

War Anxiety Workbook

**How to Feel Better
in Times of Crisis,
Grief and Loss**

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Introduction

It's completely normal to feel overwhelmed, scared and anxious when you're regularly exposed to war-related news and images. This response has been called "war anxiety," "nuclear anxiety," and "headline stress."

You might be experiencing:

- Low mood and tearfulness
- Hopelessness
- Feeling frozen/stuck
- Numbness
- Irritability and anger
- Chest tightness
- Breathing difficulties
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Sleeping problems
- Digestive issues
- Finding it hard to slow down and relax
- Eating too much/too little

In worrying times like these, supporting your mental health is more important than ever.

Given the lack of mental wellbeing skills education in schools, it's understandable we often resort to unhelpful coping mechanisms. Alcohol and excessive food and sleep may be effective short-term coping strategies, but over time, they tend to increase your distress.

The aim of this workbook is to provide you with practical tools to take care of yourself effectively – for the long-term.

Information Diet Plan

'Doomscrolling' or 'doomsurfing' refers to the excessive consumption of negative news.

It's understandable that you want to keep yourself updated about the latest developments, as doing so increases your sense of certainty and control, and it's how your brain is wired. It's your natural instinct to scan the environment for potential threats.

However, doomscrolling can be harmful to mental health.

Given the endless flow of depressing, anxiety-inducing stories, it's important to be mindful of how much media you're consuming.

A lot of the news is speculation about what could happen in future. This kind of information can easily fuel war anxiety. So, what can you do?

- Consider setting a limit for the number of times per day you'll read the news or check social media.
- Disable notifications/alerts/newsletters.
- Set a timer when you're reading, which can prevent you from going down a rabbit hole of never-ending news. Experiment with different timings to find out what works best for you.



Limiting your news intake is often the quickest and easiest way to alleviate war anxiety.

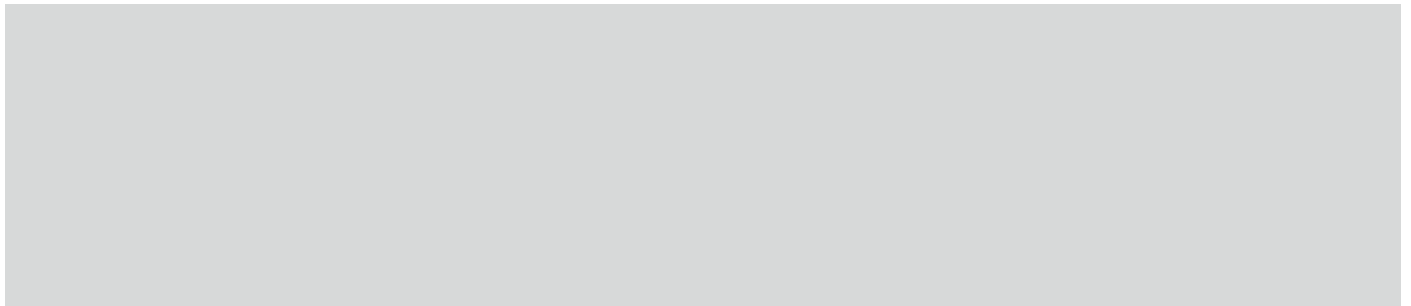
Stick With Reputable News Sources

The rise of 'fake news' could mean you're exposing yourself to distressing misinformation.

Save yourself the stress and stick with reliable sources only:

- [BBC News](#)
- [Reuters](#)
- [The Wall Street Journal](#)

Are you prone to doomscrolling? Describe your current information diet. How could it be improved?



5 Ways to Wellbeing

In 2008, [The New Economics Foundation](#) was commissioned to develop a set of evidence-based actions to improve mental wellbeing.

You can use the five-step framework they produced to reduce your war anxiety:

1. **Connect With People**
2. **Be Physically Active**
3. **Learn New Skills**
4. **Give to Others**
5. **Mindfulness**

1. Connect With People

In ancestral times, being part of a community was vital to our survival. There's now considerable evidence that suggests that, on the whole, compared with people in previous decades, we spend less time with family and friends. We have fewer close friends and are less involved in our communities. This is concerning as social connection is a core pillar of mental health and wellbeing. Here are some actions to consider:

- Spend more time with people who matter to you.
- Even though it may be difficult, try talking to someone about your feelings.
- Call a helpline such as [The Samaritans](#), [Anxiety UK](#) or [CALM](#) and [share what's bothering you](#).
- Find a local support group to join.
- Use a social networking platform to make new connections such as [Meetup](#), [Citysocializer](#) or [BumbleBFF](#).



