

TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Taking care of your mental health is just as important as keeping your physical health in check. It requires careful attention and action.

Creating an environment that helps support your mental health is crucial to overall wellbeing. MSF mental health professionals Dr Jairam Ramakrishnan and Dr Trudy Rosenwald spoke to us about simple things to incorporate into daily life that can make a big difference.



BREATHE

If you're struggling with your emotions and unable to break out of a negative thought pattern, start by focusing on your breathing. Conscious breathing can help you feel calm and give you a sense of control when you feel anxious.

"You'd be surprised at how many people don't think about their breathing, but it's one of the most effective ways to relax," says MSF mental health specialist Dr Trudy Rosenwald.

- 1 Start by taking a deep breath and holding it for as long as you can, then exhaling. Repeat for three or four breaths.
- 2 Move into a conscious breathing pattern, taking in deep breaths through your diaphragm (your stomach should rise as you take each breath), holding for a set time, then slowly breathing out. Repeat for a few minutes until you feel a little calmer.

If you're struggling to maintain conscious breathing while you're anxious, "try listening to some music you like—it'll help you automatically regulate your breathing," says Dr Rosenwald.



PAUSE

If the environment you're in becomes overwhelming, it can help to intentionally pause and refocus. When you're dealing with stress or negative emotions, be honest with yourself about how you feel. Reflecting on those feelings, instead of trying to push through them, can be a huge help in maintaining a healthy mental state.



START SOME GOOD HABITS

One of the most important ways to improve your mental health is to establish a good routine. Start with the basics—wake up on time, eat at the same time every day, and go to bed at a set time each night. Giving yourself this stability can improve your overall wellbeing, and once you've set up some simple healthy habits, it will be easier to add new ones in, too.

"Humans are creatures of habit," says Dr Ramakrishnan, "Anything that we can use as a routine helps with our mental wellbeing."



MOVE YOUR BODY

Regular exercise isn't just for your physical health—it's essential for your mental health, too.

Try to set aside 15-30 minutes of your day for exercise that you find enjoyable. Walking, yoga, or deep stretching are great ways to move your body and calm your mind.



EXERCISE YOUR MIND

Try new things like picking up a new book, a new hobby, or find a new way to exercise that challenges you. New information can give your mind something else to focus on and distract you from negative thoughts.



MAKE POSITIVE, ACHIEVABLE PLANS

When things feel hopeless, start by focusing on small things that you can achieve. Set goals that you can accomplish without strenuous effort, and allow yourself to feel a sense of achievement when you've met them.

Be kind to yourself—not every goal can be achieved instantly!



IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Unlike physical symptoms, which are often noticeable and treated independently, symptoms of poor mental health can be difficult to identify ourselves. It's important to identify individuals who can form your support system—who is looking out for me, and who am I looking out for? Does this person know how to tell me when I start showing signs of distress?

Trust is a key part of this process—start these discussions with the people you value so that they can support you when you need help identifying what you are feeling.

This pandemic is a stressful time, and it's okay to be worried. Remember, you are not alone.

If things are not getting better, talk it through with a mental health professional, or call a mental health hotline for 24/7 support.

Australia
Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

New Zealand
Lifeline: 0800 543 354

Information courtesy of MSF psychiatrist Dr Jairam Ramakrishnan and MSF psychologist Dr Trudy Rosenwald. To learn more about our work in Mental Health, visit our website: www.msf.org.au/mental-health