

8 Mental Fitness Exercises you can start TODAY!

Stressful life events can have a serious impact on our mental health. To help reduce the likelihood of mental illness, mental disorders and mental health problems, here are a few simple steps which help to promote mental health.

1. **Share thoughts and feelings with trusted friends, family member or a counsellor.** Talking can help solve problems and relieve stress and anxiety.
2. **Eat nutritious food, get adequate sleep and exercise regularly.** These can trigger a chain of healing effects—especially when we feel anxious or under stress. Regular physical activity improves psychological well-being and can reduce depression and anxiety.
3. **Daydream**—Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a dream location. Breathe slowly and deeply. Whether it's a beach, a mountaintop, a hushed forest or a favourite room from your past, let the comforting environment wrap you in a sensation of peace and tranquility.
4. **'Collect' positive emotional moments**—Make it a point to recall times when you have experienced pleasure, comfort, tenderness, confidence, or other positive emotions.
5. **Learn ways to cope with negative thoughts**—Negative thoughts can be insistent and loud. Learn to interrupt and challenge them. Don't try to block them (that never works), but don't let them take over. If you can't solve the problem right away, try distracting yourself or comforting yourself.
6. **Do one thing at a time**—For example, when you are out for a walk or spending time with friends, turn off your mobile phone and stop making that mental 'to do' list. Take in all the sights, sounds and smells you encounter.
7. **Set personal goals**—Goals don't have to be ambitious. You might decide to finish that book you started three years ago; to take a walk around the block every day; to learn to knit or play bridge; to call your friends instead of waiting for the phone to ring. Whatever goal you set, reaching it will build confidence and a sense of satisfaction.
8. **Treat yourself well**—Cook yourself a good meal. Have a bubble bath. See a movie. Call a friend or relative you haven't talked to in ages. Sit on a park bench and breathe in the fragrance of flowers and grass. Whatever it is, do it just for you.

Website resources

<http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/>

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx>

<http://www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth>

What do I do if I think I have a mental illness?

Medicines and therapy are available for mental illnesses and can help improve the life of anyone suffering from a mental disorder. If you feel like things are starting to overwhelm you or you think there might be a problem, you should visit your Medical Officer for a proper diagnosis as early as possible. There are specific criteria to help professionals determine whether the symptoms you are experiencing should be considered a mental illness. The treatment offered will depend on the nature and severity of the disorder. Other sources of help are listed below.

Mental Health Resources

Local Medical Centres Your local medical officer can provide immediate assistance and referrals as required.

Psychology Support Section All Psychology Support Sections offer after-hours, critical incident support through the local Duty Officer/Officer of the Day.

Defence Community Organisation

<http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dco/> or www.defence.gov.au/dco/

The DCO provides services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week all year round including public holidays. During normal business hours the first point of call is the Duty Social Worker or Military Support Officer. Outside these core hours and on Public Holidays, calls should be directed to the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) on 1800 801 026 or if calling from overseas +61 2 93594842.

Chaplains There are Chaplains connected to all units in Australia who can provide support and appropriate referrals.

The Family Information Network for Defence (FIND) (1800 020 031)

FIND is a phone service that provides easy access to personnel information on matters of everyday interest and concern. It is a confidential service that is available to every Service person and family anywhere in Australia.

Lifeline (131 114) If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call Lifeline for the cost of a local call.

Veterans and Veteran's Families Counselling Service (VPCS) This service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families. VETLINE – 24 hour emergency line (1800 011 046).

ADF Mental Health Strategy All-hours Support Line (ASL) The ASL is a confidential telephone triage support service for ADF members and their families that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. (1800 628 036) (FREECALL within Australia) and (61 2 9425 3878) (outside Australia)

Australian Defence Force Mental Health Strategy (ADFMHS)

Defweb Address <http://intranet.defence.gov.au/dsg/sites/dmh/>
Internet Address www.defence.gov.au/health/DMH/i-dmh.htm
Email DMH.mentalhealth@defence.gov.au



Australian Government
Department of Defence

ADF Mental Health Strategy EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK...



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Good mental health helps us deal with the ups and downs of life. It ensures we are able to think creatively to solve our problems effectively, that we are able respond positively to the challenges we face and use our abilities to the fullest. Good mental health helps us to stay in control and balanced.

You can gauge your mental health by thinking about how you coped with a recent difficulty. Did you feel there was no way out of the problem and that life would never be normal again? Were you unable to carry on with work or school? With time, were you able to enjoy your life, family and friendships? Were you able to regain your balance and look forward to the future?

What is mental health?

Mental health is more than just an absence of illness. It includes the notions of well-being and resilience. It is as important to look after your mental health as it is to maintain good physical health. Mental health affects how we think, act and cope with things that happen in life. Your ability to manage stress, have good relationships with others and make sound decisions is influenced by the state of your mental health.

What is mental illness?

There are different illnesses that affect the mind, just as there are diseases which affect the body. Everyone feels stressed or out of sorts every now and then. But when these feelings persist and become severe enough to interfere with your daily life it can mean that you are suffering from a mental illness.

Prevalence

Mental illness is common, affecting 20% of adults in Australia each year. If you are affected, it is not your fault, or a sign of weakness. Anxiety disorders and depression are the most common illnesses for adults, with between 10 and 20% of people affected at some time in their life.

Is mental illness life-threatening?

Mental illness itself is not life-threatening. However, up to 12% of those seriously affected eventually kill themselves (compared to an average of 1% for the whole population). Effective, ongoing treatment is essential to minimise the risk of suicide.

What are the chances of recovering from mental illness?

Most people with mental illness recover well and are able to lead fulfilling lives in the community—when they receive appropriate ongoing treatment and support. However, presently, only about half of those affected actually receive treatment. **Early intervention** is the best method of managing your symptoms. If you are finding it difficult to cope, hard to meet and keep friends, manage at work or enjoy your life, there are resources available to help you.

A person who is thinking or talking about suicide or homicide should seek help immediately.

Indicators of poor mental health

The most important thing is to trust your feelings. If you feel things are becoming too difficult for you to manage on your own, then you should seek professional support. Other signs to look for are listed below. If any of these happen often or last for several weeks, you should see your Medical Officer (MO) to discuss them further.

- feel generally unhappy
- feel life is out of control
- find yourself unable to make decisions
- feel 'stuck' or 'trapped'
- feel very lonely
- feel anxious and don't know why
- cry easily and frequently
- lack of interest in activities
- find yourself unable to do your job or schoolwork
- 'blow up' at others with little provocation
- find your relationships unsatisfying
- gain no pleasure from sex (if you are sexually active)
- worry about your sexual orientation
- have trouble sleeping at night, wake frequently or want to sleep all the time
- withdraw from people
- continue to grieve over the loss of someone important to you
- eat, drink alcohol, smoke, gamble or spend money excessively
- abuse drugs (drugs that are either legal or illegal)
- fear that you are going to abuse your child or spouse
- think about suicide
- experience significant weight loss or gain without a readily identifiable reason
- experience radical changes in behaviour or mood
- no longer find pleasure in activities previously found pleasurable.

Note: If you (or someone you care about) have one or more of the following symptoms an evaluation by a MO/Medical Practitioner should be arranged as soon as possible:

- marked personality change
- inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- strange or grandiose ideas
- excessive anxieties
- prolonged depression and apathy
- marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- extreme highs and lows
- abuse of alcohol or drugs
- excessive anger, hostility, or violent behaviour.