

## HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

### Exercise

It has long been known that regular exercise is good for our physical health; however it can also be very good for our mental health. It can improve mood, reduce anxiety and improve concentration. Exercise has an effect on certain chemicals in the brain that affect our mood and can make us feel happier.

If you're feeling tired, exercise can help increase energy levels.

If you're worried, exercise can take your mind off your concerns for a while. Even a 15 minute walk can help you to clear your mind and relax.

Government Doctors advise us all that we should build into our lives at least 5 sessions of aerobic exercise each week of at least 30 minutes. Some examples of aerobic exercise are swimming, jogging, tennis, cycling, football and zumba.

Tips for developing an exercise programme:

- Pick the right activities – it's no point doing something you don't enjoy (you'll never stick to it). Any type of exercise is good for you.
- Some people enjoy joining classes others prefer to exercise on their own (we're all different – choose what suits you best).
- Try a variety of different things – this will help you stay interested.
- If motivation is a problem try exercising with a friend – you can help motivate each other.
- Nothing changes overnight – stick to and set yourself realistic goals

- If gyms or swimming pools aren't your thing, a brisk 30 minute walk can still have a positive effect on your mood

## Healthy Diet

Eating healthily is not only good for us physically; it can be just as important for our mental health. Eating healthily does not get rid of low mood or anxiety but it is one of the steps we can take to improve our mood and overall wellbeing.

The government recommend we eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

Tips for healthy eating:

- Eat regular meals throughout the day to maintain blood sugar levels. Missing meals (especially breakfast) can lead to low blood sugar which can cause low mood, irritability and fatigue.
- Try not to eat sugary snacks between meals – these are absorbed quickly into the bloodstream and can cause a 'high' or surge of energy that soon wears off leaving you feeling tired and low.
- Eat more wholegrain foods such as cereals, nuts, beans, lentils, fruits and vegetables. These are more filling than sugary, refined foods and release their energy more slowly so don't cause mood swings.
- Wholegrain foods are more nutritious and they contain Thiamine (B1) a vitamin that is associated with control of mood.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine – this can cause mood swings and affect sleep.

- Avoid sugary drinks – try real fruit juices or herbal/fruit tea

## Alcohol and Anxiety

Drinking alcohol is linked to both anxiety and depression. Research shows that people suffering with anxiety and depression are twice as likely to be heavy or problem drinkers ([www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)).

Alcohol is a depressant drug which slows down our brain activity. In the short-term drinking alcohol can lift our mood and helps us forget our worries, it can increase our confidence, it can help ‘block out’ painful memories, and it tastes good! However in the long-term, prolonged and excessive use of alcohol can lead to a whole host of problems both for our physical and mental health, not to mention an increase in accidents, violence and impaired judgment.

As alcohol leaves our body it can induce physical symptoms similar to anxiety.

Alcohol is often called a ‘mood-enhancer’ so if we are feeling upbeat and happy, alcohol can enhance this feeling. However, if we are feeling low or anxious alcohol can often exacerbate this feeling making us feel even worse.

UK government guidelines for alcohol recommend **no more than:**

**3-4 units daily for men - 2-3 units daily for women**

3 units = a pint of 5% lager or a large glass (250ml) of 12% wine

Drinking alcohol on top of medication can cause a number of problems – it can impair the effectiveness of the medication (particularly with anti-depressants). Certain medications can increase the sedative effects of alcohol making us more drowsy and uncoordinated. In short, the saying “**Everything in**

**Moderation**” applies to alcohol. But be particularly careful if you are experiencing stress or anxiety and it is perhaps best avoided if you are taking any antidepressant medication.