



# Your mental health toolkit

A Co-op guide to help colleagues have great mental health.



It's what we do

# Helping you to...

Understand what great mental health is →

Know who and what the toolkit is for →

Maintain and improve your mental health →

Find help and support →

# What is great mental health?

**Great mental health is about having a healthy mindset, good relationships and positive self-esteem while coping with the stresses of everyday life.**

The Co-op want to help you have great mental health. This will help you to perform at your best in everything you do at work and at home.

To achieve this and reach your full potential, you need to try and be physically active and look after your mind.

This can help you to be happier and live life to the full.

To help you on your personal journey, we will guide you through some simple tools and exercises you can try either on your own, with colleagues at work or friends and family at home.

You can find more toolkits on mental health on the [Co-op colleague website](#).

## Who and what is the toolkit for?

This toolkit can be used by all colleagues across the Co-op.

You can use this toolkit in different ways to:

- Learn different tools and exercises to have great mental health
- Share its content with your colleagues to help them feel mentally and physically stronger
- Buddy up – you could try these fun exercises with your colleagues
- Teach your friends and family about great mental health

Visit the support page if you need help and advice.

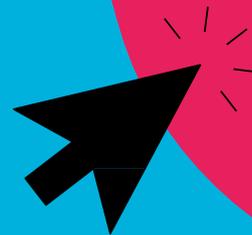


# How can I maintain and improve my mental health?

Here are 9 practical ways to have great mental health, with suggested ideas, tools and exercises.

The idea is to try and fit these in to your day so it becomes a regular and normal part of your daily life.

1. Live a healthy lifestyle
2. Have great quality sleep
3. Be calm and logical
4. Be mindful and recharge your brain
5. Develop a positive mindset
6. Focus on what's important to you
7. Be grateful and show gratitude
8. Spread happiness by helping others
9. Reach out for support when you need to talk



# Live a healthy lifestyle

Here are some ideas you can do every day to help improve your physical health.



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# Live a healthy lifestyle

It is proven that to have great mental health we need to look after our body. To do this, we need to keep up our physical fitness and keep moving, ensure we drink enough water, eat a healthy diet and finally have six to eight hours quality sleep at the end of the working day.

It's surprising just how much these basic things can have a direct impact on our day to day life.

## Here are some ideas you can do every day to help improve your physical health.

### Keep moving every day

Just by moving more you can significantly boost your mental health. Moving your body boosts the part of your brain that deals with memory loss and coping emotionally.

Aim to take part in activity for at least 150 minutes per week (NHS Guidelines). Brisk walks every other day are a great way to start getting more activity into your daily routine.

If possible, try to use stairs, stand up when you can or go for a walk in your breaks. If you buddy up with a friend or colleague you can encourage each other to get and stay more active than you are now.

### Couch to 5k

The NHS have a brilliant plan to get you started to achieve a 5k walk.

[You can follow this link to the NHS website,](#) which also lots of free exercise videos to get you started.



# Live a healthy lifestyle

## Eat healthy – find the balance

Eating healthy food and a good balanced diet is key to having great mental energy. Did you know that eating a diet high in processed foods can increase the risk of depression? Try to avoid these if possible and add some fruit and vegetables into your daily diet.

## Eat regular meals

No matter what shift you are working, you need to eat. A regular supply of food is essential for your brain to function properly. Skipping meals may cause you to feel weak, tired and struggle with concentration and might even lead to sugar cravings. Try to include some beans, granary bread, pasta and sweet potatoes in your diet. They all release energy slowly in the body to keep you going between meals.

## Look for the right fats

Healthy fat is important for maintaining brain health, particularly the unsaturated varieties such as olive and rapeseed oil, nuts and seeds. Try to avoid using processed and packaged foods too often as these could contain high amounts of unhealthy 'saturated' fats.

## Get more Vitamin D

Try to go out and get thirty minutes to two hours a day of sunlight when you can. It is a great source of Vitamin D which our body needs and will also improve your mood and make you feel good. If you work a night shift, try wake up where there is still a little daylight, even small amounts can help.

## Include oily fish

Fish oils are not only good for physical health but research also suggests they may reduce depression. Try two to four servings a week of fish such as salmon, tuna, mackerel or sardines. Limit this to two if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or likely to become pregnant in the future.

## Eat plenty of wholegrains, fruit and vegetables

These are rich in lots of the nutrients linked to great mental wellbeing. Wholegrain cereals, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, fruit and vegetables will reduce deficiencies which could have a negative impact your mood.

