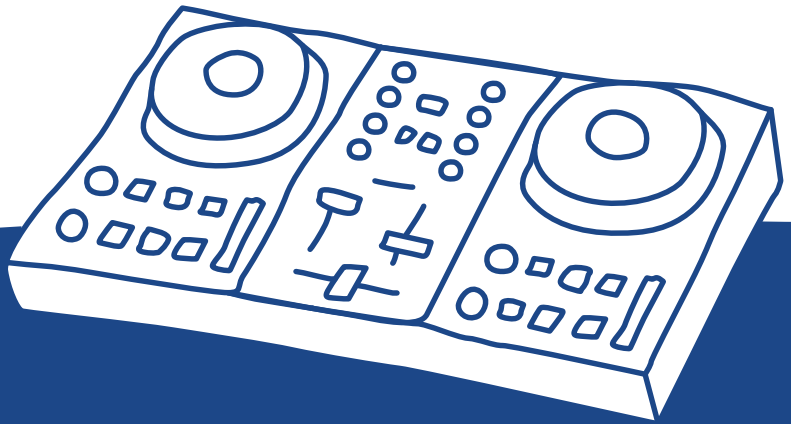


A guide to mental health in the electronic music industry

For freelancers



In partnership with

NINJA TUNE

PARADIGM



TALENT AGENCY

PERCOLATE

POLY.

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Foreword from the partners

Since we first started collaborating with Mind to raise mental health awareness in electronic music five years ago the landscape has changed for the better. In general the stigma around mental health has decreased, awareness has risen and people are talking more. However, there is still a great need to empower people across the industry to support the mental health and wellbeing of all involved – whether that is helping themselves or each other. There are many specific challenges related to the music sector that need to be understood and navigated to improve mental health. So we decided to create tailored guides for anyone working in the industry, offering advice and information to build their knowledge and skills.

In March 2020, as the project was nearing completion, the global pandemic of COVID-19 started.

Plus a few months later the Black Lives Matter movement exploded on a global scale, bringing greater awareness to the ongoing racism crisis which has been especially important in the music community. It became more vital than ever to improve people's wellbeing and empower them to support others around them. In response to these additional concerns we revisited the guides in full to ensure that the advice was fully up to date.

We hope you will find this guide helpful and that it goes some way to helping you gain the tools you need to look after yourselves, each other and your clients.

We thank all our amazing colleagues from every corner of the business who contributed their time and experiences, and Mind for their dedication in helping to make sure no one faces a mental health problem alone.

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Introduction

We are Mind, the mental health charity. In partnership with Ninja Tune, Paradigm, Percolate and POLY, we have developed a range of tools to support the mental health of people working in the electronic music industry.

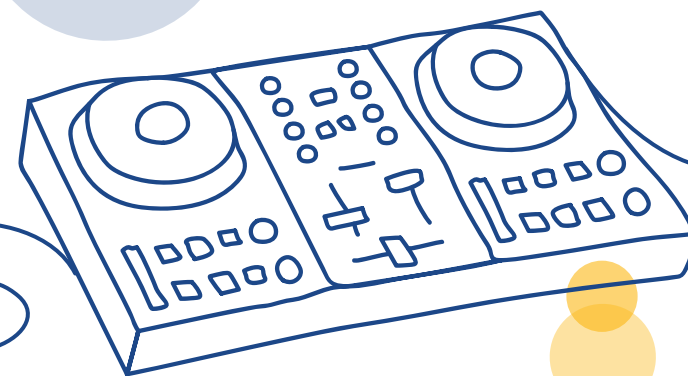
We all have mental health just as we all have physical health – it can move up and down from good to poor for any number of reasons. Experiencing poor mental health is not an issue specific to the electronic music industry. In fact one in four adults in the UK will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year.

We know that working in the electronic music industry can be very rewarding and offers many opportunities, however it can also come with a set of unique pressures. These include long hours, high stress, a higher incidence of drugs and alcohol abuse, isolation and insecure work. Industry professionals are often passionate about what they do. This means they may be vulnerable to exploitation and can feel guilty if their “dream job” affects their mental health.

