



# Tips for a healthy headspace



There are a number of ways you can look after your mental health and wellbeing every day...

## Get informed

Understanding more about what you're going through is an important first step. Information to help you make good decisions about relationships, school, finances and seeking help is available in a number of ways. Read pamphlets, articles or fact sheets, listen to podcasts, talk to or watch videos about others who have had similar experiences, read trusted websites for information, or ask a trusted adult for advice.



## Sleep well

Getting a good night's sleep helps you feel energised, focused and motivated. Adolescence is a time when a number of changes to the "body clock" impact on sleeping patterns and you are more likely to have problems with sleep. Developing a sleeping routine can help you sleep much better. To do this try to wake up around the same time each day, get out of bed when you wake up, and go to bed around the same time each night. Avoiding caffeine after lunchtime, having a quiet, dark and uncluttered bedroom and shutting down your phone, laptop and other electronic devices before bed can also help you get a good night's sleep.

## Eat well

Eating well doesn't only reduce the risk of physical health problems, like heart disease and diabetes, but it can also help with your sleeping patterns, energy levels, and your general health and wellbeing. You might have noticed that your mood can affect your appetite and food intake. A good balanced diet with less of the bad things (e.g. junk food and lots of sugars) and more of the good things (e.g. vegies, fruit, whole grains and plenty of water) will make sure you have all of the vitamins and minerals to help your body and brain function well.



## Physical activity

Physical activity is important for everyone's health and wellbeing. If you're feeling down or finding things are difficult, physical activity may be the last thing you feel like doing. But even small activities like walking around the block can help relieve stress and frustration, provide a good distraction from your thoughts, help you concentrate and can help you look and feel better. Find a physical activity that you enjoy (e.g. swimming, playing sports with friends or cycling) and make a plan to do it regularly.



## Set realistic goals

Setting realistic goals can help you to work towards a healthy headspace. Small, realistic goals can be a great way to work towards feeling well – everyone has to start somewhere. Work towards eating well, getting more active, sleeping better and also think about working towards long-term life goals. Setting and achieving realistic goals can be incredibly motivating and can help build self-confidence.



## Build strategies

We all have coping strategies – some good, some not so good (e.g. using drugs and alcohol). There are various positive coping strategies you can try; exercise, relaxation techniques, talking to someone, writing or art. Experiment with what works best for you.



## Reduce harmful effects of alcohol and drug use

Some people make the mistake of thinking that taking drugs and/or alcohol can help get them through tough times. While it may help people to cope temporarily, drugs and alcohol are one of the leading causes of harm to Australian young people and can contribute to, or trigger, mental health problems over time. Being responsible and reducing your use can improve your health and wellbeing.



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## Change your self-talk

Self-talk is the way that you talk to yourself, that voice inside your head. It can be positive (e.g. "I can make it through this exam") or negative (e.g. "I'm never going to be able to pass this subject"). There are a number of things you can do to change the direction of your self-talk. First, listen to your inner voice – is your self-talk helping you or reinforcing bad feelings? Next, try to replace your negative thoughts with more realistic ones. Try to look for a more rational spin on your situation or think of strategies to tackle your problems, rather than giving up hope. By working on your self-talk the more you'll feel confident and in control of yourself.



## Develop assertiveness skills

Being assertive means standing up for your own rights; valuing yourself and valuing others' opinions without letting them dominate you. This can help build your self-esteem and self-respect. Being assertive is not the same as being aggressive. Remember to always listen, be prepared to compromise and be respectful of the other person's opinion, while still being confident, calm and knowing what you want.

## Relax

There are many ways to relax and different relaxation techniques to use to overcome stress. Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing and relaxing specific groups of muscles from your feet all the way to your head, while focussing on your feelings of tension and relaxation. You could also try breathing techniques, such as deep breathing or focussed breathing (breathing in through the nose and as you breathe out say a positive statement to yourself like 'relax' or 'calm down'). Place a hand over your diaphragm to make sure you're breathing slowly – you should feel your hand move if you're doing it right. Focus on breathing in slowly for 4 seconds, holding your breath for 2 seconds and breathing out slowly for 6 seconds.



## Practice conflict resolution

Having a hard time with friends or family is difficult for most people. Talking through the issues in a calm and thoughtful way is the best approach. Avoid getting personal, be willing to compromise and listen to their perspective.



## Help and be kind to others

Do something to help someone else. Acts of kindness help other people but also make you feel good. Give a compliment, offer to help someone out or volunteer either on a once-off project or an ongoing basis and allow yourself to feel good for making someone else feel good.

## Be socially active and get involved

Social relationships are really important to your general wellbeing. It is okay to take time out for yourself but friends can provide support when you're having a tough time. Spending time with friends is also really important for keeping and building on existing friendships. Getting involved with volunteer work, hobbies, clubs or committees, or sports can help you feel connected to your wider community while also meeting new people. If you're not feeling up to going out, even a phone call, email, text message or Facebook message can help us feel connected to friends and family.

## Play



Play is important for staying mentally healthy. Devoting time to just having fun can recharge your battery, revitalise your social networks, and reduce stress and anxiety.

## Seek help

A problem can sometimes be too hard to solve alone, even with support from friends and family. Be honest with yourself about when you may need support and get professional help. You can see your general practitioner (GP), make an appointment to chat to someone at your local **headspace** centre or visit **eheadspace.org.au**. Finding help might feel scary at the start but it gets easier over time. Getting support can help you to keep on track with school, study or work, and in your personal and family relationships. The sooner you get help the sooner things can begin to improve for you.



**headspace**  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)