"The feeling of love comes and goes on a whim; you can't control it. But the action of love is something you can do, regardless of how you're feeling." - Russ Harris

Poor mental wellbeing can interfere with the quality of your relationships in several ways:

- Anhedonia (a lack of pleasure) may mean you have trouble enjoying time together.
- You might be projecting feelings of hopelessness about the future onto your relationship as well.
- Being irritable might lead to more disagreements and arguments.
- Having a low sex drive can cause issues around physical intimacy.
- Using alcohol and other drugs more than usual may create conflict.

If you're experiencing poor mental wellbeing and you're in a relationship, try to remember the words of Russ Harris noted above.

Why not try the [Love Languages Test](#) with your partner? You can then make an effort to act with love in ways your partner finds meaningful.

Related Tools

For more helpful resources including a list of international helplines, check out The Social Connection Planner in our [Free Tools Library](#).



How could I improve the quality of my social connections?

A large, empty rectangular box intended for a user to write their response to the question above.



2. Be Physically Active

We tend to think of exercise as a healthy habit. We'd instead argue it's a basic need.

Our bodies are designed to expend a great amount of energy, and when they don't, it negatively impacts our minds and bodies. Lack of exercise is associated with both mental health difficulties and chronic illness.

Research suggests you need around **21 minutes three times a week** to get the benefits of exercise. So, you don't have to spend hours doing it – it's something most of us can fit in to our lives when it becomes a priority. Daily [brisk walking](#) could be a great place to start.

Here are six key benefits of regular movement:

1. Less Stress and Anxiety

Exercise reduces the overall activation of our amygdala and sympathetic nervous system, the parts of your brain and body that generate stress and anxiety. It burns excess adrenaline and blood sugar, which helps you feel calmer and reduces your blood pressure.

2. Better Sleep

Research shows that people who exercise regularly fall asleep faster, sleep longer, have better quality sleep, and wake up less often during the night.

3. Less Muscle Tension

Exercise helps ease muscle tension, which helps you feel more relaxed for hours afterwards.

4. Better Digestion

Working out can help you absorb vital vitamins and minerals which help you feel calmer.

5. Increased Focus

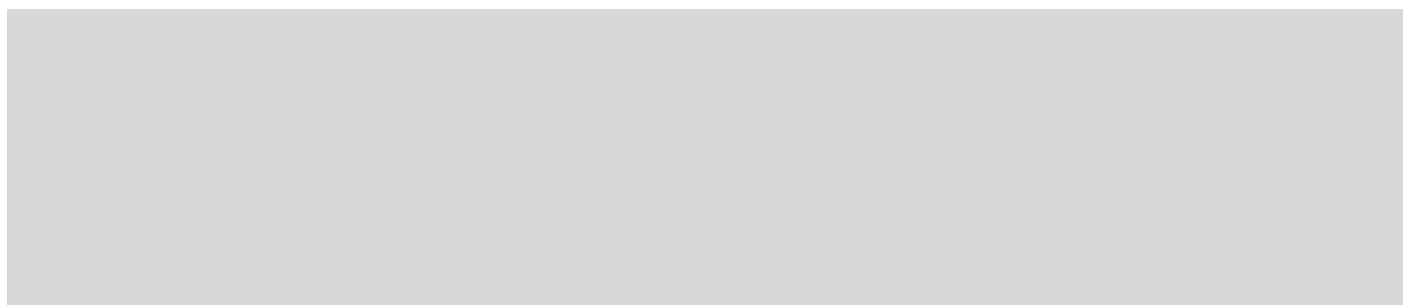
Exercise increases your alertness and ability to focus by increasing blood flow to the brain.

6. Enhanced Cognitive Functioning

Exercise stimulates chemicals in the brain called "brain derived neurotrophic factors" which help new brain cells grow and develop, providing you with a stronger foundation for learning new knowledge and skills.

With such wide-ranging benefits and a lack of negative side effects, it's no wonder doctors regularly prescribe exercise as a mental health intervention. It's a shame doctors don't have time to properly explain all the benefits so that patients understood just how powerful it is.