We also know that not everyone who works in the industry has a standard employment contract. Many people work freelance, and this guide offers practical advice and guidance to help support your mental health if you are a freelancer in the electronic music industry.

1 in 4

adults in the UK will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year



Spotlight: coronavirus

Coronavirus is having a significant impact on people and working life globally. During the pandemic, we have all had to adjust to large and very sudden changes in the way we work. The music industry has been particularly hard-hit by coronavirus and has effectively been put on pause.

Throughout this period, we have also witnessed the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement has brought to the forefront inequalities faced by many across our society. We understand that the mental health of many artists, DJs, organisers, promoters, as well as various other individuals across the industry, is being affected by what is going on.

Although lockdown restrictions have started to ease, we are still unsure what this means for the industry and the potential of further lockdowns. Many of us may be feeling anxious about the future and facing new challenges ahead.

Therefore we have developed this guide to support you both in these challenging times and in the longer term.

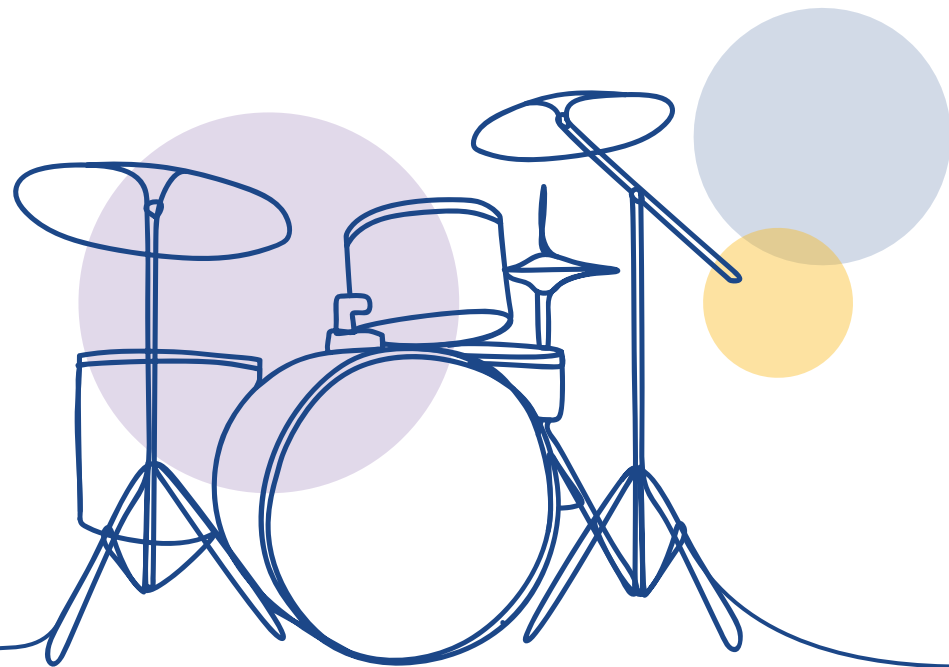


What is mental health?

We all have mental health. Our mental health is just like our physical health – we need to take care of it.

Good mental health means being able to think, feel and react in ways that help you live the life you want. But if you go through a period of poor mental health you might find the ways you're frequently thinking, feeling or reacting become difficult, or even impossible, to cope with.

Most people know someone who has experienced a mental health problem. They can happen to people from all walks of life. The good news is that there's support out there, and there are steps you can take to look after your mental health.



Mental health stigma

While mental health problems are common, lots of people feel anxious about talking about them because they are worried about how others will react.

The stigma people face when living with a mental health problem can make them feel worse. Sometimes stigma comes from a misunderstanding around mental health or fear that people with mental health problems are dangerous to others.

