

CARERS WELLBEING GUIDE

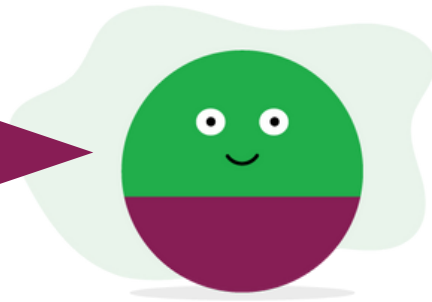
Contents

	Page:
1. What is Wellbeing?	2
2. The Wellness Wheel	3
3. Stress	10
4. The Importance of Self-Care	12
5. Anxiety	13
6. Low Mood	15
7. Staying Well Plan	19
8. Support Available?	20



1 - What is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing refers to: "a state of being comfortable, happy and healthy both physically and mentally"



What does positive wellbeing mean to you?



There is a strong link between our physical and mental health.

Having poor mental health can cause fatigue, which can increase the likelihood of having physical health problems.

Improving your wellbeing can have many benefits, such as improving your mood and mental health, and making your physical health problems more manageable. Taking part in physical activity such as exercise, releases endorphins which can help improve our mood.

It is also important to take some time out to focus on your own self-care. Self-care means that you're able to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical and mental health.

2 - The Wellness Wheel



The Wellness Wheel consists of seven dimensions. The visual tool below can help guide you to living a more balanced life. It's a great way to track your overall wellbeing, and identify the areas in which you need further support.

A. Physical Wellbeing

Physical wellbeing refers to the physical state of our body. It is the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life that allows us to get the most out of our daily activities. Below are the main areas to work on to improve our physical wellbeing:





Sleep plays an important role in our physical wellbeing. It allows our body and brain to recover during the night. There are many benefits to getting a good night's sleep. These benefits include:

- Increased memory and concentration.
- Improved energy.
- Reduced levels of stress.
- Improved physical health.
- Better immune system.

What are the effects of not sleeping well?



Remember these tips may not work for everyone; however it's important to have time on a regular basis to rest and relax, which allows you to re-energise and recharge.

How can you improve your sleep?

1. Have a regular sleep pattern – try and go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. This will help your body to work out a healthy routine.
2. 8 hours sleep – most adults need around 8 hours sleep every night. Some may need more; others may need less.
3. Wind down and relax before going to bed – try to wind down before bedtime. If you've had a particularly stressful day, it can be helpful to set aside some 'worry time' during the day or evening to write down worries from the day and actions or plans for the next day.
4. Avoid napping – sleeping during the day may make it difficult for you to sleep well at night.
5. Make sure your bedroom is comfortable – ensure that the room is quiet and comfortable with good temperature control (i.e. not too hot; not too cold).



This is essential as we need nutrients for growth and repair. Having a healthy diet can also reduce the risk of certain cancers, prevent heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

It's also important to eat well to improve your wellbeing and mood. A balanced diet should include healthy amounts of proteins, essential fats, complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and water. You don't have to make huge changes to your diet, but why not try some of the following:

- 1** Eat regular meals. Not eating regular meals can increase your blood sugar levels, which can make you feel tired.
- 2** Drink plenty of water. Being dehydrated can have an impact on your mood, energy level and ability to concentrate.
- 3** Include some protein with every meal. Protein contains an amino acid that your brain uses to help regulate your mood.
- 4** Include more wholegrains, fruits and vegetables in your diet. They contain vitamins and minerals that your brain and body need to stay well.
- 5** Limit caffeine intake. Caffeine can be found in tea, coffee, energy drinks and chocolate. Caffeine can cause sleep problems, especially if you drink this close to bedtime, and it may also cause some people to feel irritable and anxious.

Physical movement



Physical activity is a great way to improve your physical health and mental health. Exercising releases endorphins ('feel-good' chemicals) in the brain. You don't necessarily have to spend hours in the gym, but why not try a short burst of exercise, such as 10 minutes of brisk walking per day? Other activities that you could try may include: spending time in the garden, doing yoga, or taking part in group classes on YouTube or a community venue.

