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# EAP Newsletter

The mental health awareness edition

Issue 29

May 2024



**Making People Better**

# The mental health awareness edition

In this month's newsletter we talk about integrating exercise into your daily routine, busting myths around chronic pain, using meditation to calm your mind, and important points to know about fibromyalgia.

This newsletter includes information about sensitive and potentially triggering topics.

## How to integrate exercise into your daily routine

**Mental Health Awareness Week** will take place from 13 to 19 May and this year the theme is **moving more for our mental health**.

We know that moving our bodies is important for our mental health. Yet many of us struggle to weave enough exercise into the day.

To mark this Mental Health Awareness Week, the Mental Health Foundation is encouraging us all to find moments for movement in our daily routines.



With busy lives and work schedules, we understand how hard it can be to prioritise exercise. So our expert physiotherapy team here at Vita Health Group have shared five top tips on how to successfully integrate movement into your everyday life.



### Block out time for exercise in your diary

Treating your exercise time like a work meeting or appointment means it's less likely to slip off your schedule, and you're more likely to plan things around it.



### Get an exercise buddy

Commit to exercising with someone else - a friend, colleague, family member or neighbour. You're much less likely to cancel if you feel like you might let someone down.



### Choose an exercise you actually enjoy

If you set yourself a goal of running but you secretly despise it, you're much less likely to stick with it. Have a good think about the movement you enjoy.



### Combine physical activity into something you already do

Instead of putting a block of time aside to exercise, think about how you can integrate exercise into your existing routine. Could you get off the bus a stop earlier and walk the rest of the way? Can you switch a sit-down meeting for a walking meeting? Or perhaps you could try some calf stretches or squats whilst you're waiting for the kettle?



### Plan family activities that include movement

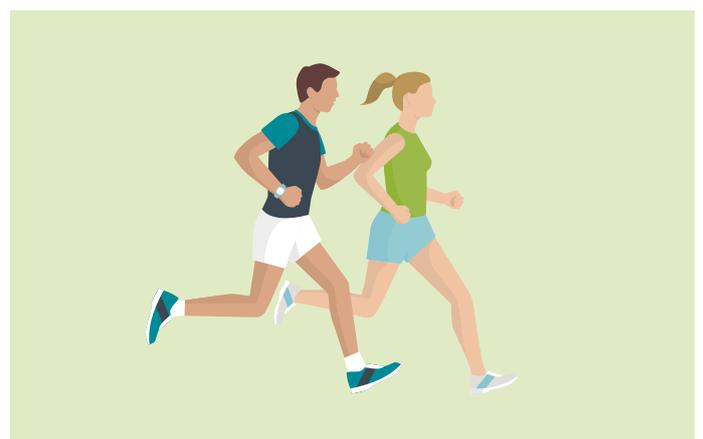
It can be tricky to juggle family life and exercise, so think about how you could merge the two together. Plan activities that involve walking, cycling, or team sport. You could look to make gardening a family activity, which is also great for mental wellbeing.

## How does exercise reduce stress?



### How stress impacts your body

Your muscles may be tense, you might get back or neck pain, and migraines or headaches. You might even feel that your chest gets tighter and your heart races. Some people experience sleep problems, such as insomnia, whilst others may get stomach ache, diarrhoea or feel they need to urinate more frequently.



### What happens when you break the stress cycle

With exercise, you can help to break this cycle. As well as releasing endorphins in the brain, moving your body helps to relax muscles and relieve the tensions that've been building up. Our minds and bodies are intrinsically linked and if your body feels good, it's likely your mind will too.

# Busting myths around chronic pain





Acute pain is useful - it's our body's way of saying that something we are doing is, or might be, damaging. Unfortunately for some people pain persists beyond tissue healing and continues to cause distress for a long time.

Despite the significant impacts associated with it, chronic pain remains largely stigmatised and misunderstood. With that in mind, we've brought clarity to the conversation by answering some of your most asked questions on the topic.

