

EAP Newsletter

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The Mental Health Edition

In this month's newsletter we'll be talking all about mental ill health and the stigma surrounding it, how to cope when you have a mental illness, ways to take a digital detox and looking into how you can incorporate mindfulness into your daily life.

The stigma of mental ill health

Mental health problems are, sadly very common, affecting thousands of people in the UK alone. Despite this, there is still a huge stigma associated with mental health issues. Some people believe that there is an automatic link between mental health problems and negative behaviour patterns. However, the most common mental health problems have no significant link to violent behaviour.

DEFINITION: STIGMA

"A set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something."

Negative attitudes, pre-judgements, prejudices and behaviours can make it harder for individuals with mental health problems to live a normal life. Mental health stigma may manifest itself in discrimination, thereby making it more difficult for people to make friends, obtain and hold down jobs, and get access to housing and other services. It may also lead to loss of self-esteem and make those affected feel unable to seek the help they need.

Myths, misunderstanding, ignorance and negative attitudes surrounding mental health can all result in stigma. The stigma is not true or fair, but it still hurts. When a person is labelled by their illness, they are no longer seen as the person they are, but as part of a stereotyped group.

Statistics around the stigma of mental health:

16.5%

Only 16.5% of individuals with depression worldwide seek help. The stigma surrounding mental health is one of the primary reasons.

50%

Over 50% of individuals will experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime, making such conditions more common and relatable than previously realised.

92%

92% of people believe that admitting to a mental health condition would damage someone's career.

3 in 4

Three in four people (74%) felt that levels of stigma towards people severely affected by mental illness have not improved in the last decade.

25%

25% of people in England, approximately 14.1 million adults, say they feel lonely at least some of the time.

Causes of mental health stigma

Mental health stigma has been attributed to a variety of different factors. Some causes that potentially play a role include:

Stereotypes

Generalised and discriminatory stereotypes about people with mental illnesses are often stereotyped as being violent or unpredictable.

Lack of awareness

Many people lack awareness of symptoms, causes, prevalence and treatments for mental illness. This lack of understanding contributes to poor perceptions about different mental illnesses and those who experience them.

Media portrayals

Media depictions of people with mental illness also play a part in perpetuating stigma. Mental health conditions are often depicted negatively, with stories being sensationalised in the news.

We often use the word 'stigma' to describe the overarching experience that people have. However, there are actually three types of stigma:

- **Social stigma:** This refers to the negative attitudes around mental health from people in society.
- **Self-stigma:** This describes the internalised stigma that people with mental health conditions feel about themselves.
- **Institutionalised stigma:** This is a type of systemic stigma that arises from corporations, governments and other institutions.



The Equality Act 2010 protects you from discrimination and makes it illegal to discriminate against people with mental health problems.

There are different ways you can experience discrimination including:

- **Direct discrimination:** if you're treated worse than others because of your mental health problem.
- **Indirect discrimination:** if a person or organisation has arrangements in place that put you at an unfair disadvantage.
- **Discrimination arising from your disability:** if you're treated badly because of something that happens due to your mental health problem. For example, if you're given a warning at work for taking time off for medical appointments.
- **Harassment:** if you're intimidated, offended or humiliated.
- **Victimisation:** if you're treated badly because you've made a complaint.



How to cope with stigma when you have a mental illness

Nearly nine out of ten people with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination have a negative effect on their lives. With this being such a prevalent issue, it's time to change the way people think and act about mental health problems. Showing that there's no shame or stigma in talking about mental health could make a huge difference.

Overcoming stigma is not easy, but there are steps that you can take to deal with negative attitudes about mental health conditions. There are some things that you can do to help combat both social stigma and self-perceived stigma about mental illness.



1. Be aware of your mental health: Tell people what helps you. Let your friends and family know how they can support you; whether it's listening to you, helping you keep on top of commitments or being aware of your triggers. Keeping a mood diary to track how you're feeling can also help you to understand what makes you feel better or worse. You can then take steps to avoid, prepare for or adapt to difficult situations.



2. Focus on what is within your control: When you are living with mental health problems there may be a lot that you feel is out of your control, but the important thing is to focus on the things that you can. For example, sticking to routines can help to manage uncertainty, as can setting goals that are measurable and attainable. If things are feeling overwhelming, or you're struggling with low mood try breaking things down and start with tasks that feel easiest.



3. Make time for therapeutic activities: There are various techniques and therapies you can safely practice on your own. For instance, having a bath, listening to music or going for a walk are all ways to relax and reduce anxiety and worry. Likewise, mindfulness, a therapeutic technique that involves being more aware of the present moment, can be very beneficial on your mental health. So too can getting out into nature.



