



“Change your thoughts and you change your world”

- Norman V. Peale

In this month’s newsletter:

Mental Health Awareness Week

Walk this way, walk this May!

Fact & Tip of the month



Mental Health Awareness Week

The Mental Health Foundation has announced that this year’s Mental Health Awareness week will take place from Monday 9th May – Sunday 15th May with loneliness and its effect on our mental health being the theme throughout.

The Foundation’s Mental Health in the Pandemic research found that loneliness has been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. So, across this week we encourage you to build meaningful connections with your friends, family, and colleagues.



Loneliness in the UK

Loneliness affects millions of people in the UK every year and can be both the drive for and a product of poor mental health.

The pandemic has given rise to a sense of loneliness and isolation undermining confidence in daily routines. Over the last couple of years, many of us have had far less access to loved ones. Technology and changes in society along with convenience and cost efficiencies are driving more and more activities online with less need for human interaction.

Our workplaces are also changing. With many individuals’ adapting to home and hybrid working, we need to embrace this change while building and maintaining meaningful connections with our colleagues.

Loneliness and mental health

We all feel lonely from time to time. Feelings of loneliness are personal, so everyone’s experience will be different.

One common description of loneliness is the feeling we get when our need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. But loneliness is not always the same as being alone.

My mental health is making me feel lonely

Feeling lonely is damaging my mental health



You may choose to be alone and live happily without much contact with other people, while others may find this a lonely experience. Or you may have lots of social contact or being in a relationships or part of a family, and still feel lonely – especially if you don’t feel understood or cared for by the people around you.

Feeling lonely isn’t in itself a mental health problem, but the two are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem can increase your chance of feeling lonely and feeling lonely can increase the risk of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and stress if experienced over a long period of time.



Tips to manage loneliness

Make your alone time meaningful

If you don't enjoy your own company very much, this could be a struggle initially, but one that gets easier with practice.

Instead of focusing on the fact that you're alone, make your alone time meaningful and focus on self-love.

Think about the things that really make you feel good and use your alone time to do these. It could be anything from taking a walk outside, having a pamper evening, re-organising your kitchen or cooking yourself a three-course meal.

The more you use your alone time to do the things you love, the more you will begin to appreciate and look forward to these moments.

Make new connections or nurture existing ones

If you're feeling lonely because of a lack of satisfying social contact in your life, you could try to meet more, or different people.

Consider joining a class or group based on your hobbies or interest, or if you can, volunteering is a good way of meeting people.

If you're feeling lonely because you don't spend enough time with your existing connections, reach out and arrange to meet for a coffee or even for a catch up over the phone! Life gets busy and it's easy to slip into the rut of feeling like people don't care if they don't reach out. But remember, that's very unlikely to be the case and is more so that they have had to focus on their own responsibilities.

Try to open up

You might feel that you know plenty of people, but what is actually wrong is that you don't feel close to them, or they don't give you the care and attention that you need.

In this situation it might be helpful to open up about how you feel to friends and family. If you don't feel comfortable opening up to the people you know, you could try speaking with a therapist or using a peer to peer support service – see if your workplace EAP provider offers signposting to talking therapies and CBT!





Walk this way, walk this May!

National Walking Month (co-ordinated by Living Streets) takes place annually in May and is a great opportunity to get active and learn about the local walks in your areas as well as the benefits you can feel from walking. This year, Living Streets is encouraging people to try walking for just 20 minutes a day by joining in with their #Try20 campaign.