## Rest your sweet tooth

Aim to have no more than 25 – 40 grams of sugar per day (between five and eight teaspoons). Swap any fizzy drinks (which sometimes can contain over ten teaspoons of sugar) for water, milk or low sugar juices.



Apps and other digital tools are effective ways to share your goals, get advice and support, or talk to other people who can inspire you with their experiences.

Why not check out the free trackers at the NHS.

[Find out more here.](#)



Visit the support page if you need further help and advice.



## Have great quality sleep

At the Co-op many of us work shifts, so working out a sleep routine is really important for great mental health.



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# Have great quality sleep

Here are a few top tips that could help you get a better nights sleep.

Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) support helpline is run by a separate organisation to the Co-op and is completely free and confidential. Don't ever feel alone, you can call from a UK landline or a mobile with **FREE** contract minutes on **0800 069 8854**.

For online support, visit the lifeworks website: [www.coop.lifeworks.com](http://www.coop.lifeworks.com)



## Top tips

### Reduce artificial light

The blue light from laptops, mobiles or TV, tricks the brain into thinking it is daylight, which disrupts the body's natural sleep-wake cycle called the circadian rhythm, preventing the production of the sleep hormone called melatonin, making it harder to fall asleep.

### Watch what you eat

Try and eat moderate quantities of dairy products in the evening, such as milk, yoghurt and cottage cheese as well as oats, fish and turkey. Doing this will help your body to produce more sleep hormones.

### Relax your brain

Read a book, or listen to soft music, let your body relax and your brain wind down prior to sleeping. Activities like this help you to unwind.

### Caffeine curfew

Caffeine can stay in the blood stream for up to ten hours, which can keep your mind active, making it very difficult to switch off. Ensure you try to limit your caffeine intake to 4-5 cups per day and try and not have any at least nine hours before you need to sleep.

### Relax your body

Switch your muscles off one by one. Whilst deep breathing, focus your mind on the feet and toes. As you breathe in physically tense this area of the body for five to ten seconds and then completely relax as you slowly breathe out, then move on to the calf muscles and then the thighs. Work your way up the body through the abdomen, chest, shoulders and head. Repeat if necessary.

### Routine

Go to bed within thirty minutes of the same time each night and wake up at the same time each day. Trying to 'catch up' on sleep throws you off your sleep schedule.



Visit the support page if you need further help and advice.

# Have great quality sleep

Try keeping a sleep diary to record how much sleep you get each night.

Fill in the boxes and at the end of the week you will begin to see patterns in your quality of sleep.

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
What time did you go to bed last night?							
After settling down, how long did it take you to fall asleep?							
After falling asleep, for how long were you awake in the night? (in total)							
At what time did you wake up this morning?							
How long after waking did you get out of bed?							
From first going to bed to getting up this morning how long did you spend in bed?							
In total how long did you sleep for last night? (In hours)							
How would you rate the quality of your sleep last night? 1 = poor 5= very good							

## Sleep trackers

The NHS online has some free online trackers that might also help. You can click on the links below to find out how to download them

[Sleepstation](#)

[How-to-get-to-sleep](#)



## Be calm and logical

Train your brain to  
think logically, not  
emotionally.



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# Train your brain – think logically, not emotionally

When we begin to think emotionally it can drain our mental resilience. Being wound up, angry or upset can cause us loss of sleep, loss of fun and sometimes we can lose valuable positive relationships with colleagues, friends and family members.

Professor Steve Peters, author of the Chimp Paradox Mind Management programme (2012) calls your emotional brain (the Limbic brain) the 'Chimp'. Often our emotions, especially negative ones, can seriously damage our mental strength and health.

This part of the brain works on emotional instinct rather than logic and is five times faster to react. The logical part of our brain is calmer, makes rational decisions and keeps us balanced and composed.

**Have you ever had a blazing argument and ten minutes later you think, 'why on earth did I say that?'**

The Chimp is emotional, nervous and far more impulsive than our logical (human) side.

The problem with this is when highly stressed our chimp is quick to respond and it takes time for the human to catch up.

A really good read...



# Train your brain – catch it, check it, change it, release it

Try this exercise as soon as your Chimp is activated and do it again and again until you master it.

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To manage your Chimp, think about these four steps:

## 1. Catch it

When you start to feel nervous or worried, this is a good indicator that you are stressed and need to take action. Use a physical cue like some deep breaths to recognise that your Chimp is trying to take over and help to stop the process.

## 2. Check it

Before you allow the Chimp to react irrationally, get the human to start asking some logical questions, 'how important is it really?' 'Will this argument really matter in thirty minutes time?' By now your human is beginning to take charge.