Taking part in physical activity can lead to many benefits. These benefits are shown in the image below:



We understand that as a carer it can be difficult to focus on your physical wellbeing due to having limited time, feeling unmotivated, financial costs and not having someone to go with.

If you're struggling to focus on your physical health, why not break it down:

1. Identify activities that you'd like to incorporate into your routine.
2. Start by allocating between 10-15 minutes per day for your physical wellbeing. This can include simple activities, such as gardening or going for a short walk.
3. If you struggle to leave the house, why not try indoor activities that can be done from your living room – YouTube has a great choice of exercise programmes including yoga.
4. If you have difficulties with your physical health, or if you want a change of activity, chair-based exercises may be a better option for you.

Enjoy and Relax



When feeling overwhelmed or stressed, taking five minutes to step away from what is causing stress, can help to give us the energy we need to deal with the problem. Relaxing has many benefits, such as:

- Helping us have a calmer and clearer mind, which supports concentration, memory and decision making.
- Slowing our heart rate.
- Reducing blood pressure.
- Relieving tension.
- Helping with digestion as we absorb essential nutrients more efficiently when relaxed.

Schedule in five minutes a few times during the day to reduce levels of stress and give your energy levels a boost.

Tips for relaxation techniques that are quick and easy:

- Focus on your breathing.
- Meditation – [headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com) is a great app.
- Progressive muscle relaxation (tighten and relax the muscles around your body).
- Visualisation – imagine a relaxing place and focus on the details.
- Take a mindful walk, being aware of your surroundings, keep your focus on the plants, the sunshine, the clouds...

What if I don't have a lot of time to focus on my wellbeing?

Caring for someone else may mean that you have little time to focus on your own mental health and wellbeing. When you're busy and overwhelmed, stressors can mount up and take their toll on your physical and mental health; therefore it's important to take out some time for yourself. Try and do this on a daily basis, using the guide below depending on how much time you have:

“ Sometimes the thought of doing something is too much and prioritising ourselves becomes too much work. To overcome this, try starting off by choosing one way to prioritise your mental wellbeing this week. ”

5 minutes	10 minutes	30 minutes	1 hour
Make a cup of tea and enjoy it	Do a guided meditation	Exercise – run, go for a walk, take part in yoga	Watch an episode of your favourite TV show
Cuddle a pet	Take a walk	Call a friend or family member	Go for a meal with a friend
Write a to-do list	Reflect on your day, using problem-solving techniques.	Have a nap	Cook or bake something new
Text a friend or family member	Listen to music	Declutter your environment at home.	Make art

B. Spiritual Wellbeing



This is likely to be very personal and is likely to be different for everyone.

- It relates to our values, our purpose and meaning in life.
- It may include our culture, our community or our beliefs; these beliefs may be religious, spiritual or otherwise.

Focusing on our spiritual wellbeing helps us to reflect and resolve any problems we may face and accept and grow from these challenges.

Example: taking time for personal reflection asking yourself questions like “What are the most important things in my life?” or “What do I value most?”, or writing down how you feel or taking part in activities, such as prayers, meditating or doing yoga.

C. Intellectual Wellbeing

Keeping our minds active and flexible by practicing existing skills or learning new ones. This helps us to think clearly and improves our memory and critical thinking skills.

Example: try to do something to keep your mind active. You could do a crossword or the Sudoku puzzle in your newspaper, read a new book or challenge yourself to learn to play a few notes on a musical instrument or a few words of a new language.

D. Environmental Wellbeing

Environmental wellbeing relates to care of the world around us.

One aspect of environmental wellbeing can involve taking care of our individual environment. This can be done by keeping spaces as clean and tidy as possible which allows us to live safely and enjoy the space, we are in.

Another aspect of environmental wellbeing refers to taking care of the world around us. This could involve recycling more often, turning off unused lights and spending more time in nature.

E. Financial Wellbeing

This refers to our relationship with money and our money management skills. We want to have financial security and feel as though we have the resources to meet our daily needs.