4. Speak out: Educate people around you about the realities of mental illness, including how common it is. Doing this allows you to actively speak out against stigma too. Debunk myths about mental illness and educate others if they make a disparaging remark.



5. Don't struggle alone: Most importantly, never struggle alone. There are plenty of people out there who can support you including your local NHS or charities such as Mind. Talking to others about how you are feeling is a strength which can help you to take control of your wellbeing and look after your own mental health.

*Remember to be kind to yourself and make small changes over time. Making changes can often be hard so make sure you do so with support and only when it is safe to do so.



Read this: The Mental Health Book Club

This month we have put together a selection of great reading to encourage and support you in looking after your mental wellbeing. The next time you're looking for something to read, why not try one of these...

Atomic Habits by James Clear

Filled with practical advice and inspirational real-life success stories of leading CEOs, distinguished scientists and top athletes, this book shares invaluable insights into how small persistent habits can transform your career and your life.

The Comfort Book by Matt Haig

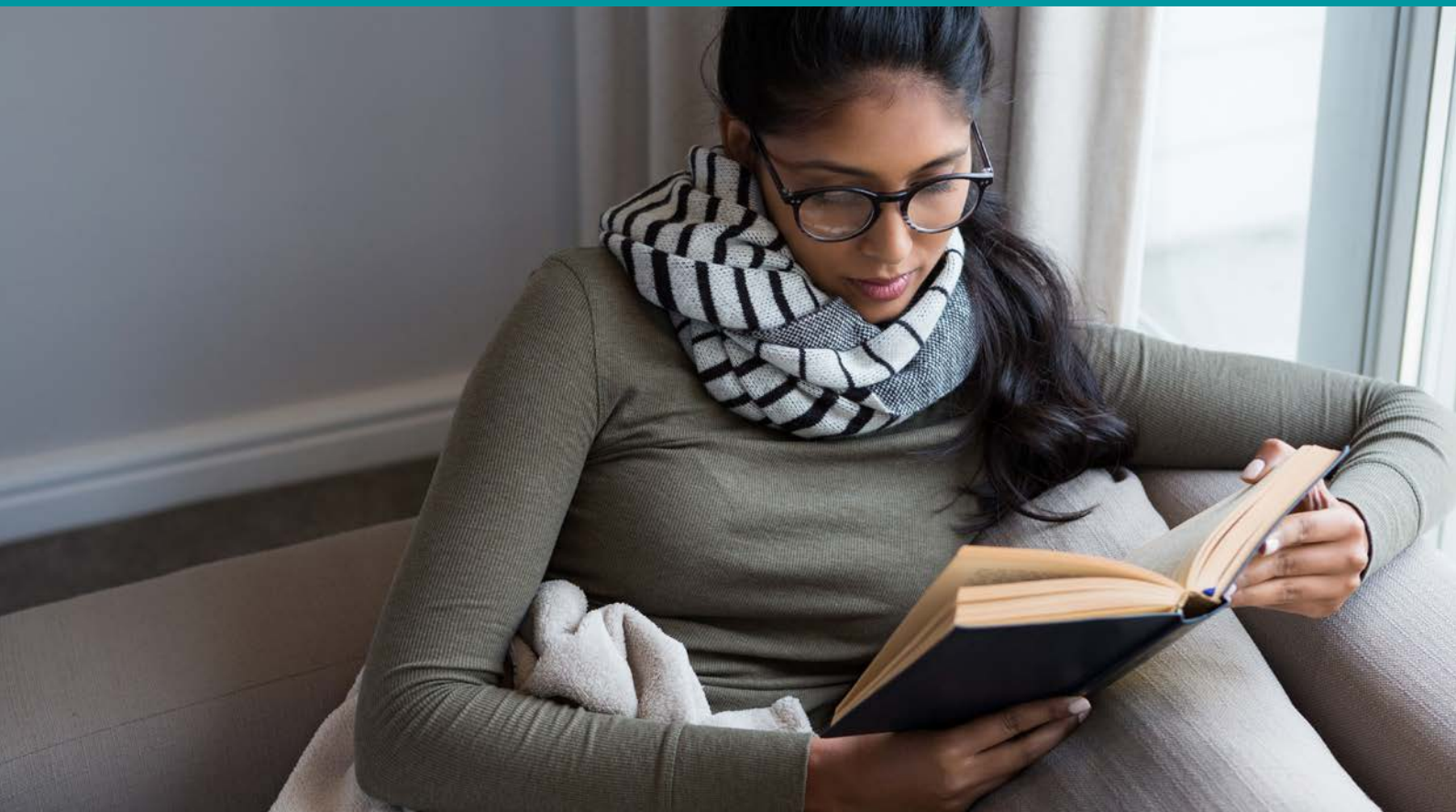
A collection of consolations learned in hard times and suggestions for making the bad days better. Drawing on maxims, memoir and the inspirational lives of others, these meditations celebrate the ever-changing wonder of living. For when we need the wisdom of a friend or a reminder we can always nurture inner strength and hope