At work this might mean people use language around mental health that's offensive, dismissive or hurtful. This can be very upsetting – especially if it's coming from somebody in your professional network or a friend. Encouragingly, stigma is slowly fading as more people feel able to talk about their problems and share what they've been through. But there's still work to be done.

Here's how you can start to break down the stigma with the people you work with:

- Share reliable mental health information. [Mind's website](#) is a great place to get high-quality information you can pass on to others.
- Talk about your experience. Speaking out about how you feel (if you feel able to) is a powerful way to change people's attitudes.
- Challenge people's attitudes. Where you feel safe to do so, gently challenge people about their attitudes and stand up to the stigma around mental health.

Equality and diversity in the electronic music industry

Everyone has a responsibility to be aware of the intersectionality between wellbeing, mental health and equality issues. People from minority groups can be at a higher risk of experiencing a mental health problem than the wider population.

The reasons for this are complex and not yet fully understood. However, mental health problems experienced by minority groups have been linked to discrimination, bullying and racism.

Some people have also experienced rejection, negative reactions or hostility from family, friends, strangers and the people they are employed by. This can have a significant impact on an individual's self-esteem and may mean they feel unable to be their true self at work, home or in the wider world. People's experiences

can be very different so it's important that there are forums and ways that people can share their experiences and concerns.

Talking about these issues and seeking support are important ways that you can manage your mental health. Here are some first steps:

- See our pages on [seeking help for a mental health problem](#) for more information on how to get support.
- [Hear stories](#) from LGBTIQ+ people talking about their mental health.
- Try out peer support. Mind runs an online peer support community called [Side by Side](#) that welcomes everyone and offers a friendly, non-judgemental space to talk about how you feel.

Working in the electronic music industry: common pressures

For many people working in electronic music, what they do isn't just a job – it's their passion. But like any other job, it has its own pressures to deal with. Below are some common pressures and how you can support yourself to manage them.

Working late

Dance culture revolves around late nights. Club nights, events and festivals tend to kick off late and finish late, while hectic schedules may mean you have to work long hours to meet tight deadlines. But working too many hours can leave you feeling completely exhausted and out of touch with friends, family and the wider world.

How to support yourself

Just a couple of nights not working a week can help you feel more connected to the daytime world, refreshed and recharged.

If you're not sleeping at night, try and set aside a regular time to catch-up on sleep during the day. If you feel too wound-up for sleep try herbal teas, hot baths or ambient music to relax. Be aware that relying on alcohol or sleeping pills to get some shut-eye can be bad for your mental health.

Touring is a unique experience. It's a chance to see new places and perform to fresh audiences. But it isn't always easy. For artists it can be a strange mix of the high of performing, followed by returning to an empty hotel room, or travelling through the night to the next gig. It's important to look after yourself and ensure that you are living as healthily as you can, connecting with your friends and family and having long breaks in between tours.

In my job you don't really have a regular structure. So you can have lots of odd hours and late nights. I actually find I work better in the mornings, which can be a problem if last night's gig was at 4am. I try and give myself a more 9-5 structure on some days. That means if I have meetings, or am writing at home, I'll try to start early and finish by 6pm.

DJ/artist

Frequent travel

Despite the coronavirus, electronic music is a global industry. After the pandemic it may again involve attending events across the world. Travelling a lot can be stressful and lonely. It can take you away from your usual support networks, which may have an impact on your mental health.

How to support yourself

To help cope with loneliness try and arrange a time you could Skype, text, email or call friends and family while you're away. Keeping a journal can help get troubling thoughts out of your head, or you could try podcasts, computer games or a book to provide some company, and a distraction.

Drug and alcohol abuse

Drug and alcohol abuse can be a problem for anyone, but dance culture often happens in party spaces where they're consumed, which makes them more available. You may not use drugs and alcohol to excess, or at all. However, others might feel they have to live up to the industry's 'hard-partying' stereotype or keep up with crowds or their industry peers. Over time, this can lead to reliance, addiction and other problems.