## 3. Change it

Think of a balanced outcome to avoid the situation next time, if you get stressed out about traffic, then pick a different route.

## 4. Release it

The safest way to release your Chimp is to find a colleague or friend who has learnt about this process too. You can then share how you feel and release your Chimp with no interruptions or solutions. Once the Chimp has been allowed to have its outburst in a safe environment it should calm down.



Visit the support page if you need further help and advice.

# Be mindful and recharge your brain

Learning to relax your brain will relax your whole body and leave you feeling calm and collected.

We all live in a busy, at times, chaotic world and keeping our brains energised in these times is great to improve our mental health.

Being aware of the present moment, often called mindfulness, can help to change the way you approach life and increase your emotional wellbeing.

Mindfulness focuses on the here and now, it encourages you to mentally remove the usual day-to-day things that clutter up your mind and help you see more clearly.



# Be mindful and recharge your brain

Here are four simple exercises you can try at home or at work.

## The one-minute breath

This technique only takes a minute and can be done anywhere.

Set your stopwatch or sit in front of a clock and just breathe for one minute. Your aim is to focus on your breath for one whole minute. Notice how the breath feels as it enters the nostrils, how it feels cool as you inhale, how it's a little warmer as you exhale. All you're doing is concentrating on your breath for an entire minute.

Thoughts will flood in and out of your brain. See how long it takes for them to enter your brain. The more you practice, the longer the invasive thoughts will take to come back.

## Focus on the breathing: Power of ten

Once you have mastered the one-minute exercise try to build this up to ten minutes a day. To begin with, allow yourself two to three minutes each day to sit, relax and take in ten deep breaths. The key is to focus on the sensation of the breathing, visualise the breath going in through the nose and slowly out of the mouth and to allow your thoughts to come and go without judgement. Then build up to ten minutes a day.

## Mindful listening

Focus on the sounds around you, this could be the noise in the room or the sound of your favourite piece of music. By listening mindfully, we achieve a present awareness that lets us hear sounds without judgement.

## Mindful awareness

Instead of going through your daily motions on autopilot, take moments to stop and be aware of what you are doing. Focus on simple daily tasks such as getting a glass of water or spending one minute looking for a colour in your surroundings. This is designed to focus your brain away from negative stress and thoughts.

## NHS online course

The NHS has an online course if you want to practice mindfulness. You can register for a free introduction.

[Find out more here.](#)

Visit the support page if you need further help and advice.

# Develop a positive mindset

Many of us have peaks in activity whether it is busy times at work, a family event to plan for or school term times to prepare our children for. Worry and low-level stress can eat away at our mental energy.

