

# Wellbeing

Wellbeing is the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy. There is more to wellbeing than just feeling happy, however. It includes the condition of your mind (mental health), your body (physical health) and how satisfied you are with your life.

DON'T FORGET

Turn your negatives,  
**to positives**

When you have a good sense of wellbeing, you feel good about yourself and the world around you. You function well in your daily life, have a sense of purpose, and feel you have things under control.

Factors that affect your wellbeing include lifestyle choices like eating a good diet, consistent exercise, having strong meaningful relationships, taking care of yourself, etc.

HSE Ireland provides some important guidance for how to develop and maintain a sense of wellbeing called The Five Ways to Wellbeing. Based on expert research from across the world, this guidance lists a set of simple actions that people can practice every day to maintain or improve mental health and wellbeing, feel good and function well. These actions are:

## **1. Connect with other people**

Humans are social beings by nature. We crave connection to other people, and research shows that when we connect with family, friends and the wider community our wellbeing improves. We feel happier, more secure and have a better sense of purpose. Research also shows that people with stronger social relationships have a 50% increased likelihood of survival than those with

weaker social relationships. It is therefore important that you prioritise your relationships.

To improve your wellbeing, spend more time with the people who are important to you, such as your family. Also, make time for the people around you who may not be family, but with whom you have a connection, such as classmates or team mates on a sports team.

Don't wait for connections to just happen – make the effort. Reach out to old friends you haven't seen in a while. Join a sports team or book club. Chat to your neighbours. Eat lunch at school with someone new. You can also meet other people by volunteering in your community.

While you may be tempted to keep your connections virtual, this is not the same as meeting people in real life and having real chats. Reduce your screen time when you're hanging out with other people so you can really connect.

## 2. Exercise

Exercise has a range of benefits, both physical and emotional. One of the most important benefits of regular exercise is the positive effect it has on mental health. Research shows that regular physical activity leads to a greater sense of wellbeing and lower rates of depression and anxiety by alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety. Exercise triggers the production of endorphins, which are the body's natural antidepressants and pain relievers.

Being active doesn't mean you need to train for a marathon, but the kind of exercise you engage in must be brisk enough to get the heart pumping. This enhances blood circulation and helps you feel better. Exercise may be jogging, walking, swimming or any other sports you enjoy and can fit into your normal everyday routine.

You can easily fit exercise into your routine by making it a part of your day. For example, you can take the stairs instead of the lift or elevator, walk throughout the day when possible, or join a local walking group or sports club. When hanging out with friends, arrange to meet at a local park or other outdoor space where you can walk and get some fresh air, instead of inside a shopping centre. Other opportunities include: be fully involved in the activities during your PE class in school, set yourself a fitness challenge together with friends and cheer each other on. Just ten minutes of physical activity a day can make a difference to your mental wellbeing.

### 3. Pay attention to the world around you

In today's busy world, it is so easy to rush through life without noticing anything other than the next urgent thing you need to complete. Unless you make a deliberate effort, you could live every day without noticing the world around you. Part of wellbeing is being aware of the world around you – your surroundings, your emotions, your thoughts and feelings. Not only does this help you notice and appreciate the beauty of the world around you, it also helps you identify any feelings of disquiet you have inside, and to know if you're under stress or are anxious about anything. Noticing stress and anxiety is the first step to doing something about them.

Allow yourself to focus your mind on one thing at a time. Notice the sensations you are experiencing. Are you happy? Sad? Nervous? Excited? There are a few simple things you can do to help you pay attention to the world around you. These include meditation, relaxation exercises, mindful breathing, sitting down to eat your meals and savouring the tastes and flavours, listening to the sounds around you, keeping a gratitude journal to record the things you're grateful for in life. Take a moment to practice right now:

Relax your shoulders and think about how your body feels right now. Close your eyes and listen for the sounds around you. Now open your eyes and deliberately look around your surroundings for things that you have never noticed before. Take deep, deep breaths and exhale slowly. Notice how you feel inside.

### 4. Keep learning

Research shows that learning new things is good for your brain. It stimulates neurons in the brain, causing more neural pathways to be formed. This in turn allows electrical impulses to travel faster across the neural pathways as you process new information. This positively affects your mental wellbeing, as it boosts your confidence and self-esteem. In older adults, it has even been shown that learning new things can even help stave off dementia.

Learning new things does not have to be an intimidating experience. Start with something small that interests you, such as a new way to cook with a specific ingredient, or learning a new language, or how to do something you already do in a different way.

Set yourself a goal to learn something new each week or month. For example, ask questions to know something about your friend that you never knew before. Start a hobby or decide to try your own version of something you usually buy from the store. Find an interesting recipe and make it. Read a book on a subject you've been wanting to explore. Download and use a language learning app to learn new words in a different language.

## 5. Practice generosity

Studies show that giving is good for both the recipient and the giver. While the gift blesses the receiver, the person doing the giving also enjoys a range of physical and mental health benefits including:

- › Lower stress levels
- › Increased self-esteem
- › Stronger relationships
- › More happiness
- › Less depression
- › Lower blood pressure
- › Longer life

Giving makes you feel happier and more satisfied with life, and it doesn't have to require massive efforts or be expensive. Simple gifts like smiling at a stranger can lift both your mood and theirs. Saying 'thank you' for things done for you is a gift everyone appreciates. Letting a mother with children get in front of you in a queue is a blessing she would appreciate. Volunteer in your community, help a stranger with their bags, give up your seat for someone, help an elderly person out, help your parents complete a project without being asked, such as cleaning the house or cutting the lawn. All these are simple, yet very effective gifts that people appreciate.

Each of the actions above can make a big impact on your wellbeing and help you lead a more fulfilling life.

REMEMBER

Learn to forgive.  
**It is the secret to  
happiness**