Lifestyle and Mental Wellbeing

What is a healthy lifestyle: Our lifestyle can be thought of as a collection of daily functions and behaviours. It is commonly known that a healthy lifestyle can be beneficial for one's wellbeing in terms of physical health. Recently, there has been growing evidence highlighting the impact of lifestyle factors on mental health. In order to maintain a healthy lifestyle, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends engaging in regular physical activity, limiting alcohol consumption and eating healthily. You can read more about how to develop and maintain healthy lifestyle habits here:
NHS Live Well website: https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/

Think of lifestyle habits as your first line of defence in terms of wellbeing. Such changes alone might be limited in addressing mental health problems and so the following suggestions are designed to be used along with the other psychotherapeutic resources provided in consultation with your GP.

Below we will outline the most important aspects of lifestyle in relation to mental health and provide links to further reading and resources.
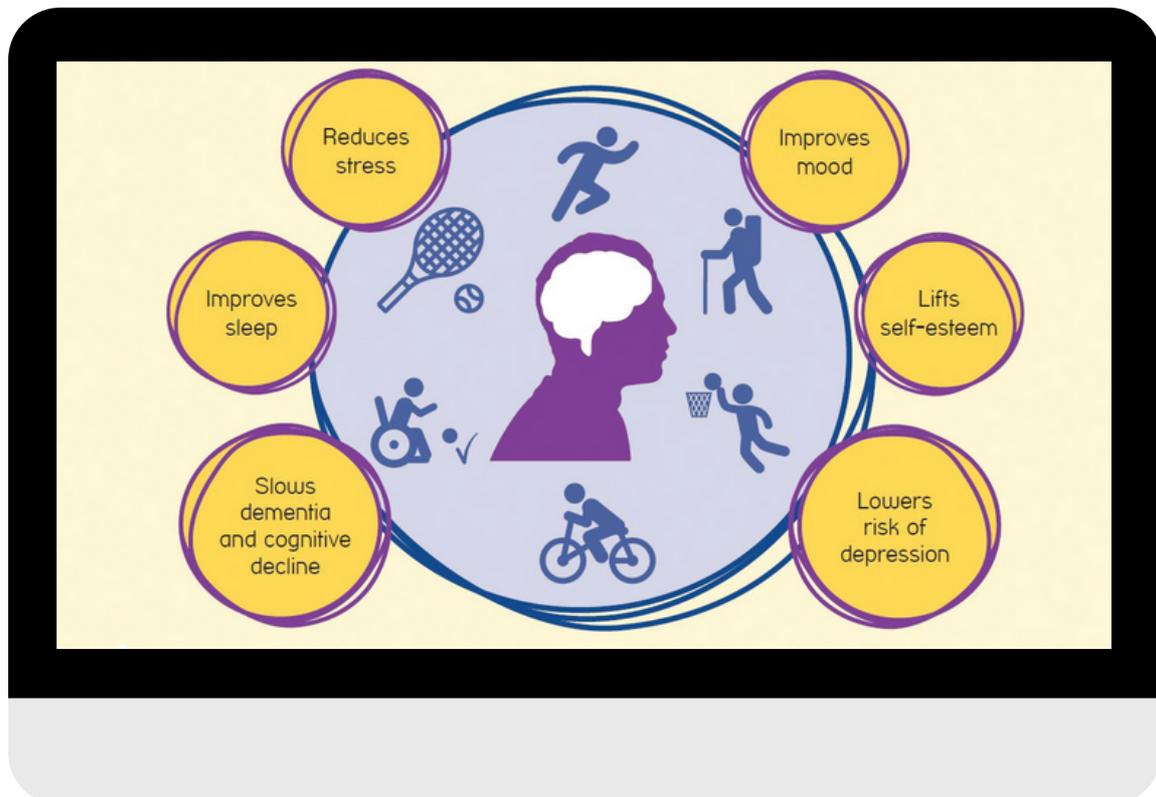
Physical Activity

There are a number of reasons why physical activity is good for your body, but did you know that physical activity is also beneficial for your mental health and wellbeing? In fact, a programme of physical activity is recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines in the treatment of mild depression for adults. We also know that some types of exercise can reduce symptoms of anxiety. But we understand that often the symptoms of depression and anxiety can make it hard to engage in physical activity. Sometimes it's difficult to motivate yourself to go outside when you feel your energy is already depleted. Or sometimes our thoughts and expectations of ourselves can hold us back when we try to make changes, such as fear of being judged by others.

Overcoming barriers and getting active: Lockdown restrictions may have had an effect on your physical activity levels or have led to changes to your routine or the way you exercise. Or maybe you have physical health conditions that bring their own challenges in terms of staying active comfortably and safely. Other common barriers include lack of energy, fear of failure or even the weather.

Support from friends, family, like minded others or even your GP can be very helpful when you are trying to make positive lifestyle changes. If you do suffer from physical illness or injury, it may be advisable to check in with your GP beforehand.

Tips for Increasing Your Activity Levels: Physical activity does not have to involve running a 5K road race or spending hours lifting heavy weights for it to be effective (but it can be if that's what works for you!) – in fact, even a short burst of 10 minutes brisk walking can positively impact your mood.