The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F* by Mark Manson**

A best-seller peppered with both expletives and invaluable advice. The antidote to the cult of mindless positivity is a refreshing, no-nonsense manual to getting the most out of less-than-perfect situations.

The Chimp Paradox by Professor Steve Peters

Recognise how your mind works, understand and manage your emotions, manage yourself and become the person you would like to be. Prof. Steve Peters explains the struggle that takes place within your mind and then shows you how to apply this to every area of your life. Based on scientific facts and principles which have been simplified into a workable model for easy use.



Physical and mental health: The intrinsic link

Did you know that physical health problems significantly increase our risk of developing mental health problems and vice versa?

In fact, nearly one in three people with a long-term physical health condition also has a mental health problem.

As well as this, mental health problems can often come with physical symptoms too. Our bodies and minds are intrinsically linked, so it's not at all surprising that mental ill health can affect your body too. Depression can lead to headaches, fatigue and digestive issues, whilst anxiety can cause insomnia, restlessness and difficulty concentrating.

Try this: Three things you can do today to stay physically well:



Exercise: Physical activity is a great way to keep healthy, as well as improving your mental wellbeing. Research shows that doing exercise releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins in the brain.



Eat well: The foods we eat can influence the development, management and prevention of numerous mental health conditions including depression and dementia. A balanced diet that includes healthy amounts of proteins, essential fats, complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and water can help to improve your overall wellbeing.



Increase natural light: A lack of natural light can cause many people to struggle with seasonal affective disorder (SAD), whilst poor indoor lighting can contribute to stress and anxiety. Increasing the amount of natural light or making sure your living and working areas are properly lit can be a great place to start.

Now is the time to start thinking about healthcare holistically; looking at the possible factors that might negatively affect your health and understanding that what might impact you physically will also impact your mental health too.



How to take a digital detox to promote better mental health

Digital detoxing – when you take a planned break from your devices – is a great way to improve your mental health. Time without digital devices may allow you to become more mindful of unhealthy online habits and enable you to create a more meaningful routine.

Kings College London found that 39% of people aged 18-30 experienced symptoms such as losing control over how long they spend on their phone and feelings of distress when they couldn't access it. Whilst [further studies](#) have shown that increased time on screens and social media can lead to depression in adolescents.

This month why not take part in our tech timeout challenge to promote better mental health this summer?



1. Turn off notifications: It's tough to give your devices the cold shoulder when they're begging for your attention with frequent notifications. Pick which notifications are important to you (such as emails from your boss or calls from your children's school) and then set aside a time to check your other platforms for those not-so-urgent updates.



2. Limit yourself to one device at a time: Instead of cutting yourself off from technology altogether, start by limiting yourself to just one device at a time. If you're used to watching TV whilst scrolling on your phone, or texting during Teams calls, challenge yourself to give your undivided attention to a single device.



3. Make airplane mode your friend: This mobile device setting is helpful for blocking calls, messages and internet access. And, since airplane mode only disables your phone's cell and WIFI signals, you can turn it on while still using your device to take notes, play games or listen to music.



4. Designate device-free zones: Having trouble committing to an hour without internet? Think of your digital detox as spatial instead of time-based by creating tech-free areas within your home. Maybe you decide not to use your phone in the kitchen so you can cook and eat with loved ones or perhaps make your bedroom a device-free space, so you can unwind before going to sleep.



5. Give your screen time a purpose: Next time you are tempted to reach for your phone, ask yourself why you want to use it. If you can't figure out how to stop 'doomscrolling' and mindless browsing, then your mental health could be at risk. Try being mindful of the times you pick up your device, be aware of the times you're bored or looking for a dopamine hit and approach your screen time with purpose and intention



Try this: Replace mindless scrolling with meditation

At the opposite end of the scale to 'doomscrolling' is meditation. A few minutes of mindfulness every day could do wonders for your anxiety levels and overall mental health.

The next time you're tempted to mindlessly reach for your phone, look beyond your screen and acknowledge your environment.