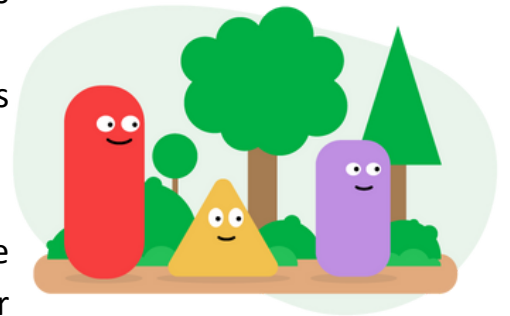
Example: Try to create a budget, this could be for the week, month or year or even further ahead depending on what you feel comfortable doing. If planning ahead feels too tricky right now, start by taking note of the money coming in and out on a day-to-day basis, this will give you a good foundation for when you create a budget or plan ahead in future.

F. Social Wellbeing

Feeling connected, supported and loved in our relationships with others.

Being social improves our mood, our productivity, helps strengthen our relationships and supports a healthy brain.

Example: Try to spend time with family or friends where possible. Use Zoom or FaceTime. Go on walks. Wave to your neighbours.



G. Emotional Wellbeing

Being able to identify, acknowledge and understand our feelings.

Sometimes our feelings will feel comfortable and other times they won't feel nice. That's okay. No feeling is 'bad' or 'wrong'. All feelings are valid and experiencing lots of different feelings in a day or all at once is normal.

Being able to notice how we are feeling is important as it helps us to improve our self-awareness and make positive changes. It also helps us to strengthen our relationships, as we are able to tell others how we are feeling and ask for help.

Example: Try taking time to notice how you are feeling. Do things you enjoy to help you relax if you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

3 - Stress

“Stress is the body’s reaction to any change that it experiences, which requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental and emotional responses.”

Everyone can be affected by stress; however the responsibilities of caring can make you more susceptible to developing stress, particularly if you feel isolated.

Stress can be triggered when we experience something new, unexpected or a threatened sense of self, or when we feel we have little control over a situation.

Although stress has negative connotations, stress can be positive. It can motivate us, increase productivity, help our creativity, prepare us for challenges or keep us focused e.g. sport or public speaking.



When is stress a problem?

In the short term stress can be beneficial, but it can have damaging health effects in the long term affecting our brains and bodies. It can leave us in a permanent state of fight or flight, leaving us overwhelmed or unable to move.

Common Triggers:

Stressors are anything that causes stress, including:

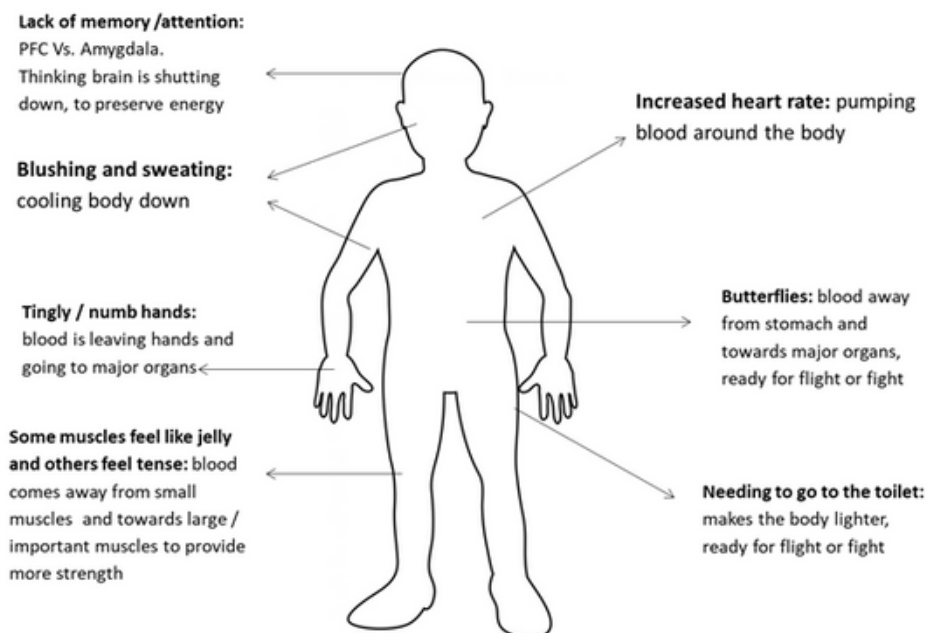
- Frustration e.g. traffic.
- Conflict.
- Pressure or increased responsibility.
- Worries or uncertainty.
- Financial difficulties.