20 minutes a day to keep the doctor away

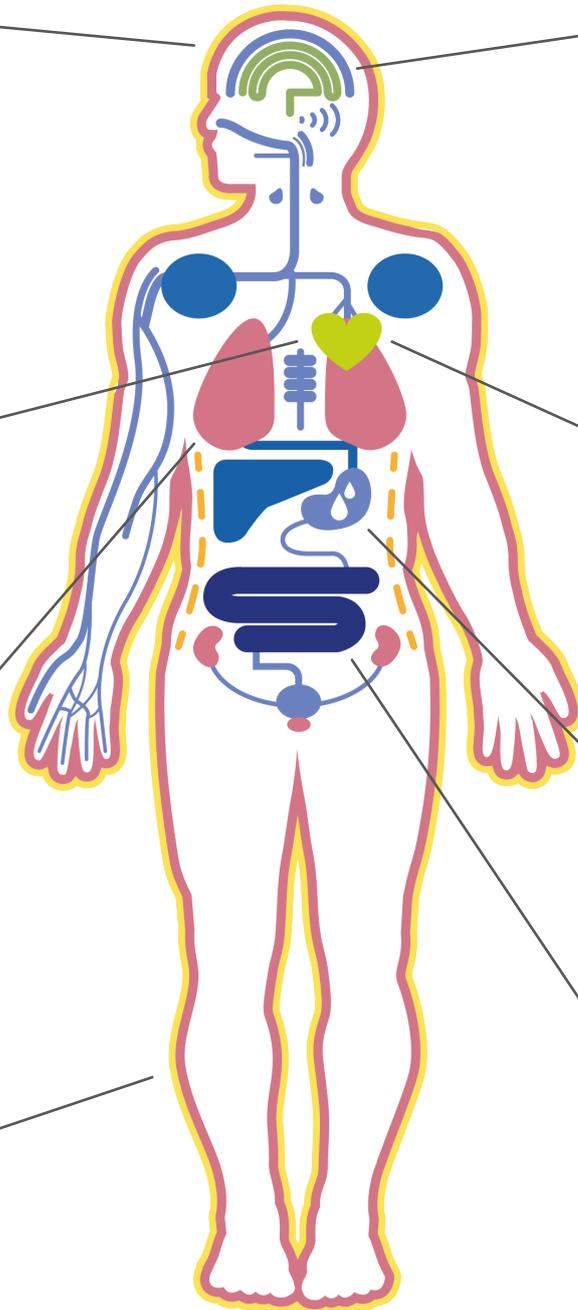
Moving our bodies regularly has innumerable benefits and we've outlined some of these below.

1 Studies have found that taking a moderately-paced walk can instantly improve your mood as well as easing symptoms of depression and anxiety. This is due to endorphins being released that trigger a positive feeling in the body.

2 Exercise, such as ten minutes of brisk or moderate walking three times a day, lowers blood pressure by reducing blood vessel stiffness so blood can flow more easily.

3 Research published in 2018 reported that brisk walking for 30 minutes can increase the activity of your body's white blood cells, boosting your immune system's defences against pathogens—a benefit that will surely come in handy during cold and flu season.

4 A brisk daily walk of two to four miles can increase muscular strength, endurance, and definition in your legs.



5 If you feel like you hit an afternoon slump every day, you may want to get moving. Researchers from University of Georgia found that people who walked just 20 minutes a day reported feeling more energetic and less fatigued. Walking increases blood flow, which in turn increases the body's ability to create energy.

6 Walking for 20 minutes a day can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke by 8%, according to research from the University of Leicester. Walking for 40 minutes can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease by up to 20%.

7 Walking daily, particularly after a meal, can help to lower your blood sugar and reduce your risk for type-2 diabetes. This is especially the case for people who are considered pre-diabetic.

8 Regular brisk walking, when combined with healthy eating, is hugely effective for weight loss, helping you burn off extra calories. Walking also helps to reduce visceral fat, also known as belly or abdominal fat which is especially dangerous to our health.



How many steps do I need to do daily?

You may have been told that 10,000 steps a day is the ideal amount and while that's a good amount to aim for, more or fewer steps might be a better fit depending on certain factors such as your age, health or physical ability.

According to the NHS, the average Briton walks between 3,000 and 4,000 steps a day – significantly less than the 10,000 step target we all have in mind. Yet many people also do significantly more, and for them 10,000 steps might not be much of a goal.

Laura Williams, a diet and fitness expert explained in a BBC article that “if you run three times a week, you’re not going to get fitter by walking 10,000 steps. You’re already quite fit. You’re going to need to do more to get fitter than someone who is chronically unfit and inactive. For them, walking 5,000 or 10,000 steps a day will improve their fitness”.

Start by tracking your steps and go about your days as you usually would to get an idea of your baseline amount. This doesn't have to only include physical walks but other things such as an active job, running, carrying out household chores, all count towards your step goal.

Then, you can increase your target by 1,000 steps every week or two until you're hitting or exceeding 10,000.

Don't forget to ensure that your goal is realistic and achievable to keep you motivated and get you moving more!



Fact of the month

If you walk 9000 steps a day it will equate to walking around the Earth 3.5 times in an average lifetime

Tip of the month

Focus on the quality of your friendships and relationships, not the quantity. If someone helps you feel supported, happy, useful, liked or loved, or any other positive feelings, keep the connection going.