Take two or three deep inhale and exhales.

Stand up, stretch and shift your perspective.

Return to a seated position to look beyond your screen again and take a minute to gauge your internal emotions. What are you feeling right now? Where do you feel it?

This simple practice is excellent for re-orienting and re-focusing after a long period of screen time.



How to open up about your feelings

Did you know Samaritans Awareness Day is hosted on 24th July?

It can sometimes be difficult to talk about your feelings and it's common to feel worried about upsetting the people you care about, feel nervous about what people might think, or how opening up might affect your relationships.

You may feel it's easier to talk to friends or family, or you might find that it's easier to approach a professional first. There's no right or wrong, but often those closest to us can be a valuable source of support.

The simple act of talking has the power to make a big difference to someone's resilience levels. Here are some ways to embrace the power of talking and opening up about how you feel...

Be kind to yourself

Whenever you feel uncomfortable, unsure or guilty about sharing how you feel, ask yourself what you'd say to a loved one dealing with something similar and apply the same kindness to yourself. Talking about our feelings can make us feel vulnerable, but try to see it as investing in yourself.

Ask yourself questions

In challenging times it's important that you are pragmatic about what you can control to avoid overburdening yourself or feeling bad if things don't go to plan. One way to avoid overwhelm is to ask, "is this in my control and can I do something about this?" Turning your mind towards acceptance will help build resilience.

Self-talk your way to confidence

Having confidence in your own ability to cope with the stresses of life can play an important part in resilience. Listen for negative comments in your head, and when you hear them practice immediately replacing them with positive ones. How you talk to yourself can greatly affect how you think, feel and behave.



And finally, our tip of the month; the one thing we ask you to do today if you do nothing else...

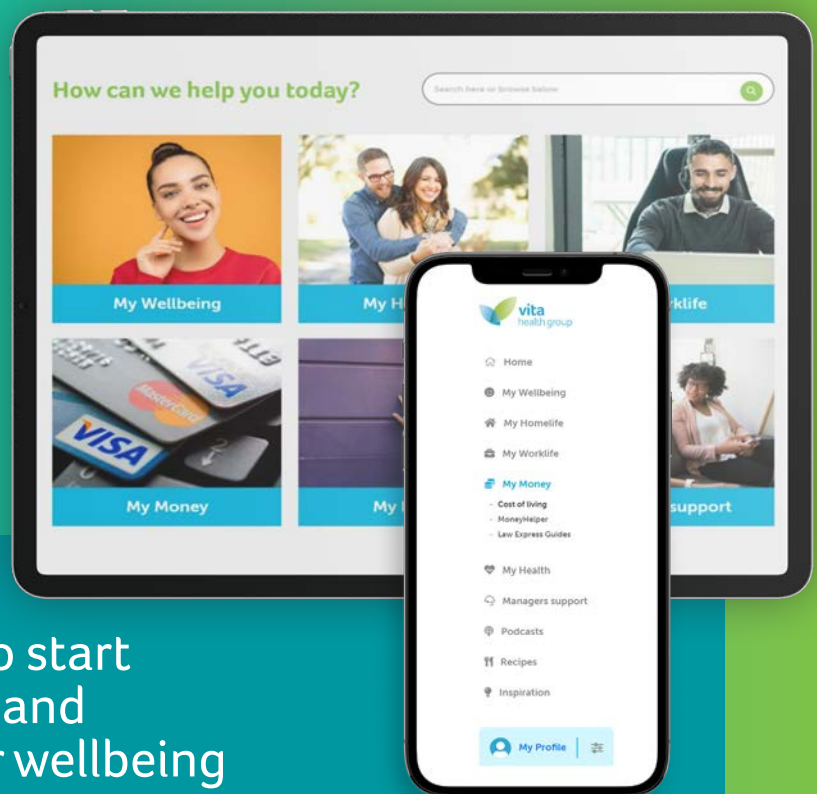
Stop making comparisons. It's very easy to compare ourselves to others, particularly in the world of social media, but it can help to be aware that things aren't always as they seem from the outside. We often only see a snapshot of people's lives on social media and this is usually only the parts they want to share. Don't make comparisons, instead focus on yourself, how you feel and what you need. Be grateful for the things you have in this moment.

Wellbeing Hub

Helping you to manage the daily challenges of life and work

We have created a range of guidance and practical advice on how to cope with the cost of living crisis.

Simply visit www.my-EAP.com and use the organisational code provided to access the site. Visit our cost of living page in our **My Money** section.



Scan the QR code today to start your journey and improve your wellbeing