How to support yourself

If you feel you're drinking too much alcohol try slightly reducing the amount you drink each week, or have alcohol-free days. You can also try low-alcohol drinks. If you think drugs and alcohol are becoming a problem for you then it's important to remember that you don't have to cope alone. [Addaction](#) can provide advice and guidance on what you're going through.

Listen, some people can have a few drinks after a show and that's fine. But for others it gets habitual, they use it to numb the boredom of touring. It's about staying in communication with the artists, to see if it's getting out of hand and they need support.

DJ/artist

Insecure work

Many people who work in the electronic music industry don't have stability or security in their careers, so they may struggle to plan for the future. Shifts in trends can happen fast meaning that club nights, musical genres and artists can sometimes be left behind.

How to support yourself

If you are out of work for a long time, or have a low income, you may be entitled to certain benefits. You can find out more here: gov.uk/benefits-calculators. Ask people in your network to keep their ears to the ground to help you identify any new opportunities.

Spotlight: coronavirus

The coronavirus outbreak is putting huge financial pressures on the music industry and many projects and contracts have been put on hold or stopped completely. Coping with uncertainty around your job can lead to lots of worries about the future, especially as things feel very unpredictable right now. If you're struggling with feelings of uncertainty, try to focus on the things you can control. By accepting the things we can't control, we can start to focus our energy on the things we can.



Money worries

Money and mental health are often linked. Poor mental health can make managing money harder and worrying about money can make your mental health worse.

How to support yourself

- Create a weekly budget and stick to it.
- Regularly review your finances, so that things don't pile up.
- Aim to keep money aside for essentials and unexpected expenses.
- Look into bank accounts that allow you to put money aside for essentials in separate sub-accounts.
- Job sharing or additional employment can also help. Look at other opportunities to support yourself in addition to your current role in the music industry.

Competition

Sometimes it can feel that everyone wants to work in the industry. When there's a constant stream of talented people doing what you do, the competition can feel very intense. This can make it feel like you have to excel at everything you do, or risk losing your job to someone else.

How to support yourself

Remember what you've achieved so far. Keeping a record of some of your best work (and any praise you've received) isn't just useful for getting future jobs. It can help you feel good, and more secure, if you're feeling insecure about your work.

Imposter syndrome

Ever felt like you don't deserve your success? That you're an unqualified fraud and everyone else is set to call you out on it? This is what imposter syndrome feels like. It can knock your confidence, leaving you doubting your professional abilities. It can often strike in moments that other people associate with success. For example, you might have gotten a promotion or a new job but in a competitive industry you might feel undeserving or lacking in confidence.

How to support yourself

Collect evidence of your abilities and achievements. This could include emails praising your work, testimonials from people you respect, or a diary that proves you're in demand. Try not to compare yourselves with others – you can't know what's really going on inside their heads. They might even feel similar to you. Be kind to yourself and practice self-care.

Toxic criticism

Feedback is part of any career. But today anyone can say what they think about a performance, a poster, a record – or any other element of dance culture – on social media. This can feel great when people are supportive. But toxic online abuse can seriously affect your mental health. It can leave you feeling exposed and under incredible scrutiny over what you do and say both online and off.

How to support yourself

Not checking social media can give you a welcome break from other people's opinions. So try a digital detox for an hour, an afternoon, a day or even longer.

Social media can be great. But there's a dark side too. You have to train your mind [to focus] on the 90% of people who are supportive. It's about not taking it too seriously – most people who criticise you don't even have a profile picture, it's just words in the air. It's hard, but try to focus on the good comments.

DJ/artist

Pressure to be positive

People working in the industry can feel they're expected to have a can-do positive attitude most of the time – especially if you are a performer. Younger people just starting in the industry can feel even more pressure to say 'yes' – whether it's to poorly paid starter roles, excessive hours or other questionable requests. But it's just not possible to be positive all the time nor is it healthy to agree to some of these requests.

