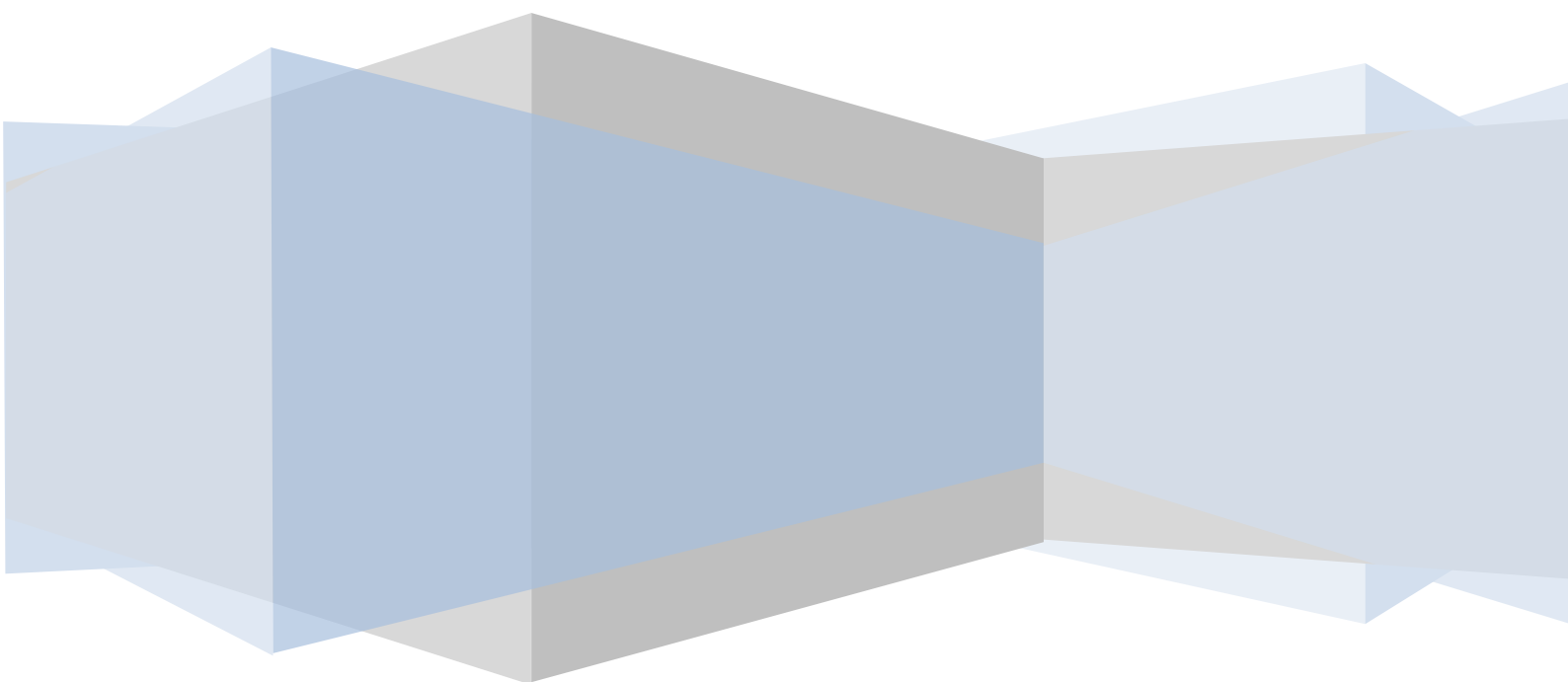


Cwm Taf University Health Board – Psychological Therapies Department



Self Care

Stabilisation Pack



Self-care, food and sleep

As humans we all have basic needs, such as enough sleep, food, water and exercise. If these are not fulfilled, then both physical and mental health can suffer.

These are some suggestions about what you might do to make sure your basic needs are met.

Food and water

Why do we need food?

Humans need food like a car needs petrol. Food is the main source of energy that enables the body to function properly. People who don't eat much, or don't eat regularly, or eat too much junk food, find they easily get tired and run down. Every type of food is best consumed in moderation.

How do foods affect mood?

Many people have found they can link eating (or not eating) certain foods to how they feel. The foods and drinks that most often cause problems are those containing **alcohol, sugar, caffeine, chocolate, wheat (such as bread, biscuits, and cakes), dairy products (such as cheese), certain artificial additives (or E numbers) and hydrogenated fats**. Other commonly eaten foods, such as yeast, corn, eggs, oranges, soya and tomatoes, may cause symptoms in some people. Making changes to their diet can, for some people, significantly improve their mood and mental health.

What do I need to do in order to feel mentally and physically well?

