

# Mental wellness for men: strategies for a healthier mind



In today's fast-paced world, mental health has emerged as a critical concern for everyone, including men, who have traditionally been encouraged to maintain a stoic silence about their emotional struggles.

## Understanding the importance of mental wellness



Societal expectations, professional responsibilities, and personal challenges can weigh heavily on men's shoulders, leading to unchecked mental health issues.

This guide aims to provide men with actionable strategies to improve their overall mental health – focusing on daily practices, mindfulness and mental wellness, to encourage a holistic journey towards a happier, healthier mind.



**Recognising the importance of mental wellness** marks the first step towards a healthier mind and life, in a society where masculine ideals often discourage expressing vulnerability.

Mental wellness influences our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour while also impacting our ability to cope with stress, relate to others, and make decisions.

For men aspiring to lead a fulfilling life, prioritising mental health is imperative. Stress, anxiety, and depression can affect anyone,

irrespective of age, profession, or background. These conditions can deteriorate life quality, strain relationships, and even have physical health repercussions. Conversely, a healthier mental state can lead to heightened productivity, creativity, and a greater sense of purpose.

## Establishing daily habits for mental wellness



Cultivating positive daily habits is a cornerstone of fostering mental wellness. These habits can lay the foundation for a healthier mental state.

### 1 Prioritise physical health

Regular physical activity is beneficial not just for the body but also serves as a significant mood enhancer, so strive for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week. This could encompass brisk walking, cycling, swimming, or any other activity you enjoy and can maintain consistency with.

### 2 Foster meaningful relationships

Social connections are essential for mental wellness. They provide support, enrich your life, and can even help you live longer. Effort to maintain strong relationships with family and friends is crucial. Engage in activities that allow you to connect with others, be it through sports, clubs, volunteering, or social groups.

Don't hesitate to reach out and discuss your feelings. Sharing your experiences can strengthen your relationships and offer the support you need most.

### 3 Establish a mindfulness practice

Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment without judgement. It can reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and boost overall mental health. Practices like meditation, deep breathing exercises, or yoga can help you become more mindful. Start with a few minutes each day and gradually increase the duration as you become more comfortable with the practice.

### 4 Get enough sleep

Quality sleep is vital for mental health. Insufficient sleep can exacerbate stress, anxiety, and depression. Aim for 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night. Establish a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time every day, including weekends. Create a restful environment by minimising screen time before bed, reducing caffeine intake in the evening, and ensuring your bedroom is dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature.



### 5 Eat a balanced diet


Diet plays a significant role in your mental health. A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains can help enhance mood and energy levels. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in oily fish, flaxseeds, and walnuts, are particularly beneficial for mental health. Attempt to minimise the intake of processed foods, sugary snacks, and high-fat foods.


Exercise is a potent stress reliever. It elevates the production of endorphins, your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, which act as natural painkillers and mood elevators.


## The psychological benefits of exercise


### Finding the right activity for you


The key to maintaining an exercise routine is to find activities you enjoy and that fit your lifestyle.

 **Walking:** Often underrated, walking is a fantastic way to get moving. It's accessible, low impact, and can be a meditative practice.

 **Cycling:** Whether it's a leisurely bike ride through the park or a more intense indoor cycling class, cycling is an excellent way to get your heart pumping.

 **Team sports:** Joining a football, rugby, or cricket team can offer both physical exercise and a sense of community.

 **Yoga:** Yoga combines physical poses with breath control and meditation, offering a holistic exercise that can reduce stress and improve flexibility.

 **Swimming:** Swimming is a superb low-impact exercise that can help reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance physical health.



- **Reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety:** For some, exercise can be as effective as antidepressant medication, without the side effects.
- **Improve sleep:** Engaging in physical activity can help you fall asleep faster and deepen your sleep, combatting insomnia and ensuring you're well-rested.
- **Boost self-esteem:** Meeting exercise goals, whether running a certain distance or lifting a specific weight, can enhance your self-confidence and improve your perception of self-worth.
- **Enhance cognitive function:** Regular exercise can keep your thinking, learning, and judgement skills sharp as you age. It can also lower the risk of developing conditions like Alzheimer's disease.

**For those living with mobility issues,** consider these additional options that are just as beneficial and can be adapted to suit your needs:

**Chair yoga:** This form of yoga is adapted to be performed while sitting on a chair or using a chair for support, making it accessible for people with limited mobility. It focuses on breathing, flexibility, and strength, just like traditional yoga.

**Water aerobics:** Performed in shallow water, water aerobics is gentle on the joints and provides resistance for improving strength and endurance. It's a fun and social way to exercise, suitable for all ability levels.

**Hand cycling:** A great cardiovascular workout, hand cycling is done using a specially designed bike that's powered by your arms instead of your legs. It's an exhilarating way to get outdoors and enjoy some fresh air.

### Seated strength

**training:** Using free weights, resistance bands, or your own body weight, you can perform a variety of strength-training exercises without having to stand. This can help improve muscle tone, strength, and joint flexibility.



**Tai chi:** Often described as "meditation in motion," tai chi is a gentle form of martial arts that involves slow, controlled movements and deep breathing. It can be adapted for those with mobility issues and is known for reducing stress and improving balance and flexibility.

