



# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

13-19 MAY 2024

This year's theme is:

# Movement: Moving more for our mental health.



Movement is important for our mental health. But so many of us struggle to move enough. We know there are many different reasons for this, so this Mental Health Awareness Week we want to help people to find moments for movement in their daily routines. Going for a walk in your neighbourhood, putting on your favourite music and dancing around the living room, chair exercises when you're watching television – it all counts!



One of the most important things you can do to help protect your mental health is regular movement. Moving more can increase your energy, reduce stress and anxiety, and boost your self-esteem. If you'd like to improve your mental health by moving more, read our tips to help you get started.

Movement is a great way to enhance our wellbeing. Even a short burst of 10 minutes' brisk walking can boost our mood and increase our mental alertness and energy. Movement helps us feel better about our bodies and improve self-esteem. It can also help reduce stress and anxiety and help us to sleep better.

If you'd like to get moving more, this guide will give you some ideas to get started as well as tips on how to get the best mental health benefit from the movement you're doing.

## Find moments for movement every day



Life gets busy and it can feel like we don't have time to spend on activities to improve our wellbeing. But, finding moments for movement throughout the day might be easier than you think.

How often do you find yourself 'waiting' throughout the day? Waiting for the kettle to boil; for your children to come out of school; for a bus to arrive; or for a delivery. These moments can add up. If you use the time to get moving, that will add up too. You could march on the

spot, do some stretches, or try some chair exercises.

Give it a go! You'll be surprised how much time you can fill with movement.

## Set small, achievable goals



When you're beginning to move more for your mental health, set yourself small goals. It might be walking to the end of your street. Then you can push yourself a little further each day.

Perhaps keep a movement journal so you can track your progress and how it makes you feel. Your goals are personal to you, and as you make progress you will create positive feelings that can boost your confidence and mood.

## Take a break from sitting



Many of us are sitting for long periods during the day: working at desks, driving, sitting down to browse the internet or scroll through social media, watching our favourite television show or reading a book.

Research shows that it's unhealthy to be sitting or not moving for long. If you are sitting for large periods of time throughout the day, set a timer to take regular breaks to stand up, walk around and stretch your body.

## Find the fun

However you choose to get moving, the best option is usually the one we enjoy the most.

As we get older, we sometimes forget that movement can be fun! Instead of thinking of exercise as a chore, embrace your inner child and find the joy in movement. Fun and laughter alongside movement will increase your motivation and the psychological benefits.

Play games like tag with family or friends, interrupt extra-long work meetings with a bit of fun movement to give everyone an energy boost, or go for a picnic in the park and

a game of rounders.

There are also online games and apps that can get you out and about – try the treasure hunt game Geocaching or maybe Pokémon Go.



## Connect with others



We can strengthen our personal relationships or even make new friends when we take part in movement activities with other people. These social connections are also great for our mental health and wellbeing.

Think about ways you can make your catch-ups with friends more active. Maybe, instead of meeting in a coffee shop, get your coffee to go and take a walk at your comfortable pace. Or visit your local pool and chat while having a swim.

You could also use opportunities for movement to meet new people. Check out what groups and activities are taking place in your area and sign up to join in. Being part of a club or team is a great way to increase your self-esteem and help reduce feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety.

## Movement looks different for everyone, don't compare yourself to others

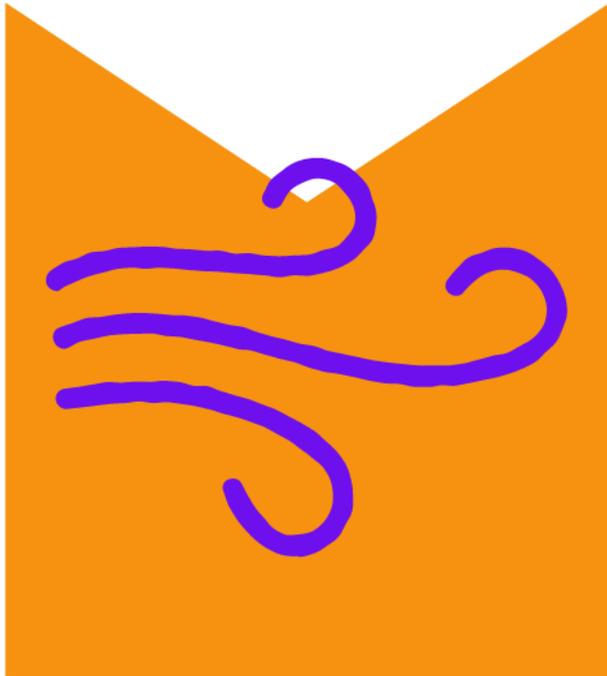


It can feel nerve-wracking to think about moving more if you're worried you can't keep up with other people. Remember, you don't have to be super sporty to get the mental health benefits that come with more movement. For your own wellbeing, be kind to yourself and don't feel pressured to keep up with someone else.

Whatever form it takes, movement that gets our heart pumping and muscles moving releases the "feel good" hormones that help reduce feelings of stress and anger.

If you haven't exercised in a long time or have reduced mobility, you can start off slowly. A little can go a long way and the more you do it, the easier it gets and the more active you'll be.