How can I do 21 minutes of exercise three times a week?



3. Learn New Skills

“Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.” – New Economics Foundation

Learned anything new recently?

Developing your skills and knowledge is a simple, effective and enjoyable way to enhance your mental wellbeing.

Here are some things to consider:

- What do you find interesting? Make a list of topics and learn about them through online articles, YouTube and books (why not pay your local library a visit?).
- Browse [free online courses](#), [Udemy](#) and [Skillshare](#) and see what piques your interest.
- Find a local adult learning provider and attend an in-person course.
- Ask your employer for [extra training or education](#) (you might find this [sample training request letter](#) helpful).

What would be interesting, useful or fun to learn? How can I do it?

4. Give to Others

Helping others in times of crisis can give you a stronger sense of purpose, control and empowerment.

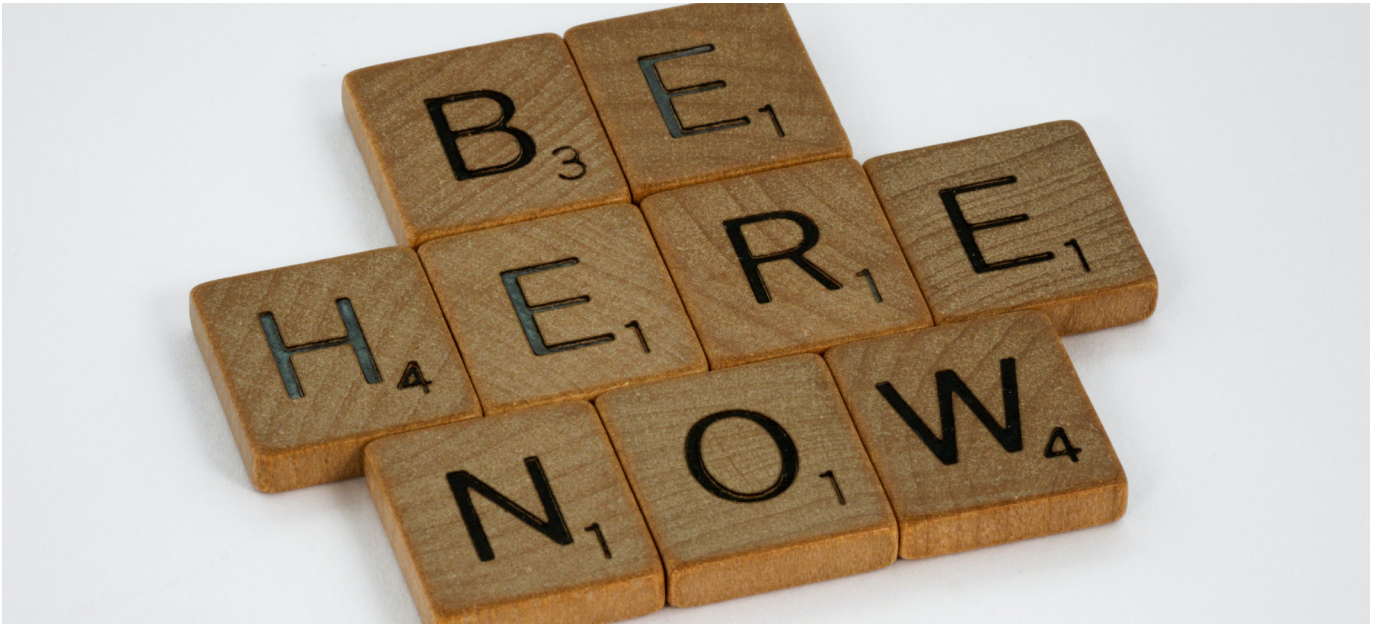
Here are plenty of ways to get involved:

- [Ukraine: What You Can Do to Help](#)
- [How To Help Ukrainians: These Organizations Are Looking for Donations](#)
- [How Americans Can Help People of Ukraine](#)
- [How To Help People in Ukraine](#)

What could I do to help others?



5. Mindfulness



Mindfulness practice is about learning to relate to things in a direct way, without the mental filters of concepts, past experiences, or value judgements placed on top.

It's about shifting your attention to your five senses, noticing what you can see, hear, smell, touch and taste.