### **Q1: When does pain become chronic?**

Pain is deemed to have become chronic when it persists for three months or more.

### **Q2: How does chronic pain impact people?**

Chronic pain has no useful qualities. For individuals who suffer with chronic pain, it can cause considerable emotional distress and impairs social and occupational functioning.

### **Q3: Who suffers from chronic pain?**

Many people have very painful long-term health conditions, such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue and irritable bowel syndrome, which all fall into 'Medically Unexplained Symptoms'. This can often leave people feeling that their symptoms are not believed and they are left with many unanswered questions.

### **Q4: Does chronic pain affect mental wellbeing?**

Individuals with frequent, repeated or continued experiences of pain find their identity becomes enmeshed with the pain, this can lead to negative thinking, depression and anxiety.

People suffering from chronic pain can feel the loss of the person they once were and may not be ready to accept who they are now. They can often feel stuck and isolated from the activities and social life they once enjoyed.

The connection between mind and body alongside pain management means psychological support could play an important role in empowering someone to cope and adapt to the change they are experiencing.

### **Q5: How can I support someone with chronic pain?**

When supporting a loved one who is experiencing chronic pain, often what they need is to feel heard. As well as offering to accompany them to any appointments and following up with practical support, it's important to listen to their emotional needs. Unfortunately, you may not be able to alleviate their physical distress but you might be able to help them with their emotional distress, whilst promoting their self care and ability to feel connected.

# How to use meditation to calm your mind

In our fast-paced and often chaotic world, finding a moment of peace and tranquillity has become really important for maintaining our overall health and wellbeing.

Meditation - a practice that involves focusing or clearing your mind using a combination of mental and physical techniques - is a powerful tool which offers a vast range of benefits for both mind and body.

To mark World Meditation Day on May 21st, our mental health experts have delved into the wonders of meditation. They've explored the positive impact it can have on us as individuals, and have shared five simple practices you can incorporate into your everyday life.



# What is meditation?

At its core, meditation is a practice that involves training the mind to focus and redirect thoughts. Originating from ancient spiritual traditions, meditation has evolved into various forms, each offering unique approaches to stillness and mindfulness.

Contrary to common misconceptions, meditation is not about emptying the mind entirely but rather about observing thoughts without judgement and cultivating a sense of presence.



## 7 wonderful benefits of meditation



### Enhanced emotional wellbeing

Regular meditation practice has been linked to improved emotional regulation and resilience. It provides a safe space for us to acknowledge and process our feelings, and foster a deeper understanding of ourselves and our emotions.



### Improved concentration and focus

In a world filled with distractions, meditation serves as a powerful tool to enhance concentration and focus. By training the mind to maintain attention to the present moment, we can cultivate sharper cognitive abilities and enhance productivity in various aspects of life.



### Stress reduction

One of the most celebrated benefits of meditation is its ability to reduce stress levels. By encouraging relaxation and fostering a sense of calmness, meditation can help to alleviate the pressures of daily life and allow us to navigate challenges with clarity and composure.



### Promotion of mindfulness

Mindfulness - a key component of meditation - involves being fully present and engaged in the current moment. Mindfulness practices can help us to develop a heightened awareness of our surroundings, thoughts and sensations, often leading to a greater appreciation of life's simple joys.



### Better sleep quality

Many of us struggle with insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns, often stemming from racing thoughts and stress. Meditation offers a natural remedy for sleep disturbances by promoting relaxation and soothing the mind, paving the way for restful and rejuvenating sleep.



### Physical health

Beyond its mental and emotional advantages, meditation has also been associated with numerous physical health benefits. From lowering blood pressure and reducing inflammation, to strengthening the immune system - the practice of meditation contributes to overall wellbeing and longevity.



