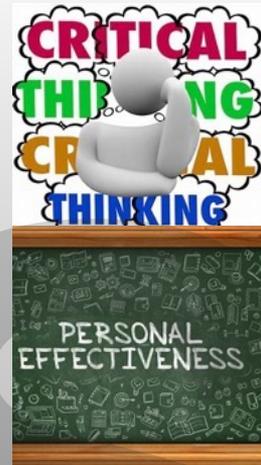
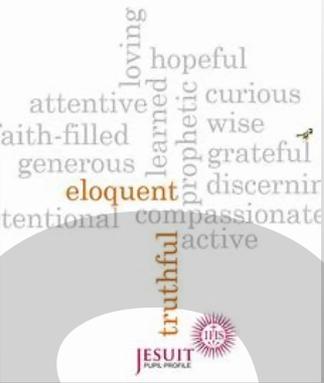
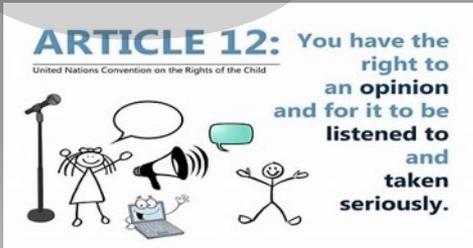


Mental Health Awareness Week

13th-17th May 2024



Movement: Moving more for our mental health



Let us pray,

God of Peace, as we approach mental health awareness week, I pray that we remain still and know that You are God. Despite what we may think or feel, You are still our God and nothing can change that. Whether we are rich, poor, happy, sad, You are our God. Your nature is not dependent upon anyone or anything else and for that Father I glorify You. I pray that we put our trust in knowing that You are the Unshakable Rock. Thank You Lord, Amen
St Joseph... Pray for us.

What is mental health?

Mental health is about how you think, feel, and act. It's the part of you that helps you deal with stress, make friends, focus on school, and handle your emotions. When you have good mental health, you feel good about yourself, have healthy relationships, and can cope with life's ups and downs. If your mental health is not great, you might feel sad, anxious, or overwhelmed, and you might need help to feel better.



Mental Health Awareness Week

May 13th - 19th is this year's Mental Health Foundation's annual Mental Health Awareness Week. This is a great time for us to focus on our own mental health and wellbeing however this year's focus is on **'Moments for Movement'**.

We can often forget that there is a direct link between our physical health and our mental health and wellbeing.



What have you done to help maintain good mental health / wellbeing in the last week?

Discussion Feedback

There are many things which we can do to maintain wellbeing and what works is likely to be different for each of us. Some possible examples of things we can try include -

- Spending time with others
- Spending time outside
- Avoiding negative people
- Exercise
- Spending time meditating or focussing on breathing exercises
- Getting a good night's sleep
- Eating a balanced diet
- Talking to others about our feelings or problems



Watch the clip on the next slide and discuss afterwards why exercise can be beneficial for our mental health.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNWaWJm1A1g>

A hand-drawn illustration of a person with a large red brain. The person is shown from the waist up, with their arms raised and hands holding a horizontal bar. The bar is supported by two vertical lines that connect to the top of the brain. The brain is a large, textured red mass. The person's body is drawn with simple black lines. The background is a dark grey color with a faint, large watermark of the letters 'S' and 'S' in a light grey color.

The effects of exercise on mental health

Feedback

Release of Endorphins: Exercise triggers the release of endorphins, which are often referred to as "feel-good" hormones. These chemicals can boost mood and reduce pain perception, leading to feelings of happiness and well-being.

Reduction in Stress and Anxiety: Physical activity helps lower stress hormones like cortisol, promoting relaxation and reducing anxiety.

Improvement in Sleep Quality: Exercise can improve sleep patterns and quality. Better sleep can lead to improved mood, reduced stress, and enhanced cognitive function.

Increase in Neuroplasticity and Brain Health: Regular physical activity can promote neuroplasticity - the brain's ability to form new connections and adapt. This can contribute to improved memory, learning, and overall brain health.

Enhancement of Self-Esteem and Body Image: Engaging in regular physical activity can boost self-esteem and body image, as individuals gain confidence from achieving fitness goals and maintaining a healthier lifestyle.