- Eating regularly helps us to maintain energy levels.
- Drinking plenty of water helps us to keep hydrated.
- Eating nutrient-rich foods such as meat, fish, beans, eggs, cheese, nuts or seeds, every day gives us a balanced diet.
- Remember, no food = no fuel = no energy = poor physical and mental health.

The MIND leaflet (see resources below) gives lots more information about how food can affect our moods.

Sleep

Most of us need 7-8 hours of sleep to function at our best. Many people have difficulty getting off to sleep, wake up frequently during the night, or wake early in the morning and are unable to get back to sleep. This can make us feel tired, tense and worried about sleep the next night. This worry can then make it even harder for us to sleep well.

The following strategies may help to promote healthy sleep.

CREATE A COMFORTABLE SLEEP ENVIRONMENT

Having the right mattress, pillow, room temperature, enough air circulation, and keeping the room as dark as possible can all help.

A noise machine (not TV!) can help with noise reduction or cancelling out intrusive sounds.

Keep the bed only for sleep, so that your mind associates it with sleeping and relaxing.

DON'T GO TO BED STUFFED OR STARVING

Allow at least 2 hours after a meal before bedtime.

A small snack before bed is OK – a small portion of high, complex-carbohydrate or protein is best (too much sugar can increase energy).

Don't have too much fluid just before bed or you will need to get up in the night.

GET SOME EXERCISE!

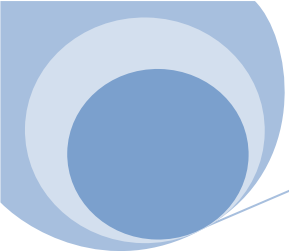
Tiring the body during the day helps to lead to more restful sleep.

Do not exercise too close to bed time – the body needs time to “come down” from the adrenalin/endorphin rush produced by exercise.

PUT AWAY THE ALCOHOL. . .

Although alcohol is a sedative and can make you feel sleepy, it can severely affect essential sleep cycles that provide ‘restful’ sleep.

Alcohol also increases frequency and intensity of sleeping and breathing problems (i.e. sleep apnoea, snoring, allergic responses, etc.).



STOP SMOKING

Sleep is often disrupted by the body's perceived need for nicotine. A craving for nicotine may not be recognisable at night – instead you may want to have “late-night munchies.”

GO DECAF! (. . .AT LEAST AFTER 12 NOON. . .)

Caffeine is a stimulant and will make you feel more alert. Allow at least 5-7 hours to process the last caffeinated drink before your planned bed time. This includes coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate.

LEAVE WORRIES AT THE DOOR. . .

If you are lying in bed and not able to get off to sleep because you are worrying, sit up and write the problem down. Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings to use whenever you need to.

Try using imagery of storing your worries away for a night in a box. This works very effectively when used in addition to some physical relaxation exercises. If this does not work, try writing down your worries and physically putting the paper away in another room before you get into bed.

Put aside some time during the day (5-60 minutes) for thinking and worrying. This should end at least a couple of hours before going to bed. Then, if the thoughts come when you are in bed, say gently: "Stop, I thought about this today. I will think about it again tomorrow. Now is the time to sleep."

Plan the next day - only! Giving yourself with a basic structure for the next day can help to avoid worries about what to wear, kids' lunches, meetings, etc.

TRY SOME RELAXATION

Relaxation methods: breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation (see resources below) and visualising a peaceful scene in your mind. Mindfulness can also help with sleep problems. Look at the section on 'Mindfulness.'

ESTABLISH A PRE-SLEEP ROUTINE OR RITUAL

Create a regular pre-sleep routine: e.g. TV, bathroom time, reading, etc. This helps to train and prepare the body for sleep.

GO TO BED ONLY WHEN YOU ARE TIRED AND DON'T FORCE SLEEP

Only go to bed when you are tired and sleepy. If you have not fallen asleep within half an hour, get up, do something ordinary until you feel sleepy then go back to bed again. Repeat this until you fall asleep.

Self-Care Resources

If you would like to read more about healthy eating, a copy of the Mind leaflet can be downloaded for free from: <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/>

The Mental Health Foundation (www.mentalhealth.org) also has a great deal of information on food and its effect on our psychological wellbeing, including a chart of the foods that may help to reduce anxiety, depression, poor concentration, etc.

There is more information about sleep at www.getselfhelp.co.uk/sleep.htm

Information on sleep is also available in a leaflet at:

<http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/?p=selfhelp>

Progressive muscle relaxation

Audio tracks can be downloaded for free from <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/audio-resources/> which guide the listener through progressive muscle relaxation techniques. This involves tensing and relaxing each body part in turn, to relieve the physical aches and pains that can often accompany feelings of stress and anxiety.