Life changes, such as:

- Bereavement.
- Interpersonal problems or breakdown.
- Health problems.
- Marriage.
- Transitions – new job, school, moving home.

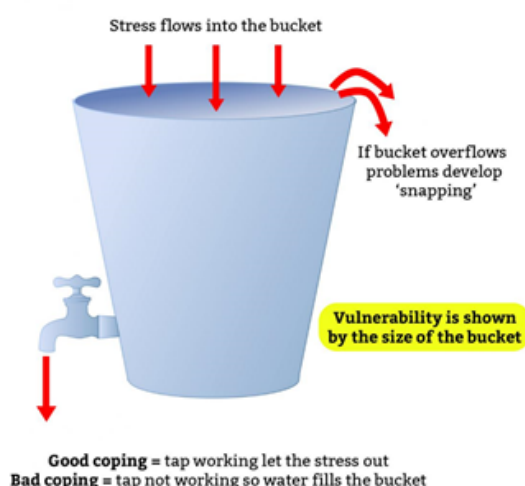
3 - Stress continued...

How does the 'fight, flight or freeze' affect us?



Stress Bucket:

The stress bucket helps us to understand our current levels of stress, and allows us to reflect upon our coping strategies and improve our wellbeing. The image below is an example of how the stress bucket works:



The size of your stress bucket relates to your level of vulnerability. The bigger the bucket, the less vulnerable you are to stress. The smaller the bucket, the more vulnerable you are to stress. As the bucket fills up with stress, it shows our capacity to cope. If the bucket overflows, too much stress is experienced and problems can develop.

There are certain factors that can make us more vulnerable to stress, such as:

- Genetics
- Early childhood experiences
- Social support

Sometimes you feel strong enough to carry a lot of stress, but it's important to find activities which help you lighten the load.

4 - The Importance of Self-Care

Self-care can help to promote your own wellbeing. It's individual, but it can be important to think about what you can do on a regular basis that brings you comfort or enjoyment and allows you to recharge.

It's important to have time to look after yourself. This means not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally and socially.

Here are some tips for self-care:

- Get plenty of sleep
- Take a relaxing shower or bath
- Go for a walk
- Listen to some music
- Watch your favourite TV programme/film
- Practice yoga
- Read a book or magazine
- Be creative – making art, painting, etc.

When caring for someone else, you may experience feelings of guilt. At times, the idea of self-care may feel selfish. However, resting and relaxing gives you the energy and chance to recharge which will then allow you to effectively deal with problems and difficulties.

Self-care doesn't have to be time-consuming, it can be taking a few moments to:

- Read
- Drink enough water
- Pursue a hobby



The negative effects of not focusing on your self-care:

Physical symptoms:

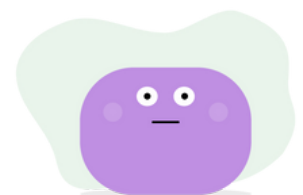
- Feeling tired or physically exhausted, despite sleeping or taking a break
- Difficulty sleeping, as you may not be able to switch off despite being tired
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Muscle tension or pain
- Increased heart rate or chest pain
- Weight gain
- General decline in health – it may feel like you catch every cold or flu that's going around.

Emotional symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling isolated
- Increased or consistent worrying
- Feeling resentful, or experiencing 'compassion fatigue'. This is when caregivers can become so over-empathetic that they may find themselves becoming numb to their cared-for person's suffering

Behavioural symptoms:

- Neglecting your own needs
- Becoming irritable, or impatient with the person you're caring for
- Increase in negative coping strategies, such as drinking or smoking behaviours