Social Interaction and Community Building: Exercise often involves group activities, sports, or gym environments, providing opportunities for social interaction and community building. This sense of connection and support can be crucial for mental health, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Diversion and Stress Relief: Exercise can serve as a positive distraction, allowing individuals to focus on physical movement rather than stressors or negative thoughts. This break can offer a sense of relief and improve emotional regulation.

Promotion of Mindfulness and Presence: Certain forms of exercise, such as yoga or tai chi, emphasise mindfulness and being present in the moment. This focus on the "here and now" can promote a sense of calm.

What does the movement need to look like?

Movement which you are doing to support your mental health can be either gentle or vigorous and can be done alone or with others, it doesn't have to be anything that has a financial cost or requires special equipment. It is a good idea to do something you enjoy as you are more likely to keep doing it.



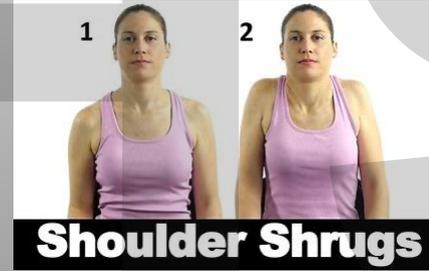
What might be some free and easy ways of increasing the amount of movement we do?

Is there anything you could add in to your routine?

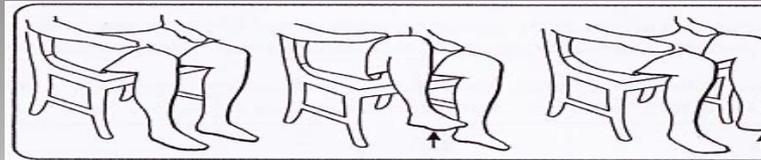
Simple indoor seated movement

Movement doesn't even have to involve leaving your seat. Try some of the following –

Shoulder Shrugs & Rolls – Shrugs: Raise both shoulders toward your ears, hold for a few seconds, and then relax. Repeat 5-10 times. Rolls: Roll your shoulders in a circular motion, first forward and then backward, 5-10 times.



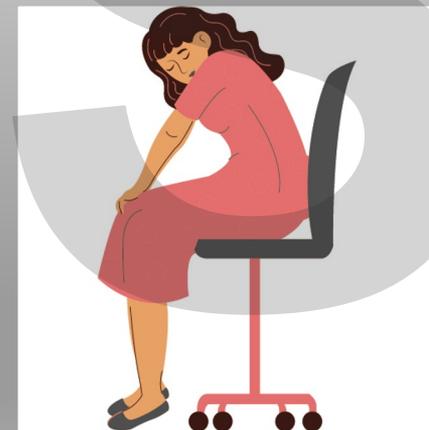
Seated Marching – While sitting, lift your right knee toward your chest, then lower it. Repeat with your left knee. Continue alternating for 20-30 seconds. This helps to engage your core and activate your legs.





Seated Spinal Twist - Sit up straight with your feet flat on the floor. Twist your upper body to the right, placing your left hand on the outer edge of your right thigh. Hold for 5 seconds, then switch sides. Repeat 3-5 times on each side.

Seated Cat-Cow Stretch - **Cow Stretch:** Sit on the edge of your chair with feet flat on the ground. Place your hands on your knees. Inhale and arch your back, lifting your chest and looking up slightly. This is the cow position. **Cat Stretch:** Exhale and round your back, tucking your chin to your chest. This is the cat position. Alternate between the positions, 5-10 times.



Getting outside to move

Although moving and exercising anywhere is great for our mental health, we can have further benefits if we can get outside to do it. This is because -

- ✓ Natural light helps regulate your body's internal clock, leading to better sleep and increased energy during the day. Sunlight stimulates the production of vitamin D, which is essential for bone health and has been linked to improved mood.
- ✓ Being outdoors, especially in green spaces or near water, has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety levels. The natural environment can have a calming effect on the mind, promoting relaxation and reducing cortisol (a stress hormone).
- ✓ Spending time outdoors fosters a connection to nature, which can have a grounding effect and promote mindfulness. This connection can lead to a greater sense of peace and reduce symptoms of depression.

