

## Getting the most out of life

Mental health or “mental well-being” is more than just being free of unpleasant emotions and mental problems. Being mentally healthy means getting the most out of life. It means that you know your strengths and weaknesses, can cope with life’s ups and downs, are able to work productively, and are happy with your life and relationships.

Your mental health is important, so it is worth taking care of. Here are some practical tips and strategies to help you take control of your mental health and increase happiness and well-being:

### Increase enjoyment

Get the most out of pleasant experiences by ‘savouring the moment’. Here are some ways to improve good feelings and satisfaction with the things you do.

- Celebrate your achievements: If something good happens to you, then share it with others. Celebrate your success. Congratulate yourself. Focussing on your success will increase your positive emotions.
- Keep a momento: Take a photo or get a souvenir. Relive the pleasant feelings of happy events and reminisce with others about them.
- Sharpen your perception: Don’t be overwhelmed by the noisy confusion of life. In any situation, try focussing on one element at a time. For example, notice the music, the aroma, or the scenery.
- Immerse yourself: Become completely absorbed in an activity you enjoy by focussing hard and concentrating. Let the rest of the world disappear.

### Stay engaged

Be aware and connect with yourself, your experiences, and the people around you.

- Be mindful: Bring your attention and focus to the present moment. Try a mindful breathing exercise as shown in the box.
- Nurture your relationships: Invest time and energy in your family and friends. Plan a get-together; schedule a phone call; share a meal, walk or game. Strong relationships have a big impact on your life satisfaction.
- Know your strengths: What are you good at? What are your best qualities? Think of ways to use and build your personal strengths in everyday life. To explore your personal strengths go to: [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org)

#### Mindful breathing exercise

1. Sit or lie comfortably, eyes opened or closed.
2. Slowly move your attention to your breath – observe the sensations of the air in your nostrils, or the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe in and out.
3. If your mind wanders, notice the distraction. Bring your attention back to your breathing.
4. Continue for 5 to 10 minutes - connecting with the present moment.
5. To finish, slowly expand your attention from your breathing to the room around you.

# Building happiness and wellbeing

## Find meaning

Finding meaning can help you feel better about your life and more hopeful for the future.

- **Be thankful:** At the end of each day, note down three things that you are thankful for, no matter how small. Keep a 'gratitude diary' like the one below.
- **Know your values:** What do you want your life to be about? How do you want to be in relationships, at work, as a parent, as a friend? What is important to you? Take time out to think about how you are going in important areas of your life. Are you on track? If not, what can you do differently?
- **Be kind:** Being kind to other people is a win-win. Not only does someone else feel good, but small acts of kindness and generosity help you connect with others. The feedback you get will leave you feeling good about yourself. Try doing something kind each day. It doesn't need to be a big thing.

### TODAY I AM THANKFUL FOR:

1. *My warm bed that makes me feel safe and secure*

2. *My family and friends who make me feel loved*

3. *The great weather we had today, for my sunny walk in the park*

Research shows that positive feelings, hopefulness and enjoyment of life lower the risk of mortality in people with diabetes<sup>1</sup>

## Accept

Emotions like fear, anger and sadness are part of the normal human experience. They can feel uncomfortable and most people work hard to get rid of them or avoid them. Unfortunately, this can often lead to more problems and greater discomfort. So what can you do?

- **The wave of emotions:** Emotions are not permanent, but vary in intensity. Like waves in the ocean they will build in intensity, and then pass. Even the unpleasant ones. Recognising this wave effect can help you prepare for and manage your emotion.
- **Be accepting of distress:** 'Accepting' is not the same as 'liking'. You do not have to like fear, sadness or anger, but allow yourself to experience these emotions. Notice where you feel them in your body. Describe them to yourself, but don't judge them. Allow them to build, then pass.
- **Think differently about emotions:** Emotions are not good or bad. All emotions, even the uncomfortable ones like fear and anger, are useful and can motivate us in positive ways

For more information go to:  
[www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au)  
[www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org)  
[www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au)  
[www.livelifewell.nsw.gov.au](http://www.livelifewell.nsw.gov.au)

#### References:

<sup>1</sup>. Moskowitz JT, Epel E, Acree M. (2008). Positive affect uniquely predicts lower risk of mortality in people with diabetes. *Health Psychology*, 27, S73-S82.