How to support yourself

Everyone needs a 'time out' sometimes. Talking about how you feel with trusted friends or colleagues can help. Writing your feelings down, whether on paper or on the notes section of your phone, can help to clear your thought process.

Managing your work

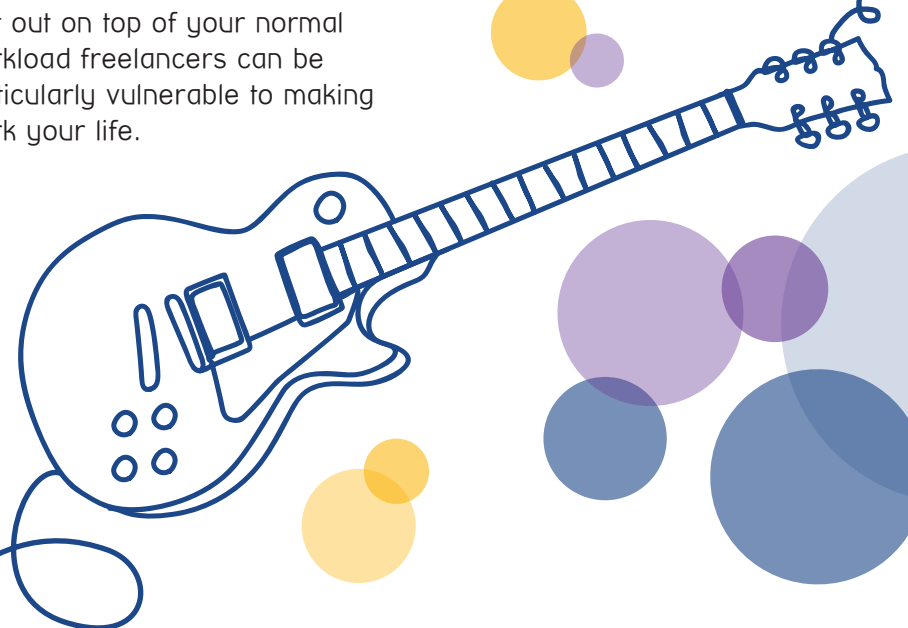
Improving work/life balance

You may work in electronic music because you love it. However, it's important to develop interests outside of dance music.

Whether that's hobbies, or spending time with family or friends, creating the right work/life balance is essential. This is particularly important if you're often working long hours, late nights and weekends without a break.

With admin and finance to sort out on top of your normal workload freelancers can be particularly vulnerable to making work your life.

If you feel too busy to take time off try quick activities that take you away from work. These could be things like cooking a meal, going to the gym or just reading a book. Ask other people what they do to unwind too.



Here are a few simple ways to work towards it:

- **Take short breaks throughout the day**, even if your day starts at 10pm!
- **Have some time off**. A short break can help you feel recharged and refreshed.
- **Try not to let your whole life be work**, nurture your outside relationships and interests.
- **Set clear boundaries to your work and communicate these to your clients and contacts**. In addition to this, make it clear if there are ways in which you don't wish to be contacted. For instance, perhaps you prefer to keep a personal phone number or you don't want clients chasing you on social media. This can make it easier to relax when you're at home and take your mind off work.

- **Develop end of day habits.**

Whatever time you finish, do something that marks the end of work for now to avoid feeling 'always-on'. This could be making a list of what to do tomorrow, shutting down your computer or just switching off your phone for a bit.

It's important to look after yourself. To take a day off if you're feeling depressed, or just need a rest. You have to be able to recharge so you can put energy into what you do.

DJ/creative freelancer.

Spotlight: coronavirus

Coronavirus has played havoc with people's working patterns. And as well as the shock of clubs and venues having to remain closed, there's also been the impact of Black Lives Matter to reflect on.

Many of you will have had to adjust to a change of routine following lockdown and it's likely you'll be spending a lot more time at home than you usually would. Make sure to take a break to look after your mental health, you might need some time out to relax and unwind, so it's important to take a break and use it as an opportunity to prioritise self-care. You deserve it.

