

## Self-care

### What is self-care?

The World Health Organization defines self-care as “the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider”.

Self-care techniques and simple lifestyle changes may help to lessen the symptoms of some mental health problems – and may even prevent them from developing or getting worse. It’s important to remember that there’s no instant solution, and everyone is different. Self-care techniques are very individual and are most definitely not selfish.

Our pages on [improving and maintaining your mental wellbeing](#) contain more self-care suggestions and tips.

### Why is self-care important as a champion?

- Juggling different commitments can leave you feeling pressured. While some pressure is helpful to get tasks done, frequent pressure can lead to stress, which, over time, can be harmful for both your physical and mental health.
- Sharing your experiences can help to change how other people think about mental health, but you need to be comfortable with what you’re sharing – and this may change depending on how you’re feeling on any particular day.
- People may share their problems with you and want you to help fix them, but that’s not your role. Explain this to them and signpost them to relevant support services.

### Ways to support your self-care

#### Sleep well

Sleep is a basic human need and is fundamental to our wellbeing. Living with a mental health problem can affect how well you sleep, and poor sleep can have a negative impact on your mental health. We’re all different but, on average, we need between 6 and 9 hours of sleep per night. Try something new, such as a technology ban for 30 minutes before bed or setting a regular bedtime. Aim to optimise your sleep and review the impact it makes.

#### Food and mood

There is a direct relationship between food and mood, and improving your diet can help you:

- feel more positive
- think more clearly
- have more energy
- feel calmer
- experience fewer mood swings

Think about your food and mood this week. Take notice of your habits and how they link to your behaviour. Look for opportunities to make positive changes to improve your wellbeing. Perhaps you could substitute your 3pm brew for an ice-cold lemon water or herbal tea, or swap the office biscuit tin for a communal fruit bowl.

### Relaxation tips

Everyone relaxes in different ways, whether that's taking part in light exercise, such as walking or yoga, or reading a book. When it comes to relaxation techniques, there really is something for everyone. Try a 10-minute relaxation activity at home or in the workplace and see if it affects the way you're feeling. The body scan on page 58 is just one example.

### Write your own wellness action plan (WAP)

A wellness action plan is an easy, practical way of helping you to support your own mental health. If you're a line manager or coach, they can also help you support the mental health of your team.

**WAPs** are a personalised, practical tool we can all use – whether we have a mental health problem or not. They help us to identify what keeps us well, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem should we experience one. They also open up a dialogue with your line manager, supervisor or coach, to help them better understand your needs and experiences, and to better support your mental health. This in turn leads to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction.

## What is a body scan?

A body scan is a great way of taking time to notice how different parts of your body are feeling. It can take as little or as much time as you like, and you can do it statically (sitting or lying down) or actively (while you're out walking, for example).

If you're out walking, you may want to perform a body scan at both the start and the end of the walk to see if you notice any differences.

A basic scan may involve the following:

1. Turn your attention to your feet, wiggling your toes and getting a real sense of how they feel. Do you notice any particular sensations? How do they feel against the ground? Is the ground soft or hard? What are you standing on? It might be mud, leaves or a pavement. How does it feel beneath your feet?
2. Now bring your attention to your ankles, then up to your knees and thighs, scanning both legs equally.
3. Moving up the body, turn your attention to your hips and lower back, then up your spine to the top of your back and shoulders. How do your neck and shoulders feel? Any sensations?
4. Now move your attention to the top of your arms, down to the elbows, then the wrists, hands and fingers. What can you feel? Is the temperature cold or warm? Can you feel a breeze?

Finally bring your attention to your chest and stomach. This part of the body is very expressive and is hugely linked to our emotions. If it feels heavy or anxious, consider using the breathing activity to help you expel these feelings with each outgoing breath.

# Five Ways to Wellbeing for champions

## Connect

Speak to a friend, family member or another champion.

Visit [Side by Side](#) to connect with people online.

Disconnect – leave your phone at home or have a phone free hour.



## Keep learning

Try a different self-care activity.

Read an interesting blog or listen to an inspiring podcast.




## Take notice

Write down three things each day you are grateful for.

Try a mindful breathing exercise from [Every Mind Matters](#).

Learn how to reframe unhelpful thoughts.



## Get active

Go for a walk during lunch or take a walking meeting.

Build activity into your daily routine.

Try stretch and flex activities and build them into your week.



## Give

Share feedback or a tip of something that has worked on the champions group.

Say thank you and really mean it.

Pay someone a heartfelt compliment.



More ideas for looking after yourself during champion activities can be found [here](#).