

Wellbeing: Invest In Your Life

Factsheet

There are many ways of thinking about wellbeing. Wellbeing often refers to happiness, satisfaction, how well we handle life and the quality of our relationships with others. You might have your own list of the things that are important to your wellbeing.

We've decided to think about what wellbeing means in four different parts of our lives: our mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and social wellbeing.

This fact sheet provides a number of simple, everyday ideas for how you can improve wellbeing. Not every example will be something that you'd like to try, but there might be something that appeals to you. Some tips might take a lot of practice; with others you might notice a difference straight away.

MENTAL WELLBEING

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as "a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". Mental health is about much more than whether you have symptoms of a mental illness or not.

Mental health is often referred to using other words such as 'social and emotional wellbeing'. For many Australians, especially Indigenous Australians, health and wellbeing is viewed holistically and encompasses the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of a whole community, as well as the individual. Similarly many culturally and linguistically diverse communities see the health of a person as being part of the health of a whole community.

How can I improve my Mental Wellbeing?

One good way to improve your mental health is learning healthy and flexible ways to deal with stressful situations. We are faced almost everyday with things that make us feel stressed: making a mistake at work, a fight with a friend, the death of a pet, loneliness, debt, and so on.

You may like to try... Coping Skills

Next time you are faced with a stressful situation, instead of worrying, getting angry or ignoring the problem, think about some positive ways of coping with the situation. Try problem-solving. Here you would define the problem, brainstorm a range of solutions, work out the pros and cons of each solution, and act on the best one. Sometimes we do this automatically and sometimes we need to take some time to work out the best way forward.

However, sometimes the situation is something we have no control over or causes such stress that we can't use problem-solving straight away. In these cases, some healthy ways to cope with the problem could include:

- Talking to a family member or friend
- Doing something you enjoy and find relaxing
- Looking for something good in the situation
- Using spirituality
- Exercising
- Talking to a counsellor or psychologist

Many of these ideas are covered in more detail at the 10 Tips to Stress Less website: www.stresslesstips.org.au



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PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Our physical and mental wellbeing, both in terms of illness and good health, are linked in a variety of ways. Exercise or physical activity is particularly important for our wellbeing and some research has shown it to be useful in managing depression.

If you don't get a lot of exercise perhaps this Mental Health Month you could set yourself an achievable goal around increasing your activity.

How can I improve my Physical Wellbeing?

For many of us, it can be difficult to make time for physical activity. By incorporating exercise into your daily routine and planning regular physical activity that you enjoy, being active and keeping fit can be made easier. Include some exercise in your day by:

- Meeting your friends for a walk in the park rather than for coffee at a café.
- Hanging your clothes out on the clothes line rather than using the clothes dryer.
- When on the phone, walking around instead of sitting down.
- Walking or riding a bike instead of catching public transport or driving.

It is recommended that we do 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days and some extra vigorous exercise if we can manage it. This will improve physical wellbeing and can also be a great way of spending time with friends, or making new friends. When planning to do regular physical activity, it is important to think about what types of physical activity you enjoy, and how you like to exercise – alone, with a friend, or in a team. This is different for everyone! You also might need to have a check-up with a GP before you get started.

You may like to try...Dancing

Dance is a social and fun way of being active and keeping fit. There are many different types of dancing including ball-room, salsa, ballet, hip-hop, flamenco, belly-dancing and jazz. Some styles you can learn on your own and others you need a partner (which you can often be matched with at a class). There are many places beginners can learn and enjoy dancing including dance schools, community colleges and social venues. You might even choose to rock it out in your lounge room! A nearby gym may also include dance classes (for example, zumba) amongst its exercise programs.

While being physically active will help improve physical wellbeing, it is also important to eat healthily, sleep well and limit alcohol intake.

For more information on this visit the website:
www.livelifewell.nsw.gov.au



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SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

Spirituality can mean different things for different people and can be expressed in many ways. You might think of spirituality as being about having a sense of meaning and purpose, hope, and connection to something bigger than yourself. Spirituality for some, involves belonging to a particular church or religion, but for others this is not the case.

How can I improve my Spiritual Wellbeing?

Regularly participating in activities that let you focus on your spirituality is a great way to improve your wellbeing. You may like to:

- Visit a traditional place of worship such as a local synagogue, church or mosque
- Do yoga
- Meditate
- Spend time outdoors
- Pray
- Read inspirational books
- Make a donation to a charity
- Look for the 'holy' or 'sacred' in everyday life.

You may like to try....Yoga

Yoga is an ancient Indian practice that is very popular in Australia. While it is based on a specific religion or philosophy, many use it as a way to relax and exercise. It involves moving your body into different positions or postures, special ways of breathing and meditation. It can help you feel more relaxed and more in control of your body. Some studies have suggested that it may even be helpful in treating depression and anxiety. Yoga is best practiced in a class. Talk to a yoga teacher about what sort of yoga would suit you (Hatha Yoga is the most popular), and what you should wear or bring to class. Make sure you tell them if you have any health problems.

Snapshot: Australian of the Year talks about 'The power of giving'

2011 Australian of the Year Simon McKeon is a highly successful investment banker and world record sailor. His life passion is helping those less fortunate than himself and encouraging other Australian's to do the same. When asked about how he leads a healthy and happy life, Simon says *'According to the 2010 World Giving Index, there is a stronger link between giving and the overall wellbeing of a country than the link between a country's wellbeing and its overall wealth. I think the same applies to individuals - the more we take time out to focus on others and to lend a hand, our general wellbeing is enhanced. For me, wellbeing is all about getting the right balance between time for "others" and time for "me" - there is a need for both'*



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SOCIAL WELLBEING

Social wellbeing is about a person's ability to have good relationships and interact with his or her community. Social relationships and networks are good for mental health and overall wellbeing.

How can I improve my Social Wellbeing?

There are a number of ways you can improve your social wellbeing, including nurturing your close relationships, meeting new people and volunteering. You may like to do this by participating in activities which also improve your physical, mental or spiritual wellbeing. For example, go bike riding with your family, or volunteer at a faith-based charity.

Investing in your relationships is important as you never know when you might need to call on your friends and family for support. Being a good friend means making your relationships a priority, celebrating your friends' successes, being a good listener, and being forgiving and loyal.

You may like to try...Volunteering

Volunteering is an excellent way to get more involved with and help out your local community, and it is beneficial to you at the same time. Volunteering increases social connectedness, quality of life and wellbeing. This is especially true for older people.

You may wish to visit www.govolunteer.com.au to find out about volunteering opportunities near where you live.

Some websites to check out for more information

- Australian Government, Swap It, Don't Stop It <http://swapit.gov.au/>
- Better Health Channel, Dance – Health Benefits www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing, Physical activity guidelines www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-publth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines
- The Heart Foundation's information on active living www.heartfoundation.org.au/active-living/Pages/default.aspx

For information in other languages and relevant for culturally and linguistically diverse communities see

- The Transcultural Mental Health Centre website www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/tmhc



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