Here's a mindfulness activity you can practice to reduce anxiety.

Mindful Music Listening

It's simple: [Play this song](#), close your eyes, and listen.

"Perception without language" may be the most succinct definition of mindfulness.

When you *just* listen, you're practising mindfulness.

When mental chatter arises (it will – a lot), gently redirect your attention to just listening. Focus on observing all of the song's layers.

To become more mindful, apply this "perception without language" approach to daily life as much as possible.

It's so easy to spend our lives lost in inner dialogue, missing the richness of the human experience. Life is a lot like music. The more you can sense the richness that comes from noticing all of its layers - as opposed to being lost in your mind - the more satisfying it'll be.

Sit, close your eyes and practise mindful music listening with any song or sounds that make you feel calm in times of emotional distress.

Related Resources

- [The Ultimate Online Guide to Mindfulness and Meditation Resources for Beginners](#)
- [How to Be Mindful in Daily Life](#)



Lean Into Uncertainty

People prone to anxiety have been shown to have a low tolerance for uncertainty.

Prone to doomscrolling (see page one)? An aversion to uncertainty may be an underlying cause. You're trying to seek out more information to increase your feelings of certainty.

Here's the thing: uncertainty is an inescapable part of life. The sooner you become comfortable with this, the sooner you can reduce your anxiety.

Which words remind you of this and help you feel better?

Examples

"There is nothing certain, but the uncertain." – Proverb

"Uncertainty is the only certainty there is, and knowing how to live with insecurity is the only security." - John Allen Paulos

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." – The Serenity Prayer

"Change is the only constant." – Heraclitus

"Every man's life lies within the present; for the past is spent and done with, and the future is uncertain." - Marcus Aurelius

"The whole future lies in uncertainty: live immediately." - Seneca

Which words can I use to remind me to accept uncertainty?



*“A world-class athlete was number one in the world in her event and had won two consecutive world championships. Only a few human beings on the planet ever reach that level of athletic achievement. Yet, upon winning her second championship, she said her primary emotion was neither elation nor satisfaction, but fear. The reason? She was afraid she wouldn’t win next year. **Minds are like that.** They will never change. They are **evaluative, predictive, comparative, worrying “organs”**. But in the case of values, it’s different. Once you choose them, you are in fact choosing them. **You’ve won.** Then they allow you to follow your path and to measure your progress on that path.”*

– Steven Hayes

Values

"Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." – Viktor E. Frankl

Values are the aspects of life that matter most to you.

Connecting with your values allows you to live a richer, more meaningful life – regardless of the circumstances.

In fact, studies show that reflecting on your values is one of the most effective psychological interventions around.

One study found that people who affirmed their values before a stressful task had significantly lower cortisol responses compared with those who didn't.



Video Break

Take a few minutes to watch [this video](#) describing the difference between a values-driven life and a goal-driven life.

To help you clarify your values, we'll complete two exercises.

1. Self-Reflection Exercise

First, spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

What qualities do you most appreciate in others? In yourself? What does that say about what you value?

What would you do if money and other people's opinions didn't matter?



What are you doing when time flies?

Which events in your life have been the most meaningful to you?

If you were to be stranded on a desert island, which three things would you bring with you? What do these things tell you about what's important to you?

2. Fast Values Exercise

Set a timer for two minutes. In this time, review the values on the following page and tick the ones that stand out to you the most.

Don't overthink it – go with your initial response.

When the two minutes are over, list them on the following page and rank them on a scale of most to least important. Then, review both exercises and use the insights to note up to seven of your core values.

(Your values don't have to be those included in the list, it's just there to help you.)



Fast Values Exercise

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendships | <input type="checkbox"/> Passion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Altruism | <input type="checkbox"/> Fun | <input type="checkbox"/> Patience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambition | <input type="checkbox"/> Gaming | <input type="checkbox"/> Perseverance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animals | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening | <input type="checkbox"/> Playfulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity | <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Authenticity | <input type="checkbox"/> Gratitude | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balance | <input type="checkbox"/> Growth | <input type="checkbox"/> Privacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beauty | <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bravery | <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calmness | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career | <input type="checkbox"/> Humility | <input type="checkbox"/> Resilience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change | <input type="checkbox"/> Humour | <input type="checkbox"/> Resourcefulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Connection | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity | <input type="checkbox"/> Risk-Taking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contribution | <input type="checkbox"/> Kindness | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Compassion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Expression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity | <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Respect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy | <input type="checkbox"/> Love | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty | <input type="checkbox"/> Sport |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Mercy | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equality | <input type="checkbox"/> Mindfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtfulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics | <input type="checkbox"/> Minimalism | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excellence | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | <input type="checkbox"/> Trust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> Nature | <input type="checkbox"/> Truth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fairness | <input type="checkbox"/> Open-Mindedness | <input type="checkbox"/> Vulnerability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimism | <input type="checkbox"/> Wealth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Order | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Stability | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing |



Fast Values Exercise

List your values in order of most to least important.

My Core Values

Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?

Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?

Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?



Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?

Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?

Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?

Value

What actions can I take in line with this value?



Focus on What You Can Control

If your anxiety is high, it's likely that your thoughts are fixating on what psychologists refer to as "hypothetical worry". These are the "what if?" thoughts we all experience when we think about the future.

If you're worrying a lot, you might find it helpful to practice noticing these thoughts and then shifting your attention to things within your control.

Research shows that focusing on what you can control can result in meaningful and lasting improvements to your wellbeing, health and performance.

Write down what you have control over inside the circle below. Then, note the things you cannot control outside of the circle, using the table below as inspiration.

Within My Control	Outside My Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My information diet• Seeking and offering social support• Being physically active• Learning new skills• Doing what I can to help• Being mindful• Leaning into uncertainty• Focusing on my values• Eating well and staying hydrated• Meeting my basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The news• Other people's actions• The law• The government's decisions• Adversity• How much things cost• The state of the healthcare system• What people post online• Natural disasters• Global politics



Distraction Activities

If your anxiety feels too overwhelming, distraction might help you cope.

It's important to note that a distraction activity must be very attention absorbing to effectively reduce anxiety. When an activity isn't working well, spend some time reflecting on why this could be and how you could make it more attention grabbing in future.

Here's a checklist of 72 ideas for healthy distraction activities. Tick the ones you like the sound of to add to your distraction activities list alongside your own ideas:

- ☐ 1. Browse mindfulness and meditation resources to try - find lots in [our online guide](#)
- ☐ 2. Work on personal development through journaling - [here's](#) a list of prompts
- ☐ 3. Browse new [healthy recipes](#)
- ☐ 4. Plan your meals
- ☐ 5. [Clean and tidy](#) your home
- ☐ 6. Watch [free online documentaries](#)
- ☐ 7. Download Reddit and browse uplifting content such as [r/aww](#) and [r/humansbeingbros](#)
- ☐ 8. Learn some basic yoga poses (we recommend [Yoga with Adriene](#))
- ☐ 9. Learn calligraphy or hand-lettering
- ☐ 10. Learn how to play a musical instrument
- ☐ 11. Talk to a volunteer listener (see pages 20-26 of [The Social Connection Planner](#))
- ☐ 12. Read a biography about someone who inspires you
- ☐ 13. Do some mindful colouring (check out our free [mindful colouring resources](#))
- ☐ 14. Rediscover old music you liked when you were younger
- ☐ 15. Make a list of things to save up for
- ☐ 16. Have a relaxing [DIY foot soak](#)
- ☐ 17. Do a [free online nutrition course](#)
- ☐ 18. [Start a blog](#)
- ☐ 19. Reorganise or redecorate your living space
- ☐ 20. Do a [jigsaw puzzle](#)
- ☐ 21. Find a [new podcast](#) to listen to
- ☐ 22. Paint your nails
- ☐ 23. Use [Discover Weekly on Spotify](#) to find new music you enjoy
- ☐ 24. Make a list of [books you want to read](#) this year
- ☐ 25. Search Pinterest for [craft or DIY project ideas](#)
- ☐ 26. Make a [bucket list](#)
- ☐ 27. Do a [free online drawing class](#)
- ☐ 28. Search Facebook for local groups to join
- ☐ 29. Arrange to catch up with someone over video chat
- ☐ 30. Listen to [relaxation music](#)
- ☐ 31. Do a [workout video](#)
- ☐ 32. Brainstorm ways to save money
- ☐ 33. Learn furniture building or upcycling
- ☐ 34. Get a [30 day free trial](#) of Audible and listen to an audiobook
- ☐ 35. Do a [free online coding course](#)
- ☐ 36. Build your [Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#)