## Be mindful about your movement



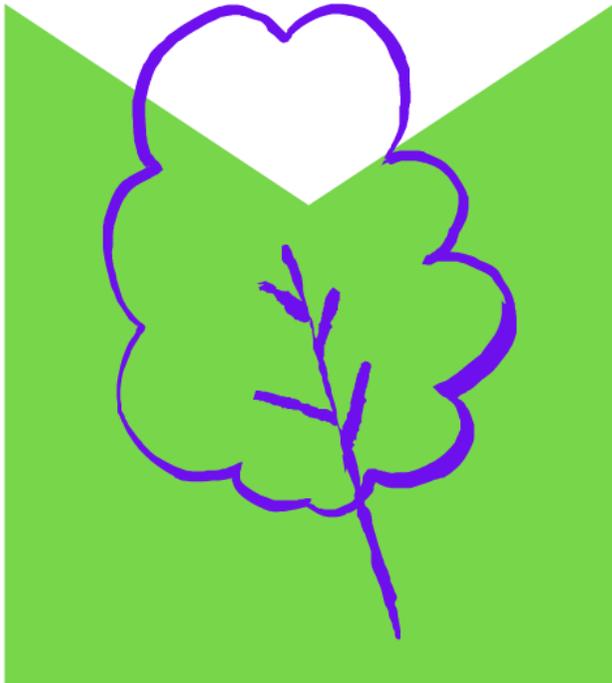
Often, we are moving without realising it. For example, when we do housework, grocery shopping, or walking to work.

Try to be mindful of how you're moving, and the way it makes you feel in both your mind and body. Noticing how we're breathing, the sights and sounds around us, how the air feels on our face, can help us relax and feel less stressed.

Practising mindfulness can help with this. For example, you can practise mindful walking.

It might feel good to do certain movements faster or slow some of them down. Try to do what feels good. And remember to recognise and celebrate your moments for movement, big and small.

## Moving in nature



Research suggests that doing movement in an outdoor 'green' environment has greater positive effects on our wellbeing compared to doing activity indoors. So why not take your moments for movement out in the wild? Go for a walk in the countryside or perhaps try cold water swimming at the beach (make sure to take appropriate safety precautions see RNLi advice).

Even if you live in the city, nature is often close by. Parks, gardens, nature reserves, forests, all provide opportunities for exercise, movement and meeting new people. You could find opportunities to get moving such as a walking group, gardening club, or volunteering for woodland and park maintenance.

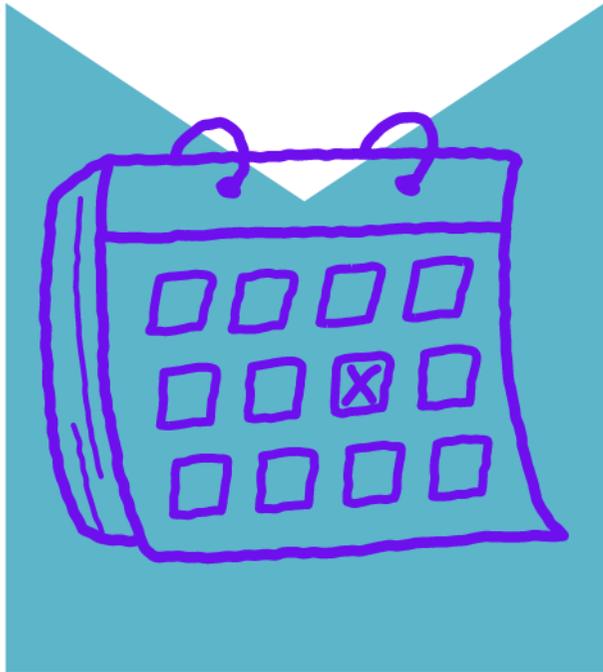
## Try something new



When we are open to trying new experiences, we reap the rewards to our wellbeing. You might be inspired by watching Strictly Come Dancing but have been too shy to try your local dance classes. Give it a whirl! Pushing ourselves to try new things opens us up to new opportunities for movement, making new friends and having fun.

Having the courage to try something new will also give your confidence a boost. If you don't try, you'll never know!

## Plan things to look forward to



We know having events and plans in the diary to forward to, is great for mental health, it can give a sense of hope and excitement for the future.

Add moments for movement to your diary and make plans to do fun things that you can get excited about. This could be planning a family outing for a walk in an interesting place you haven't been to before, joining a club or class that you can look forward to every week, or a night out dancing with friends.

## Listen to music that gets you moving

Some songs are just made for moving. We all have favourite tunes that get us on the dance floor. So, crank them up and have a living room disco where you can dance like no-one's watching!



Why not play your favourite song when you get up in the morning, dance around and put yourself in a good mood for the day ahead?

## Be kind to yourself, moving more is self-care



It can be hard to get yourself up and active if your mental health is poor. The days when you lack motivation or are feeling low are likely when you'll see the biggest boost to your mood by getting moving. Think of moving more as an act of self-care that will help you to feel good.

If you're struggling to even leave your bed or house, take advantage of the times when you have to get up; for example, to use the bathroom. Use these times to do a bit of movement – some stretches, some lunges, marching on the spot.

If you feel anxious about going outside, there are also lots of home workout ideas on YouTube that can help get you moving.

Don't be too hard on yourself if you're struggling to get moving. Take small steps each day and you'll soon feel the benefits.

## Don't forget to rest



Taking time to rest is important for good mental health, especially if you've been using up a lot of energy. Try to prioritise time for rest and establish a regular, relaxing routine that lets you unwind and sends a signal to your brain that it's time to rest.

## Celebrate your achievements!



Congratulate yourself for taking care of your body and mind. Make sure to reward yourself too, do something else that you enjoy.

Appreciation is a powerful way of generating positive thoughts and feelings.  
**Recognising our progress is an important part of moving for our mental health!**