Aim for 20 minutes moderate activity per day if this is realistic for you.

Physical activity can include **any type of recreational or leisure activity** ranging from doing the housework or gardening to doing exercise.

Set **SMART** goals to monitor your progress and keep motivation up.

Consider what type of activity will keep you motivated, ask yourself what do you enjoy doing? What have you enjoyed doing in the past? For example, if you value keeping physically fit and active but running is not your cup of tea, then consider alternatives, such as cycling or completing home workouts.

Remember that positive change takes time, reward yourself for progress made and for doing something good for your mental health.

Challenge negative thoughts that get in your way. Click for this great resource to start: **http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/headroom/cbt/catch_it.pdf**

Useful Resources

- **NHS Inform https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/keeping-active**

- **NHS Fitness studio https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/**

- **Glasgow Club https://glasgowclub.org/Pages/Home.aspx**

- **Mental health Foundation https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-to-using-exercise**

Alcohol

Why do we drink and what does it have to do with our mental health?

Alcohol and mental health are closely related in that one of the main effects of alcohol is its ability to change our mood. For example, having a drink after a stressful day at work as a 'reward', or drinking to cope in certain situations that might normally make you feel uncomfortable or anxious - often referred to as 'dutch courage'. Sometimes alcohol is used to block out distressing thoughts or feelings.

In the immediate short term, alcohol might provide feelings of relaxation, help us to unwind or indeed block out those distressing thoughts or feelings. However, alcohol itself is a depressant and once its effects wear off, you are likely to feel much worse. Drinking more than the recommended guidelines can have detrimental effects on our physical and mental health. If you notice your drinking habits have changed and have noticed a change in your mood, it might be useful to keep a tracking diary or consider alternative ways of coping. Familiarise yourself with the following chart and remember the maximum units per week is now the same for men and women: **14 units per week**.

WHAT IS A UNIT?
A UK unit is 10ml of pure alcohol

2.8 UNITS — Standard beer Pint (ABV 5%)
2.1 UNITS — Wine Standard glass (ABV 12%)
1.4 UNITS — Alcopop Bottle (ABV 5%)
1 UNIT — Fortified Wine Standard measure (ABV 20%)
1 UNIT — Spirit Small measure (ABV 40%)

Alcohol wreaks havoc on sleep and mood and can have a negative impact on other aspects of life such as work and relationships. If you are concerned or you think you might be dependent on alcohol **talk to your GP**

Useful Resources

- **Unit Calculator** https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/understand-your-drinking/unit-calculator
- **Alcohol & You (NHS Northumberland & Tyne)** https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/leaflets/Alcohol%20and%20You.pdf
- **Alcohol Focus Scotland** https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/news/alcohol-and-mental-health-are-closely-linked/
- **Glasgow Council for Alcohol** https://www.glasgowcouncilonalcohol.org/

Connecting

Social isolation is related to mental health problems and here at wellbeing we have always supported and encouraged people to think of ways of becoming more socially engaged. Remember that if you are feeling lonely, you are not alone in feeling that way.

Tips for staying connected:

- Meet with people or use video calling. This allows you to interpret people's facial expressions and allows for more comprehensive communication.

- Learn to recognise passive scrolling. When you pick up your phone for 5 mins then BOOM 1 hour later you are left feeling down on yourself.

- Social media sites such as facebook, twitter, tiktok and instagram now play a pivotal role in keeping us connected with others both near and far. However, passive browsing has been associated with feelings of isolation.

If you use these sites, try to use them in a way that is meaningful for you and will allow you to feel connected with others.

Look for online support groups or common interest groups (such as a book group or a virtual running club). Many community resources have increased their online presence to offer support in these challenging times. An excellent example of this is #Glasgowlifegoeson, run by Glasgow Life.

Find out more information here: https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/

Sleep

Sleep is fundamental to our functioning and it impacts our emotional health in that it can heavily influence how we deal with stress. Sleep is also related to depression and anxiety, in that we can find that we are sleeping too much or not enough. This might be due to changes in routine, worries about the future, ongoing stressors or even from too much screen time.

You may have been battling sleep problems for quite some time and maybe you have noticed that with changes to your routine, your sleep has suffered. On our website we have many resources to help you to improve your sleep.
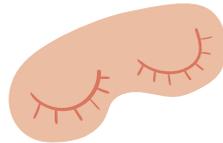
Routine can benefit our mental health by helping us to cope with uncertainty and change, and to help us develop and maintain healthy lifestyle habits. Having a daily routine can also help us cope in uncertain times.

- Start by developing a sleep routine.

- Try to incorporate things that matter to you, whether that is connecting with someone you care about, making a nice healthy meal, getting some fresh air or even just dressing your bed every day.

- Make at least one thing a non-negotiable, for example; every day without fail I will make my bed.

- Use a planner to help you.

- Limit your screen time.

- Download and engage with the **SLEEPIO** app from *https://www.sleepio.com*:
    Discover your Sleep Score take the questionnaire to identify your sleep problems

    Build your treatment program

    Incorporate expert techniques

    Track your improvement