Things like yoga, colouring and DIY can be a great way to switch off, as can tidying – why not have a spring clean? You could also have a digital clear out. Delete any old files and apps you don't use, upgrade your software, or clear out your inboxes. Just make sure that you aren't keeping frantically busy as a way of avoiding your feelings. It is all about balance.

As a freelancer you may already be used to working from home for the majority of the time, and already have a good routine in place. However, now that the majority of us are going to be working from home for the foreseeable future, we have all had to adjust to a new way of life. For many of us, going into the office provided a sense of routine and security; it ensured that we got to see people everyday and make social connections, which we know is good for our mental health. Swapping this for staring at your own four walls all day, and dealing with a constant stream of video calls, has taken a lot of us out of our comfort zones. See some of our guidance below on how you look after your mental health during this time:

- [Top tips for working from home](#)
- [Working from home Wellness Action Plan](#)



Managing difficult relationships

Having a difficult relationship with your co-workers or clients can be stressful, and can make work harder to manage. Here are some ideas on dealing with difficult work relationships:

Address your concerns

If someone says or does something that you find upsetting or offensive, arrange to speak with them in private about this.

Try not to get drawn into arguments

You won't always agree with everyone you work with. But getting your point across in a diplomatic way can avoid unhelpful disagreements.

Find common ground

You won't always have lots in common with everyone you work with. But finding something that you both like – such as a sports team, TV programme or hobby – can give you something positive to talk about and improve your relationship.

Avoid participating in gossip

People often use gossip as a way of bonding. But it can put strain on relationships and cause conflict, so it can be a good idea to avoid getting involved.

Keep a professional distance

Unfortunately it's not always possible to have good personal relationships with everyone you work with. So if you do have to work with someone you don't get on with, it's helpful to keep focused on work and stay professional.

What if I'm being bullied at work?

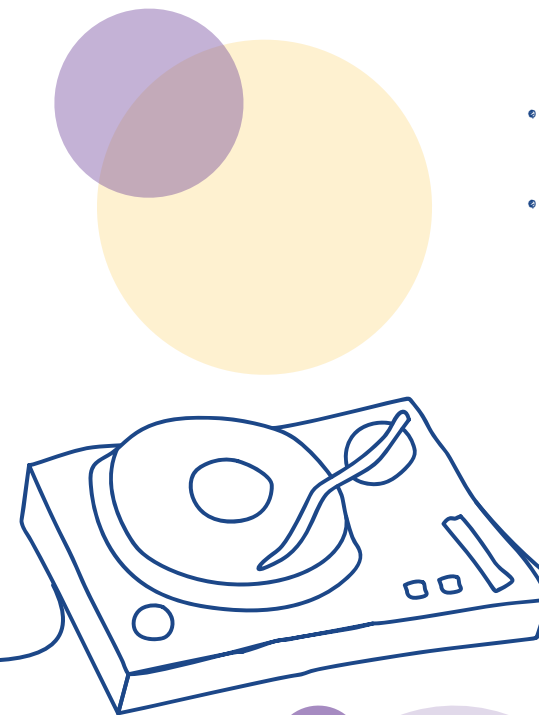
You don't have to put up with bullying at work. If it happens to you try to:

- Speak to a friend or colleague about what's going on and how you feel.
- Speak to [Acas](#) or [Citizens Advice](#). Both can give personal advice.

Coming back to work after time off

If you're taking time off, money can be a worry. It's possible to apply for Employment and Support Allowance when you're too sick to work – but this depends on your situation. It's also possible to get sickness insurance, or to build up some savings to tide you through. See below for some more tips to support you:

- Visit your GP. They can give you advice on managing your mental health problem.
- Keep in touch with people in your network and colleagues.
- Get some support. Sharing your experiences with others going through the same thing can help you feel less alone. You could join an online community, like [Side by Side](#), where you can talk openly about your mental health.



