to focus on other things.
- Seek help – we may need to get support if we feel like overtraining is starting to have a negative impact on our mental or physical health - for example, by visiting our GP.



How much activity is ok?

There are lots of benefits to being more active, and any amount of physical activity can help. We do not have to begin a vigorous training plan to start feeling better. How much activity we decide to do is personal to us and will depend on our current level of activity, fitness and what we fit in to our day-to-day life. There may also be things that affect how much activity is safe for us to do, such as medication, an eating problem, anxiety, OCD, or a physical health condition. What is important is working out what feels realistic for us at the moment. This may change from time to time, depending on how we are feeling, and what we are able to do.

Overtraining

Doing too much physical activity can be as unhealthy as doing too little. This is called overtraining or overexercise. Overtraining can have a negative impact on both our mental and physical health.

For example, it can cause injury and long-term physical damage to tendons, ligaments, bones, cartilage and joints. This can become life threatening, if our body is not getting enough nutrition. Additionally this can have a negative impact on our relationships, mood and ability to function in other areas of our life.

What type of activity might work for me?

Being physically active tends to be easier if we choose an activity that we enjoy, and that fits into our daily life. If we force ourselves to do something we do not enjoy, we are much less likely to keep it going and experience benefits.

There are lots of different things we can try. Not everybody will enjoy or feel comfortable doing all of these activities, so we can sometimes try a few before we find something we like. Different things can also work for us at different times, depending on how we are feeling.



Start getting active

It can be difficult to start being more active, particularly if we are not feeling well or feel like there are things getting in the way.

How to get started

- Start off slowly. It may take a while to build up our fitness. Doing too much at first can make us feel tired and may put us off future activity.
- Plan a realistic and achievable routine. We try to find ways to be active that fit into our day-to-day life.
- Be kind to ourselves. Sometimes we can't be as active as we would like, and our energy levels will vary on different days. It's fine to slow down or take a break.
- Try to identify our triggers and work around them. For example, if we find leaving the house difficult or don't like to exercise in front of other people, we could try doing some exercise at home.
- Keep trying. It may take a while to find an activity/ class/ group we like.
- Working with our highs and lows. If we are taking medication that leaves us feeling exhausted in the mornings, we can rest and build in exercise later on.
- Have alternatives. If we can't be as active, having alternative options that will help lift our mood.
- Not comparing ourselves to other people. We can set our own goals and measure progress, if we want to.

Free and low-cost activities

- Find activities that are free. The NHS website has lots of ideas ([nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-exercise-ideas](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-exercise-ideas))
- Look for local schemes and discounts. Some councils offer cheaper leisure centre memberships for people who want to be physically active, especially if we have a health problem or are inactive. Many private gyms also offer free trials or discounts.
- Join one of our peer to peer support groups.

If we need a confidence boost

- Look for groups of like-minded people. Some leisure centres and sports clubs provide sessions aimed at people with mental health problems.
- Go with someone else. Some clubs will allow us to attend with someone we know for the first few sessions while we get used to the surroundings.
- Consider doing an activity alone. Walking, running or cycling are great physical activities that can help clear heads and can be built into daily routines.

If we feel conscious about your body

- Most people have worries about their bodies, other people may well be feeling self-conscious too.
- Find an inclusive class. There are lots of classes where we will find people of all shapes and sizes.
- Look for one gender only sessions. Many leisure centres and swimming pools run these, which may provide an environment we feel more comfortable being active in.