5 - Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

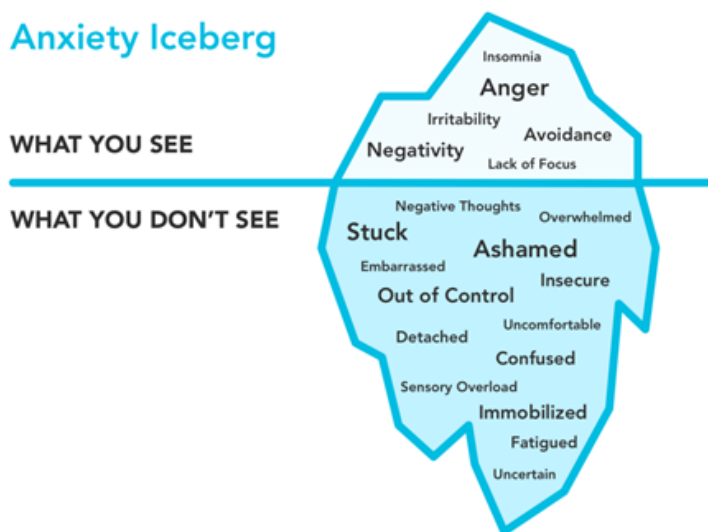
Anxiety refers to “a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.”

We all feel anxious from time-to-time. It's a completely natural response to a threatening situation.

What Anxiety Looks Like Vs What It Actually Is

Anxiety can often be misunderstood as many of the symptoms experienced may not be visible to those around you.

The below diagram shows what anxiety can look like on the outside, but there is so much going on beneath the surface that others may not see.



When is Anxiety a problem?

If anxiety is a natural response, then why is it a problem?

Anxiety can become a mental health problem if it has an impact on your quality of life. For example:

- your feelings of anxiety are long-lasting
- your fears or worries are out of proportion to the situation
- avoiding situations that might cause you to feel anxiety
- you feel distressed by your fears or worries and find that they are hard to control
- you regularly experience symptoms of anxiety, which could lead to panic attacks



5 - Anxiety continued...

Understanding your Anxiety (triggers)

To manage anxiety, firstly it is important to understand your triggers.

Anxiety can be triggered due to fear of activities, situations, or lack of control.

How can you identify your triggers?

- Keep a journal to identify patterns
- Identifying major life stressors, or things that have recently changed
- Reflecting on the past, and identifying things that may have caused feelings of anxiety in the past
- Building a support network and talking to others
- Paying attention to the physical symptoms of anxiety

Coping Strategies

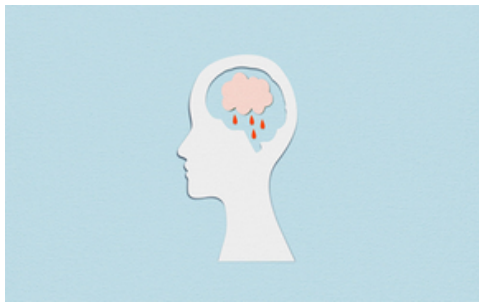
- Challenging our thoughts
- Using Grounding Techniques:
 - 54321
 - Body awareness
 - Mental exercises
- Breathing Techniques:
 - Deep breathing
 - Box breathing
- Planning ahead or creating a schedule
- Physical movement
- Being creative
- Listening to music
- Taking part in our hobbies
- Talking about how we are feeling



Everyone has different coping strategies. Make a list of the techniques that you commonly use to relieve your anxiety.

It's important to have a routine or plan of activities you do regularly to help maintain your wellbeing or practice self-care.

6 - Low Mood



Everyone's mood changes. You might feel many emotions in a day all at once, or sometimes we feel numb and can't place our finger on how we feel. We all experience 'low mood' when we are sad, unhappy, fed up, feel down or 'have the blues'. Usually our mood changes and we feel better.

If our low mood continues or becomes more severe, it can lead to 'depression'. Depression may happen just once, or may return again and again – sometimes throughout our lifetime.