### Enhanced self-awareness

Through introspection and self-reflection, meditation allows us to develop a deeper understanding of ourselves and our inner workings. By turning into our thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, meditation enables us to embark on a journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

# 5 simple meditations to try at home



## Breath awareness meditation

1. Find a comfortable seated position and close your eyes gently.
2. Focus your attention on the natural rhythm of your breath as it enters and exits your body.
3. Notice the sensations of each inhale and exhale, allowing your breath to anchor you to the present moment.
4. Whenever your mind wanders, gently guide your focus back to the sensation of breathing.



## Body scan meditation

1. Lie down in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and bring your awareness to different parts of your body, starting from your toes and gradually moving upward to the crown of your head.
2. Notice any sensations or tensions present in each area, and with each exhale, release any tension you may be holding onto.
3. Allow yourself to sink deeper into relaxation with each breath.



## Loving-kindness meditation

1. Sit comfortably and bring to mind someone you care about deeply, whether it's a friend, family member or even yourself.
2. Silently repeat phrases of loving-kindness such as "May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be safe, may you be at peace".
3. Extend the wishes to yourself and others, cultivating feelings of compassion and goodwill.



## Walking meditation

1. Take a leisurely stroll in a peaceful environment - you might choose a park, garden, or a quiet neighbourhood street.
2. Pay attention to each step you take, feeling the connection between your feet and the ground beneath you.
3. Notice the sights, sounds and sensations around you, allowing yourself to be fully present in the experience of walking.



## Guided meditation

Utilise guided meditation recordings or apps that offer structured sessions led by experienced instructors. These guided meditations often provide gentle prompts and visualisations to help you relax and deepen your practice, making meditation more accessible and enjoyable for beginners.

## Be present in the here and now

In a world characterised by constant motion and noise, meditation serves as a sanctuary of stillness and serenity, inviting us to reconnect with our inner selves and the present moment.

Through its countless benefits of mind, body and soul, meditation offers a pathway to greater peace, balance, and wellbeing in our lives.

By embracing simple meditation practices and incorporating them into our daily routines, we can embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery, healing, and renewal.

Let us honour the gift of stillness within us and nurture our inner light with the timeless practice of meditation.

# A short guide to fibromyalgia

Each year on May 12th, people around the world observe Fibromyalgia Awareness Day.



Although millions of people in the UK suffer with fibromyalgia – also known as fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS) – it’s often a misunderstood condition.

So, our experts have shared a quick guide on fibromyalgia to help us all understand more and be better equipped to help friends, family and colleagues who live with it.

## What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia is a long-term health condition that can cause pain and tenderness all over the body. The condition is thought to be caused by the nervous system and the spine not being able to control or process pain signals from other parts of the body.

Fibromyalgia symptoms are often confused with those of arthritis or joint inflammation. Although fibromyalgia does not cause joint or muscle inflammation and damage, it can increase a person’s feelings of joint or muscle pain.

## Fibromyalgia symptoms

Some of the most common fibromyalgia symptoms include (but are not limited to):



**Widespread pain throughout the body**, which may be worse in particular areas, such as your neck or back. The pain could feel like an ache, a burning sensation or a sharp, stabbing pain.



**Extreme sensitivity** which can lead even the slightest touch to feel painful. If someone with fibromyalgia hurts themselves, for example by stubbing their toe, the pain may continue for much longer than it normally would.



**Stiffness** which may be most severe when sitting or lying in the same position for a long period of time.



**Fatigue**, which can range from feeling mildly tired to the level of exhaustion felt during a flu-like illness.



**Poor sleep quality**, otherwise known as non-restorative sleep, can mean people wake up tired, even when they’ve had plenty of sleep.



**Cognitive problems**, which you may hear described as ‘fibro-fog’. People with fibromyalgia may have trouble remembering and learning new things, problems with attention and concentration or slowed or confused speech.



**Feeling too hot or too cold** because people are not able to regulate their body temperature.



**Tingling, numbness, prickling or burning sensations** in hands and feet.

## Facts about fibromyalgia

It's estimated that somewhere between **1.8 million and 2.9 million** people in the UK have fibromyalgia\*.