Other Tactics

If you are feeling stressed or anxious you could also try some of the following exercises:-

- Talk with someone about how you are feeling at that moment.
- Use a calming breathing technique like box breathing (see slide).
- Set a small target which you can push yourself to achieve.
- Use the 5,4,3,2,1 exercise (see slide)
- Rephrase negative thoughts (see slide)
- Read a self help book or listen to an audio guide.
- Write the worry down.

Try some exercises as a form – Be sensible!

Box Breathing

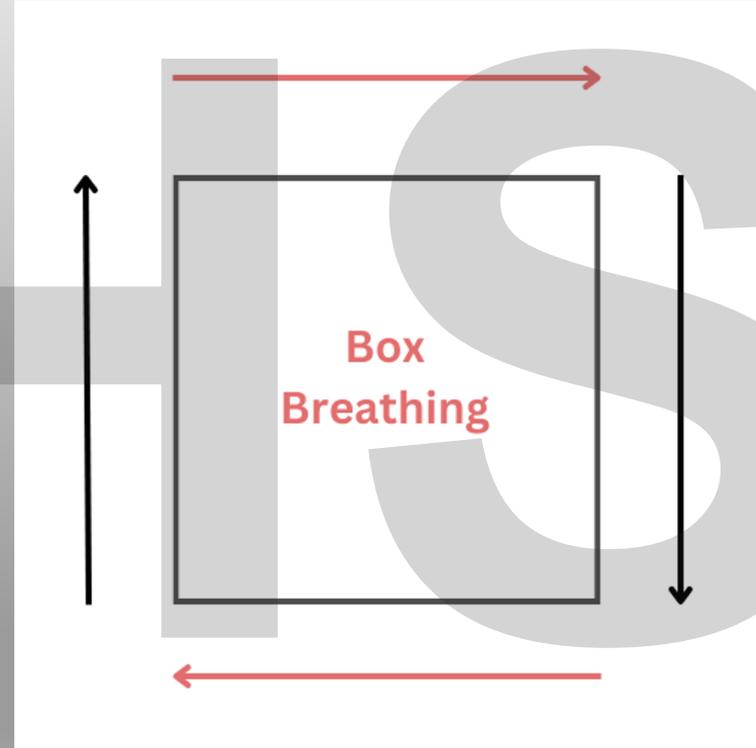
Breathe in whilst counting to 4 and imagine drawing a line up.

Hold your breath for a count of 4 as you imagine drawing a line from left to right.

Breathe out slowly for a count of 4 as you imagine drawing a line down.

Hold your breath for a count of 4 as you imagine drawing a line from right to left to join up the box.

Repeat until you feel better. You can do this any time, anywhere.



5,4,3,2,1 exercise

Breathe in deeply through your nose and out through your mouth.

Look at your surroundings and -

Find 5 things you see around you.

Find 4 things that you can touch.

Find 3 things that you can hear.

Find 2 things that you can smell

Think of one emotion that you feel.

This a way to ground yourself so that you can feel present in the moment and in control of your surroundings.

Rephrase negative thoughts

Try to notice the negative thoughts that you are having and rephrase them e.g.

Instead of 'I'm feeling worried', put just in front of it, 'I'm just feeling worried'. This makes the thought less scary.

OR

Instead of 'I'm scared I'll embarrass myself' try 'I'm just having a thought that I'll embarrass myself' as this rewires the thought from being something which is real.

Task - Think of a worry you have had this week, and then rephrase it.

Scenario Task

Ben has been feeling low recently, he has been struggling to get up in the morning which is making him late for school even though his dad gives him a lift and the drive only takes five minutes. When he gets home, he feels tired and just wants to slump in front of his Xbox with his dog for company. His friends often meet at the park on the local skate ramps but he doesn't tend to go as it is about a 20 minute bike ride from his house.

What advice would you give Ben? Are there any simple things he could do to improve his wellbeing?

Ask an Expert

If you are concerned about your own mental health or that of someone else, please speak with a trusted adult.

You may also wish to visit -

Mental Health Foundation [here](#)

Childline [here](#)

NHS [here](#)

