My Mental Health and Wellbeing

What is it?

Mental health and wellbeing is something that affects everyone. It’s not just about mental illness, the pressures of everyday life can mount up and affect different people in different ways. It’s a very personal thing, and there are no specific measurements for how much different life events (such as a relationship break-up, or exam stress) will affect your state of mind.

For some people, good mental wellbeing means managing your workload and avoiding unnecessary stresses. For others, a longer-term coping strategy is needed to help with particular psychological concerns.

There are, however, things you can be aware of and things you can do to try and minimise damage to your mental wellbeing.

What affects my mental health?

Life is unpredictable and sometimes things can happen that make it seem like hard work. There has been a lot of research to suggest different things that might affect your mental health, but there are no hard or fast rules as to what impact this will take. This can depend upon someone’s personality, their personal situation at the time of the stress and also upon how different “life events” interact with each other.

Suggestions of things that can cause stress include:

- Divorce (of yourself or your parents)
- The death of a close friend or a family member
- A relationship breakup or separation
- Getting engaged
- Moving house
- Forthcoming exams or deadlines
- Changing course of study
- Change in drug or alcohol use

You may have other things to add to this list.

Sometimes if you find yourself suffering from the symptoms of stress, it can be useful to think about what might be making you feel this way.

It may be useful for you to look at the changes that have occurred to you in the last 12 months. You could make a list. It doesn’t need to be exhaustive, and it isn’t about scaring yourself with all the things that worry you – but it can be useful to be able to look back and see what really matters and what you might be able to do to help yourself.

What are the signs of poor mental health?

Mental health is a personal thing, and some people may be greatly affected by some events, where other people are able to keep going as though nothing’s wrong.
Classic signs of poor mental wellbeing include:

- Difficulty meeting deadlines
- Inability to think clearly or to concentrate
- Sleeplessness or early waking
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of energy
- Loss of interest in things that would normally interest you
- Loss of pleasure
- Change in behaviour – e.g. speech, change in habits, altered dress

Not all people experience all symptoms, but you may recognise some of these signs either in yourself or in those around you.

What can I do?

Five Ways to Wellbeing

Here are 5 evidence based ways to help you improve your mental wellbeing. Try to integrate them into your daily life – think of them as your “5 a day” of mental wellbeing!

1. Connect… With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections with support and enrich you every day.

2. Be Active… Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity that you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

3. Give… Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

4. Keep Learning… Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.

5. Take Notice… Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are on a train, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

These are actions that are shown by research to improve people’s wellbeing. They can’t change our circumstances but building them into our daily lives can help us feel better, no matter what our starting point.

When should I seek support?

Everyone has moments where they can feel that they’re under too much pressure. However, if you find yourself in a situation that has been going on for more than 2 weeks, you may find it helpful to talk to someone or to seek further support.

If you are struggling, then it’s also worth telling someone in your academic department – a tutor or a lecturer – as soon as you can. That doesn’t mean you have to tell them everything if you don’t want to, but if they are at least aware that there are issues so they can help where they can. Prompt and early action can help to minimise any effect on your academic work or physical health.
People you can talk to here

There are lots of people here at the university who can support you, and there are also others outside the university if you prefer. You are not alone.

You could talk to your GP Doctor, or you could talk to a Counsellor at the university, or you could call up one of the university’s dedicated Mental Wellbeing Support officer. In all these cases, your enquiry will be treated in complete confidence. We will not share any information with friends, families, tutors or anyone else without your express permission.

What to do if you’re worried about a friend

If you are worried about a friend’s emotional state or personal situation then don’t panic – help is at hand. Often friends may notice behavioural changes or particular problems and can offer valuable emotional support during troubled times, just through talking. It is always important, however, to bear in mind how you are feeling. Just because a friend is experiencing difficulties, doesn’t mean that your own health and well-being becomes any less important.

Indeed, if you are offering support sometimes it is often more important that you are able to take a step back and make sure that you are comfortable with providing that level of care. That includes walking away if you find you are putting yourself at risk or dialling the emergency services (999) if you find yourself in a crisis situation.

If you are worried about a friend, then you could try talking to them about the issue. They may or may not be aware that they are having problems and sometimes just getting it out in the open can help. You could also let them know about Counselling or other services mentioned in this site that may be able to provide relevant support.

If they don’t feel like talking, it may be that they are already seeking support elsewhere – from another friend, parents, tutors or from a support department such as Counselling or their GP. Ultimately, it is their decision whether or not to share issues with you, so it is important to respect their confidentiality.

If you are still worried, then you can also approach Counselling for further advice. Counselling is a voluntary process and so you won’t be able to “refer” your friend to us, but we may be able to offer helpful suggestions for help or chat through any issues you are experiencing.

University Contacts

If you are experiencing emotional problems, distress or stress that is affecting your studies and you feel you can’t manage on your own, we urge you to get in touch so that support can be put in place.

Email studentservices@brighton.ac.uk or contact the following services direct:

Counselling
01273 642895 counselling@brighton.ac.uk
www.brighton.ac.uk/current-students/my-student-life/health-and-wellbeing/need-to-speak-to-someone/index.aspx

Disability and Dyslexia Team
01273 683799 disability@brighton.ac.uk
www.brighton.ac.uk/disability

The Counselling and Wellbeing Service provides a range of self-help information, useful contacts, apps and e books -