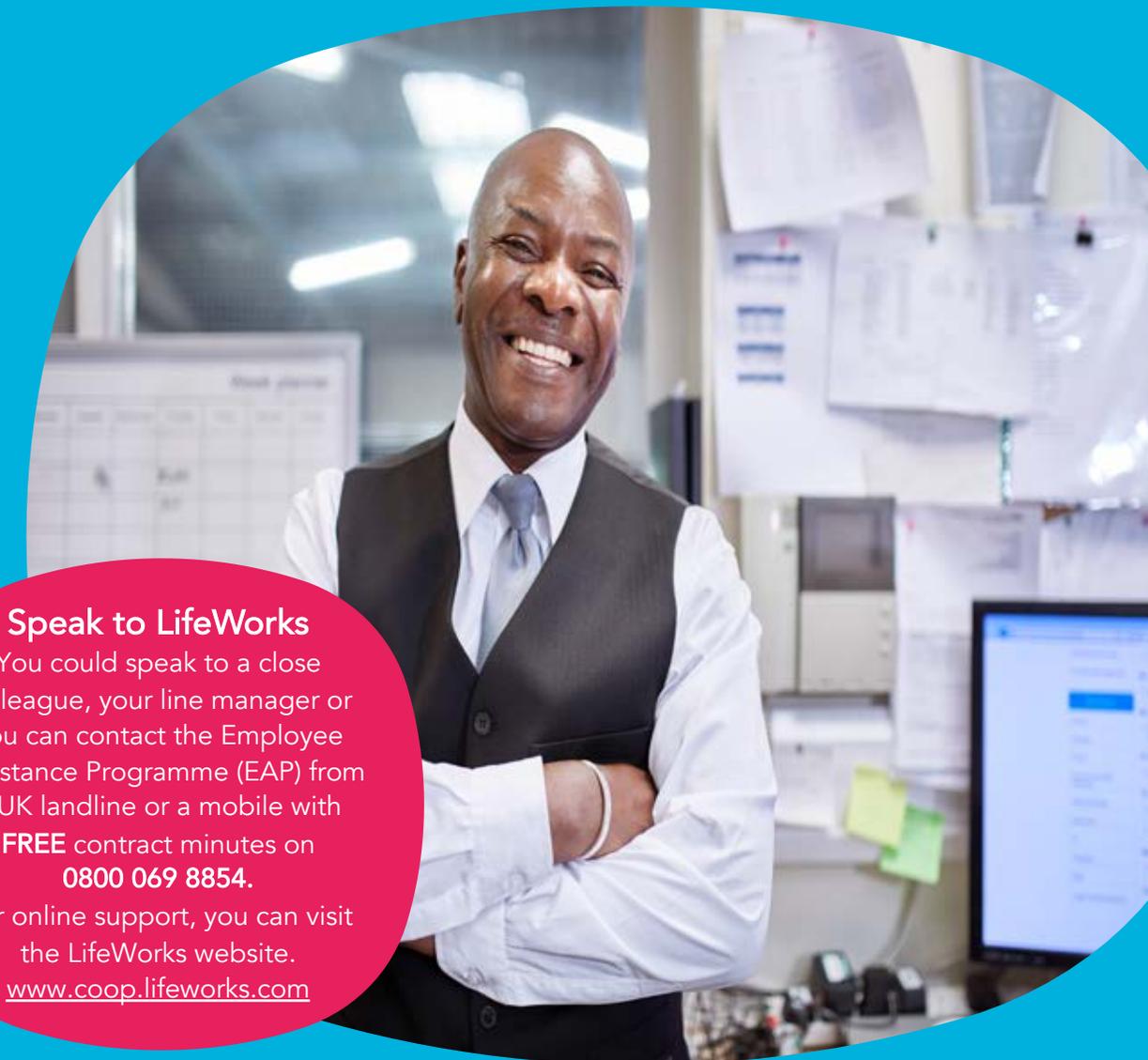
Negative thoughts and actions are the biggest contributors to 'brain drain'. If your thoughts are tired and low, then you'll feel tired and low. If you constantly look for and focus on the negative, then all you will get is more of the same happening to you.

## Try some of the following exercises to help build a positive mindset

### **Lift your head up and be strong**

Your posture often reflects your mental energy. Changing your physical state can be a powerful energiser, especially if done daily.

Start by just lifting your chin up by 2-3cm, pull your shoulders back, raise your arms and smile. The feelings of positive energy have a direct effect on building levels of neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to build new connections.



### **Speak to LifeWorks**

You could speak to a close colleague, your line manager or you can contact the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from a UK landline or a mobile with

**FREE** contract minutes on  
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# Develop a positive mindset

Actively looking for people, tasks and activities that make you feel like you have more energy helps the brain to recognise the great things in your life.

## NHS support is available here

Relax your body and mind with a series of audio tracks designed to help you build confidence, energy and a positive mindset.

[You can download the free App on the NHS website](#)



## Energy gainers and drainers

Write down what in your life will make you feel positive and the things that are more negative. Note the ways you can do more or less of these tasks and activities into your daily life.

### Focus on energy givers:

Identify 5 things in your life that make you feel positive - see if you can make more time for these things in your day.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Avoid energy drainers:

Identify 5 things in your life that do the opposite - you may not always be able to avoid them, but think about how you can reduce your exposure to them or handle them in a different way.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

My plan to avoid them is:

# Focus on what's important to you

There are many distractions that can take a toll on having great mental health and cause our brains to feel tired and wired.

These distractions at work can include the constant flow of emails, notifications and pop-ups on our phones.

Many of us have busy lives at home too. We may have children, be a carer, or studying as well as working, so it's key that we stay focused on what's important for our own health and that of our colleagues, friends and family.

The following are activities that may create more time for you, to do what matters for you.

## Speak to LifeWorks

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# Focus on what's important to you

## Always on:

### Create a distraction to-do list

Because the internet has made information instantly accessible, we tend to want to look something up the moment it crosses our mind. 'I wonder what the weather will be like tomorrow?', 'What year did that movie come out?', 'I wonder what's new in my Facebook feed?'

We become distracted from what we're working on the instant these questions or thoughts pop into our minds. Once we get distracted, it can take up to twenty five minutes to return to our original task and shifting our attention back and forth drains our mental strength.