Physical symptoms:

- Moving or speaking more slowly than usual
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Constipation
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Lack of energy
- Loss of libido
- Changes to menstrual cycle
- Disturbed sleep

Emotional symptoms:

- Feeling hopeless or helpless
- Lethargic or lacking energy
- Having low self-esteem or frequent negative thoughts
- Feeling tearful
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling irritable or intolerant towards others
- Lack of motivation, enjoyment or interest in things you usually like
- Finding it difficult to remember things, concentrate or make decisions
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself

Behavioural symptoms:

- Avoiding contact with others
- Spending more time alone
- Staying in bed longer than usual
- Taking part in fewer social activities
- Neglecting hobbies and interests
- Having difficulties in your home, work or family life

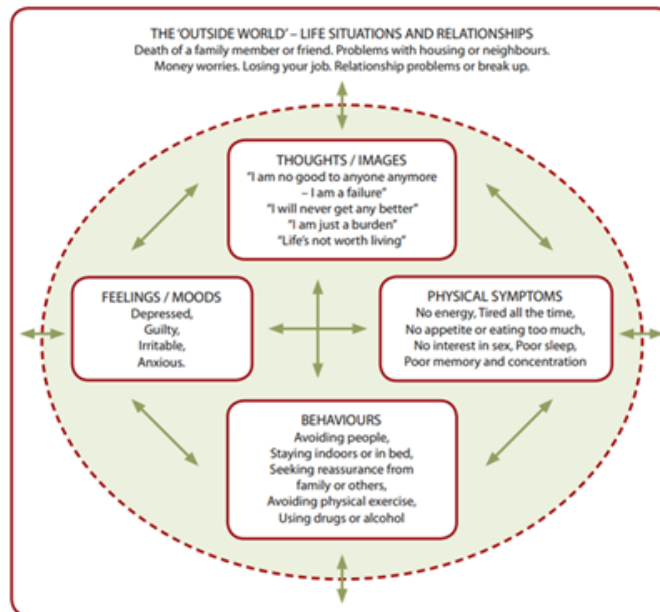
The symptoms of depression can lead to drastic changes in a person's life, daily routines, and their behaviour.



**NHS CRISIS LINE 111 (option 2)
Samaritans 116 123**

6 - Low Mood continued...

Cycle of Low Mood



How to manage low mood and depression

Medication can be one of the ways of breaking the vicious cycle of depression. Medications, such as antidepressants can help change your energy level and improve your sleep.

Another way is to use self-help techniques, such as meditation, breathing exercises and learning ways to think about problems differently. Also, simply increasing your activity level, and tackling your list of tasks and responsibilities by breaking them down to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Improving your physical wellbeing and being more active can help to:

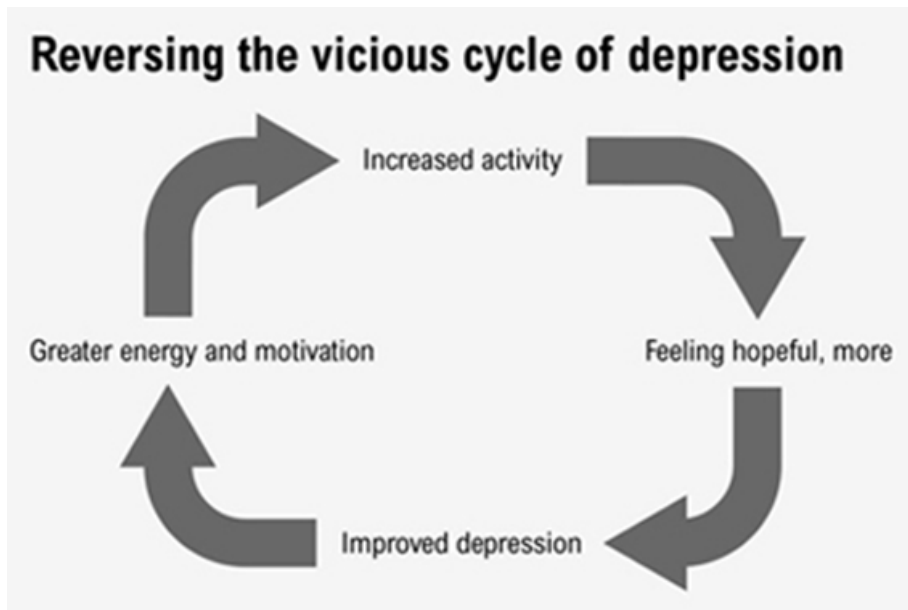
- Improve your mood
- Feel less tired
- Think more clearly

How to manage low mood and depression

When a person is experiencing low mood or depression, they are more likely to withdraw from activities that they usually enjoy. Behavioural Activation is a technique that can be useful to overcome depression. This refers to the idea of increasing our level of activity even if we don't feel like it to begin with. Research shows that when a person engages in activities that lead to positive feelings, the activities become intrinsically reinforcing, motivating the person to do more of those things.