Looking after your physical health

Many people find that physical activity helps them maintain positive mental health. Many studies show that doing physical activity can help with:

- **Better sleep** – by making you feel more tired at the end of the day.
- **Happier moods** – physical activity releases feel-good hormones that give you more energy.
- **Managing stress, anxiety or intrusive and racing thoughts** – doing something physical releases cortisol which helps us manage stress. Being physically active also gives your brain something to focus on and can be a positive coping strategy for difficult times.

- **Better self-esteem** – being more active can make you feel better about yourself as you improve and meet your goals.
- **Reducing the risk of depression** – studies have shown that doing regular physical activity can reduce the likelihood of experiencing a period of depression.
- **Connecting with people** – doing group or team activities can help you meet new and like-minded people, and make new friends.

Exercise is so important. Because being fit helps with the lack of sleep and keeps you feeling well.

DJ/artist

Top tips to improve your physical activity and mental health:

- **Start small.** Try a short walk or join a fun class.
- **Be kind to yourself.** If you're doing anything more than you normally would, then that's a step in the right direction.
- **Clear your head.** Physical activity often helps you concentrate on something other than those unwanted thoughts and worries.
- **Celebrate your achievements.** Give yourself a reward whenever you've done well.

Food and mood

If you travel a lot for your job, or work lots of late nights, eating well can be a challenge. But there's good evidence that what you eat can affect the way you feel. In fact, improving your diet may help to:

- improve your mood
- give you more energy
- help you think more clearly.

Here's some tips:

- **Eat regularly.** Feeling hungry can make you feel tired, stressed and depressed. Eating regularly helps to keep your blood sugar levels steady. Slow-releasing energy foods like pasta, rice, oats, wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds do this really well.
- **Eat more vegetables.** Vegetables and fruit contain a lot of the minerals, vitamins and fibre we need to keep us physically and mentally healthy.

- **Stay hydrated.** If you don't drink enough water, you may find it difficult to concentrate or think clearly. It's recommended that you drink between six to eight glasses of fluid a day.

To stay well you need to exercise and look after yourself. But it can feel like the industry isn't set up for the lifestyle you need to cope with the job. For example, you can be surrounded by alcohol and drugs at work. Then you get home late after a gig and what's open? Just the local burger place.

DJ/artist

Top tips for looking after your mental health

Because you're running your own business there really isn't an 'off' button. You can end up thinking about it all the time. You're the boss and you have to make it happen.

Artist/DJ

Many freelancers in electronic music have built their own careers. They've started club nights, set up record labels or left a big company to run a consultancy. It's a growing trend in the UK whatever sector you're in.

Operating without a boss (or having several different clients to answer to) works for some people. It can give you the freedom and flexibility to follow your passion. But it can be insecure and very hard work. This makes it even more important to put measures in place to look after your own mental health.

If you're running a business your health and wellbeing are your biggest assets. So it makes a lot of sense to invest in those assets and keep your mental health on track. As a freelancer, it's (usually) up to you to make sure the way you work supports your mental health. There's lots you can do to help yourself.

Freelancing can be a good way of exploring different creative ideas. You're able to try out lots of different projects which feels good creatively. The flipside is when you feel stuck in what you're doing.

DJ/creative freelancer

Create a structure

Freelancers can face a lot of uncertainty in their working life. Creating as much structure as possible in your working day can help you feel more in control. Try having a consistent start time and finish time.

Also, remember to build in time for marketing, finances and networking as well as doing your core job. Block out time for each activity and research project management apps to help you stick to your plan. Have a system for managing dates and deadlines – whether they're for work projects, tax or a networking event.

Budget for self-care

Self-care is vital for protecting your mental health – so make it part of your schedule. Often the times when you feel you don't 'deserve' it are when you need it most. It doesn't have to be expensive, plan something simple like an early night after a long day or a swim after work. Whatever it is, try to put time and money aside for things that make you feel good outside work.