Protect your thinking time and switch off all communication from phones and tablets during the time you need for yourself. Write a list of anything that is distracting you – at work it might be emails for a short time, at home it might be your phone, the TV or going somewhere for a short period of time away from a noisy neighbour.

## The wandering mind checklist:

### Why not try this exercise?

When you find yourself worrying, take a minute to examine the things you have control over and those you don't. Often our mind wanders to the worst thing that can happen and by answering the following questions we can calm our brain and work out a plan of action.

Recognise that, sometimes, all you can control is your effort, your attitude and your language. When you put your energy into the things you can control, you'll be much more effective.

Write down the problem that is worrying you and consider the following:

- **What you can control and influence?**
- **What you can't control and influence?**
- **What are your fears?**
- **Create a plan to manage your worry?**

Look at your answers and write down three actions you could do today that are within your influence and talk to somebody about your plan.

If you don't feel comfortable talking to a friend, colleague or family member call our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) on **0800 069 8854**.

**You can also click here to visit the support page**



# Focus on what's important to you

Spending time with positive people will improve your mental energy.

As the saying goes, you are the company that you keep.

Write down the names of the people who:

- **Inspire you to want more**
- **Strengthen you**
- **Make you feel hopeful**

If you have the same names coming up, they are your positive influencers and the colleagues, friends and family members who can help you find happiness.



## Find your passion and purpose

We are all born with a deep and meaningful purpose that often we haven't yet found. You may ask yourself, 'What is my purpose in life?' To be resilient having a sense of purpose and passion can help you cope with life's challenges. Ask yourself:

- **What do you love to do?**
- **What comes easily to you?**

Once you understand more about your purpose and passion, you don't need to completely overhaul your life all at once. Instead, just lean into it, bit by bit. Live your life by doing what you love whether it is at work or at home.

## Speak to LifeWorks

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Visit the support page if you need further help and advice.

# Be grateful and show gratitude

At the Co-op we want everybody to show they care for themselves and others. Often when we don't take a step back and see what we have, we can lose our mental energy and feel stressed trying to keep up with expectations of ourselves that may be unrealistic.

Gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude can help you feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, deal with adversity and build strong relationships.

**Being grateful for what we have is proven to improve happiness.**

## **How to practice gratitude**

If you write down each day three things you are grateful for, your brain increases chemicals responsible for feelings of pleasure and happiness.

Keep a note of what you are thankful for, make a pact with a colleague or friend to share with each other every day and feel happier each day.

## **Colleague recognition awards**

We have lots of colleagues who make a real difference to people's lives so if you spot somebody, show your gratitude and nominate them.

[recognition.coop.co.uk](https://recognition.coop.co.uk)



# Spread happiness by helping others

To improve self-esteem and a feeling of positivity, look to help others, whether through donating to charity or volunteering your time.

Those of us who are generous with our time, feel more connected to our communities and often build powerful and lasting relationships. It also helps you to become more optimistic, more thankful and feel more self-assured.

Stronger Co-op, Stronger Communities enables all who work at the Co-op to help others.

Below are links to further information on our Member Pioneers, who help bring people together to increase co-operation and our online platform that helps people Co-operate to make good things happen in, and across, communities.

[www.coop.co.uk/member-pioneers](http://www.coop.co.uk/member-pioneers)

<https://co-operate.coop.co.uk/about-us/>

## Action For Happiness

To find out more about what's happening in your community and how to get involved you can also visit [www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)



## It's good to talk

It's really important for great mental health to talk to others about the great times and tough times.



# Help and support

There is often a stigma around mental health and people don't like to talk about how they are feeling.

One great way to overcome this is by acknowledging the importance of your own mental health, talking about anxiety, depression, distress or anything that is causing you mental health problems.

There are many helpful resources available. The following links can be used to read, learn and contact others in order to support you to improve your mental health.

Many of the sites have downloadable fact sheets and take-away information which will support the use of this toolkit.

## Speak to LifeWorks

You could speak to a close colleague, your line manager or you can contact the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from a UK landline or a mobile with **FREE** contract minutes on **0800 069 8854**.

For online support, you can visit the LifeWorks website.  
[www.coop.lifeworks.com](http://www.coop.lifeworks.com)

## Here are links to online support:

- [NHS – How mindfulness helps mental wellbeing](#)
- [NHS – How exercise helps your mental wellbeing](#)
- [Consumer Credit Counselling Service Free advice on problem debt, based on what's best for you](#)
- [British Heart Foundation – Sleep better tips](#)
- [Here is a helpful guide for getting better sleep](#)
- [Further toolkits can be found on the Co-op colleague website](#)