6 - Low Mood continued...

Reversing the Cycle



Fun Activities

- Practising yoga
- Creating origami
- Cooking or baking
- Building something
- Making art
- Trying or learning something new
- Using positive affirmations
- Going for a walk, jog or hike
- Gardening
- Listening to music



Try one of the above activities and assess how you feel before and after the activity. It is hoped that you'll feel a little better by increasing your activity.

Once you've dealt with increasing your activity, it's important to manage and deal with Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs).

6 - Low Mood continued...

What are NATs?

Automatic	They come to your mind with no effort
Twisted	They present themselves as facts but upon examination there is <i>little or no evidence</i>
Believable	They are <i>sneaky</i> and you often accept them without question
Unhelpful	They get you feeling down and keep you there and make it difficult to change



Coping Strategies

Having coping strategies helps us deal with difficulties.

What helps you manage when difficulties arise?

Examples:

- **Distraction** – reading, gardening, arts and crafts, or jigsaw puzzles.
- **Grounding** – use body and senses, mindful walk or eating.
- **Emotional Release** – dance, yell, let yourself cry or laugh at a funny video.
- **Self Love** – have a hot drink, bubble bath or make a special snack.
- **Thought Challenging** – think rationally or imagine giving a loved one advice.
- **Helping Others** – act of kindness, smile at strangers or volunteer.

Guilt

It can be natural to have feelings of guilt when taking time for our ourselves; however it's important to remember:



**To look after
someone else, you
need to look after
yourself first!**

7 - Staying Well Plan

A 'Staying Well Plan' is a self-management tool, which can help you to identify your coping strategies. A template of the Staying Well Plan has been included to allow you to highlight and implement your coping strategies.

My Staying Well Plan – Keep me in a safe place	
What helps you get through right now:	
How can you make your situation safer:	
Things that help to lift or calm your mood:	
Things that help distract you:	
People or organisations who support you:	
Who can you talk to in an emergency if you are in distress or thinking about self-harm or suicide:	

Looking After Your Wellbeing



An annual health check can help you stay well by talking to a professional about your physical health, and try and identify any problems early, so they can be resolved.

Anyone over the age of 40 can access an annual health check via their GP.

You can contact us for more support in accessing this service.

8 - Support Available

We offer wellbeing support to help carers who feel a strain on their wellbeing. The types of support we offer are below:

- Online Support - these resources can be accessed through our website:
 - Wellbeing online courses - our courses include improving wellbeing, overcoming guilt, low mood, anxiety and stress. The courses can be accessed here: <https://learninghub.carersinbeds.org.uk/>
 - Monthly Wellbeing webinars - webinars include tips and tricks on how to improve your wellbeing including stress management, how to tackle low mood and address anxious thoughts. The timetable and sign up link for the webinars can be accessed here [What's-On - Carers In Bedfordshire \(carersinbeds.org.uk\)](#).
- Professional support - to find out more about your suitability for accessing support with professionals please get in contact with us on 0300 111 1919 or contact@carersinbeds.org.uk for an assessment to find the right support for you.
 - 1:1 support with a Wellbeing Practitioner - carers can access 4-6 sessions with a wellbeing practitioner to address presenting issues such as low mood, stress, anxiety or feeling overwhelmed by a caring role.
 - Counselling - at Carers in Bedfordshire we have partnerships with counselling services, where we can refer carers who qualify for long term counselling support.

Carers Assessments

All carers are entitled to receive a carers assessment via their local authority. An assessment looks at the impact your caring role has on your wellbeing and may lead to you accessing additional support. This can be accessed through the social care department in your local authority.



“ Remember:
We are only
ever a phone
call away. ”