

Stabilising advice for mental health disorders

Everyone has days when they don't feel so good. It's part of life that things sometimes feel a bit heavier to bear. This might be because of external events that influence how you feel, or inner thoughts and emotions that affect you. This in turn might make you feel stressed or dejected, or make it more difficult for you to sleep at night.

There are things you can do to help yourself feel better. Taking care of oneself and one's body is the basis of physical and mental health. The suggestions below are good for you regardless of how you feel right now. By following this advice you can improve your well-being, increase your resilience, and help yourself to manage the situations you may be faced with.

Exercise regularly

Our bodies and minds benefit from physical exercise. Training or walking makes you happier, more energetic, and makes it easier to relax and to fall asleep. Physical activities that increase your heart rate are a good idea – this might be a brisk walk, going out for a run, practising a sport or going to the gym. It's also a good idea for the activity to be outdoors, so you breathe fresh air and absorb sunlight as well. A good rule of thumb is to exercise for 30 minutes three times a week.

It's better to do a little activity regularly than to have exaggerated ambitions that don't get fulfilled. It's also a good idea to do everyday exercise, like getting off the bus a stop early, cycling to school or using the stairs. Try to find a way to exercise that suits you.

Eat food that's good for you

A regular and varied diet is important. Food gives us energy and is something we need in order to grow and develop. By eating properly we give our brains the strength to focus, think and concentrate. It's good to eat a varied diet and to eat several meals a day. Eating a lot of vegetables and fruit is particularly good for us.

When we feel unwell we sometimes enjoy our food less, due to nausea or reduced appetite. But sometimes it may be the other way round – we get a craving for soft drinks, crisps and other junk food. Regular meals, and snacks between breakfast, lunch and dinner are important for your well-being. Eating together with others can make it easier to maintain a routine around meals.

It's also important to avoid alcohol and drugs. They often exacerbate anguish and dejectedness, making it harder to feel better.

Give yourself time to sleep and recuperate

Try to sleep at night. Sleep is very important – sleeping well provides protection against stress and ill health. Your mind and body need sleep in order to recuperate and process all the impressions from the day before. This in turn makes it easier to concentrate and learn things. You will be happier, stronger, and less sad and anxious if you sleep well, which will make it easier for you to deal with difficult situations and emotions.

When person is mentally unwell it's common for them to sleep either too little or too much. There are many tips for how to improve your sleep, and help is available if you often sleep badly. Try to wind down and take it easy before going to bed. Put your mobile phone out of sight one hour before bedtime. Keep regular hours for when you go to bed and when you get up. Keep your bedroom cool, dark and silent when you sleep. Try not to sleep during the day.

It's also a good idea to plan rest and recuperating activities for when you don't feel any pressure. Try to maintain a balance between activity and rest. Sometimes relaxation exercises, or just breathing calmly for a while, can help you recuperate.

Do things that you like

Doing things that we like doing gives us more energy and makes us happier. When we're not feeling well it's easy to withdraw and stop doing things. This makes it extra important to plan and do fun activities. You know what you like and need – it could be anything from going for a coffee, watching a film, playing football, to crocheting or painting. Try to fit in at least one activity every day. If it feels daunting, start out with some small activity that you're likely to manage.

Speak to other people

We humans need social contexts and other people. Try to socialise and spend time with people you like, in the way that you like.

You may have to overcome an initial reluctance, but it's usually a good idea to speak to other people about how you feel and what you find difficult. It can help you gain a different perspective on your situation. Other people can also offer you support or help to improve your situation. Speak to a member of your family, a friend, or someone else you trust.

There are also helplines and chat rooms you can seek out online.

Help is available

Feeling mentally unwell may be a burden, but you aren't alone, and help is available. If you've been feeling mentally unwell for a long time, seek help by speaking to your parents, with the school health care services, the youth advice centre, or your medical care centre. They can give you support to help you change your situation.

Sources and reading suggestions:

- 1177.se
- UMO.se
- Book suggestion: *Hjärnstark* by Anders Hansen