# Embracing journaling and mindfulness:

## Keys to emotional balance



In the quest for mental wellness, journaling and mindfulness stand out as potent tools for achieving emotional balance and greater self-awareness.

Let's delve into how journaling and mindfulness can be woven into your life for a healthier mind. It involves regularly writing down your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and reflections.

### Journaling

To begin with journaling, allocate a few minutes each day to write.

There's no right or wrong way to journal; it's about what feels therapeutic for you. You might write about your day, list things you're grateful for, or explore your feelings about a specific event or situation.

- **Facilitate emotional expression:** Writing helps process emotions, reducing their intensity and allowing for better understanding.
- **Boost self-awareness:** Regular reflection through writing can reveal patterns in your thoughts and behaviours, offering insights into your motivations and emotional triggers.
- **Enhance problem-solving:** Journaling can break down complex issues into manageable parts, facilitating easier solutions.
- **Provide a stress relief outlet:** The act of writing can be therapeutic, helping to lighten the emotional load of stress and anxiety.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the act of being fully present and engaged in the moment, without judgement. It involves noticing your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment with curiosity and kindness.

Mindfulness can be practised through formal meditation, but it can also be integrated into daily activities. Try to be fully present while eating, walking, or during conversations. Pay attention to the sensations, thoughts, and feelings that arise, observing them without judgement.

- **Reduce stress:** By concentrating on the present, mindfulness can help break the cycle of stress-inducing thought patterns.
- **Improve emotional regulation:** Mindfulness teaches you to observe your emotions without being overwhelmed by them, enhancing your ability to manage difficult feelings.
- **Boost concentration:** Mindfulness practices can sharpen your focus and attention to detail, making it easier to concentrate on tasks.
- **Enhance relationships:** By becoming more aware of your thoughts and reactions, mindfulness can help you respond more thoughtfully in your interactions with others.

# Nurturing relationships:

## A cornerstone of mental wellness

Human connections are fundamental to our mental and emotional health. Relationships offer support, enrich our lives with meaning, and significantly impact our wellbeing. Strong, healthy relationships have been shown to increase happiness, improve health, and reduce stress.

### Positive relationships



Relationships act as a support network, offering encouragement, understanding, and a sense of belonging.

In times of stress or sadness, having someone to turn to can make a significant difference.

- **Provide emotional support:** Knowing you have someone who listens and cares can help you navigate life's ups and downs.
- **Offer a sense of belonging:** Strong relationships give a feeling of being part of something larger, reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- **Encourage healthy behaviours:** Loved ones can motivate you to take care of your health, whether it's through exercise, eating well, or seeking help when needed.
- **Boost self-esteem:** Positive interactions and recognition from others can enhance your sense of self-worth and confidence.

It's important to acknowledge that not everyone has a ready-made support network. For some, the absence of close relationships, whether through circumstances, life changes, or personal perceptions, can feel particularly isolating.

If you find yourself in this situation, here are a few suggestions on how to start incorporating small moments of connection into your life:

- **Engage in community activities:** Joining local clubs, groups, or classes can introduce you to people with similar interests and provide a natural environment for connections to form.
- **Volunteer:** Offering your time to a cause can not only enrich your life with purpose but also connect you with others who share your values.
- **Be open to casual interactions:** Sometimes, a simple conversation with a neighbour or a casual chat with someone at a coffee shop can brighten your day and slowly widen your circle of acquaintances.
- **Reach out online:** Many online communities and forums cater to a vast array of interests and support needs. Engaging in these virtual spaces can provide a sense of belonging and introduce you to potential friends.

## Building and maintaining strong relationships

Nurturing relationships requires effort and intentionality. Here are some strategies to help build and maintain these important connections:

- **Communicate openly:** Honest and open communication is the foundation of any strong relationship. Share your thoughts and feelings and encourage others to do the same.
- **Be a good listener:** Show genuine interest in what others have to say. Listening without judgement can deepen your connections and help others feel valued.
- **Spend quality time together:** Make time for the people who matter most. Whether it's a simple coffee catch-up or a weekend getaway, quality time strengthens bonds.
- **Show appreciation:** Regularly expressing gratitude and appreciation can reinforce your relationships and make your loved ones feel cherished.
- **Support each other:** Be there for others in times of need. Offering your support during difficult times can solidify your bond and provide mutual emotional support.

## Balancing relationships and personal time

While relationships are vital, it's also important to maintain a balance between social time and personal time – ensuring you have moments for self-reflection, hobbies, and personal growth is crucial for your overall wellbeing.

Striking this balance can help you return to your relationships refreshed and with more to offer.

## Seeking new connections

**Expand your social circle:** Consider joining clubs, groups, or activities that align with your interests.

**Volunteering:** This is an excellent way to meet people while contributing to your community.

**Be open to new experience:** These can lead to meaningful connections and enrich your life in unexpected ways.

Nurturing relationships is an ongoing process that plays a crucial role in mental wellness.

By investing time and effort into your connections, you can build a supportive network that enhances your quality of life and bolsters your mental health.



This article incorporates content reproduced with the kind permission of HealthHero.

### About WPA

WPA is a specialist not-for-profit health insurer. With a history dating back to 1901 they look after private individuals, families and all businesses from micro enterprises through to blue chip global brands.