Think about the things you need to feel better at work too. This might include a more efficient laptop, phone or comfortable chair. Alternatively, counselling and talking therapies can help you address some of the issues you are facing in a secure space with a trained professional. Some people think that therapy is only for when you are severely unwell, or have big life issues facing you. But having space to talk about whatever is on your mind can be really beneficial to everyone.

Take time off

As a freelancer you might be tempted to work 24/7. This can lead to stress and burnout. Working in electronic music may mean that you don't get weekends off. But having scheduled non-work days (from week-long holidays to brief downtime) will help you stay resilient and perform at your best.

Be social media aware

Social media can be a drain on your time and your mood. You can adopt unhealthy social media habits by comparing your life to other people's. So, even if you use social media for your job, manage how you use it. Ideally have social media-free periods or only use it at scheduled times each day. Also be aware that experts recommend switching off your device an hour before bed to get better sleep.

Learn to cope with rejection

No one likes being rejected but it's something that many freelancers have to deal with as part of their working life. Try being kind to yourself when you're rejected and allow yourself to feel sad or angry for a while. Sharing your experience with other freelancers can help you feel better. Make sure you're clear why you're not being picked for the project or job (even if it's hard to hear). That way you can make changes and move forward so you're more likely to win the next work.

Spot your triggers

Try to pinpoint exactly what makes you feel depressed or anxious, or anything else. Then work out strategies for each. These strategies can be as easy as remembering to go for a walk when you're feeling stressed.

Build in breaks

If you don't get paid holiday, add some breaks to your schedule. These could be a 10-minute rest between calls, or a non-negotiable two-week holiday in summer. Don't let your physical and mental health suffer at the hands of the business.

Praise yourself

You might not get praise or feedback from a manager. So take time to praise yourself after a job went well. Alternatively, when you get good comments from a client, keep them in a folder on your desktop you can look at if you need a boost.

Balance working in and out of home

Working from home can be great, but it can also feel lonely. If you can (and regulations allow) invest in time at a shared workspace. Or go to the library or a coffee shop.

Build a network

Connecting with other trusted freelancers, either online or in person, can be a great way to share your big wins and work frustrations. The chances are they'll be going through some of the same stuff as you.

Get exercise

If your job involves working at a computer, it can be tempting to sit down at it until your work is done. Try and get out for short walks outside (or book in a gym or swim session if that's more your thing). It can boost your mood and help you feel connected with the outside world.

Learn to say no

It can be tempting to take on more work than you can manage. Over time this can lead to stress and burnout. Try to protect your mental health by politely saying no to extra demands when you've got your plate full.

Supporting other people in your network

Talking, whether it's just over a cup of tea or in a more formal setting, can really help someone experiencing a mental health problem. If someone has decided to open up to you these are a few things you can do to ensure they feel supported:

- **Avoid interruptions** – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt
- **Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions** – avoid patronising responses
- **Listen actively and carefully** – speak calmly and maintain good eye contact
- **Show empathy and understanding** – focus on the person, not the problem
- **Be prepared for some silences** – be patient
- **Avoid making assumptions or being prescriptive** – the best thing to do is listen.

Spotlight: coronavirus

You might be worried about coronavirus and how it could affect your life and your work. You might have had to spend a lot of time at home and kept a safe distance from others outside. You might have found this difficult or stressful, so it is important that you ask for help if you need it.

You should also take time to ask your colleagues and people you work with how they are coping too. Give people an opportunity to share if they're struggling, and be honest with them about how you are feeling too.

If you are really feeling low or struggling with feelings of isolation, there are people who can help.

- Our [information](#) on coping with going into work during coronavirus.
- Our [tips](#) for managing feelings about lockdown easing.
- Our coronavirus [useful contacts](#), listing Government and NHS guidance, helpful organisations and other ways to get support during coronavirus.
- Our [information](#) on the coronavirus pandemic and your wellbeing.



We're Mind, the mental health charity. We want to support a million people each year to stay well and have good mental health at work.

Be part of our movement for change in workplace mental health.

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