Fibromyalgia most commonly develops between the ages of **25 and 55**, although children can also get it\*.

Fibromyalgia occurs more commonly in **women**\*.

There is **no exact known reason for fibromyalgia**. However, it does seem to be commonly linked with other conditions such as arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis.

Fibromyalgia may be triggered by a **traumatic event** such as a car accident or major operation, **mental health and wellbeing, emotional trauma genetics, and sleep and mood disorders**\*\*.

\*Versus Arthritis \*\*NHS



## Treatment for fibromyalgia

There is no single treatment that will help to manage all symptoms of fibromyalgia and treatments that work for some people, may not work for others.

However, there are a variety of successful treatment methods people with fibromyalgia use\*\* which tend to fall into three categories:

- Exercise
- Talking therapies
- Medicines

Your GP, or another healthcare professional treating you, can advise and support you in making these changes part of your everyday life. If you think you, or a friend or family member has fibromyalgia, see a GP for support.

\*\*NHS'



### Our tip of the month

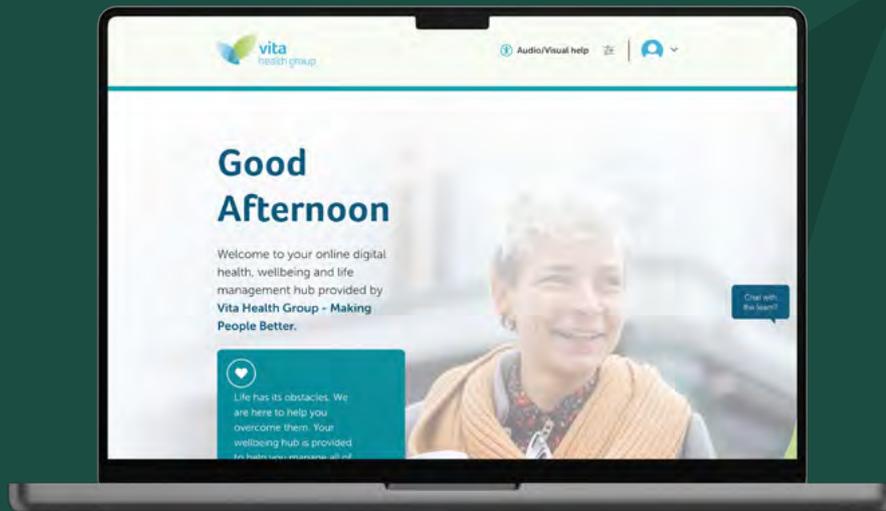
The one thing we ask you to do today if you do nothing else...

#### Check in with a friend.

Knowing how and when to check in with someone is hard. Many people worry that asking someone how they're feeling will make their friend feel worse. However, if someone is struggling with their mental health, they're more likely to find your acknowledgement healing rather than hurtful.

# On-Demand Digital Wellbeing Programmes included in your Wellbeing Hub

Our digital wellbeing programmes provide the skills necessary to better manage everyday issues that affect your emotional and overall wellbeing.



## Interactive, Practical, Wellbeing Programmes

These programmes provide participants with tools and strategies to create small behavioural changes that allow them to reduce stress and increase resilience and emotional health through various techniques.

- Stress programme
- Positive Body Image programme
- Mindfulness programme
- Resilience programme
- Sleep programme
- Money Worries programme
- Perinatal Wellbeing programme
- Alcohol programme
- Breast Cancer programme – Depression & Anxiety

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## Clinically Verified

Up to  
**80%**  
of participants show improvement in depression and anxiety symptoms.

Up to  
**93%**  
users satisfaction.

Up to  
**65%**  
of users achieve clinically significant improvement.

Helped over  
**1m+**  
users think and feel better.

## Contact us

 [wellness@vhg.co.uk](mailto:wellness@vhg.co.uk)

 [vitahealthgroup.co.uk](http://vitahealthgroup.co.uk)