- ☐ 37. Learn a new language
- ☐ 38. Plan some thoughtful gifts
- ☐ 39. Start a side project
- ☐ 40. Write a poem or short story
- ☐ 41. Make a cookbook of your favourite recipes
- ☐ 42. Become a volunteer listener (or chat to one) on 7Cups.com
- ☐ 43. Watch [TED Talks](#)
- ☐ 44. [Get to know your strengths](#)
- ☐ 45. Do a home improvement project
- ☐ 46. Try [self-coaching](#)
- ☐ 47. Declutter/reorganise your phone
- ☐ 48. Search Pinterest for [family bonding ideas](#)
- ☐ 49. Learn knitting, cross-stitch or embroidery
- ☐ 50. Find a [new board game to play](#)
- ☐ 51. Find a local volunteering opportunity
- ☐ 52. Do some [baking](#)
- ☐ 53. Learn how to invest in this [free online course](#)
- ☐ 54. Do [progressive muscle relaxation \(PMR\)](#)
- ☐ 55. Go for a scenic drive
- ☐ 56. Learn about [worry management techniques](#)
- ☐ 57. Learn [how to fold your clothes](#)
- ☐ 58. Make [homemade bubble bath](#)
- ☐ 59. Play video games
- ☐ 60. Look through your photo libraries
- ☐ 61. Plan a trip
- ☐ 62. Buy a new recipe book and try out some new meals
- ☐ 63. Research and develop a skincare routine for your skin type
- ☐ 64. Make a budgeting plan
- ☐ 65. Learn about [cognitive distortions](#)
- ☐ 66. Start a daily [gratitude practice](#)
- ☐ 67. Go to a new cafe or restaurant
- ☐ 68. [Prioritise your tasks](#)
- ☐ 69. Do some gardening
- ☐ 70. Go swimming
- ☐ 71. Reorganise your wardrobe
- ☐ 72. Go for a walk in nature

Which distraction activities will I try?



Ecotherapy



Research suggests that **two hours per week in nature** can significantly improve your mental health and wellbeing.

We offer two key ecotherapy resources:

- **Ecotherapy Workbook.** Download our 10-page PDF from our [Free Tools Library](#).
- **Ecotherapy Online Course.** An adaptation of our workbook in partnership with the mental health charity Mind. Register on [Mind's website](#) to access for free.

Both resources are packed with practical ideas for connecting with nature alongside a journal to record your experiences.

Basic Needs

Feelings of numbness and helplessness often contributes to neglect of your basic needs.

This can worsen your mental health and lead to a vicious spiral, so it's important to consistently work on the following:

- **Eating 3 meals a day.** Aim for [healthy, balanced meals](#).
- **Staying hydrated.** The NHS recommends 6-8 glasses of fluid per day.
- **Moving.** See page four.
- **Sleeping enough.** Try to go to bed and wake up at a regular time. The CDC recommends that most adults get at least 7 hours of sleep per night. If you struggle with this, see our [Better Sleep Planner](#).
- **Taking care of your hygiene.** Brush your teeth at least twice a day and shower at least every couple of days.

If this feels tough right now, you might find keeping a journal helpful for tracking your progress.



FOOD



HYDRATION



MOVEMENT



SLEEP



HYGIENE



NOTES

Therapy



If you're struggling to stay on top of your basic needs, we urge you to consider accessing professional support.

Here are some resources on the topic of therapy that you may find helpful:

- [What Is Therapy and How Does It Work?](#)
- [How to Choose a Therapist](#)
- [How to Get The Most Out of Therapy](#)
- [What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy \(CBT\)?](#)
- [7 Types of Therapy for Trauma Survivors](#)



About us

We empower individuals, therapists, coaches and organisations with practical, fluff-free, and beautifully designed self-help resources.

Visit our website to find out more about what we offer:

- ✓ [Free Tools Library](#)
- ✓ [The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#)
- ✓ [The Professional's Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#)
- ✓ [Organisational Licenses](#)
- ✓ [Books](#)
- ✓ [Mental Health Art](#)

We love hearing from you.

Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences with us for the development of this workbook.

Collaboration is incredibly important to us, and we really appreciate your help in making our tools the best they can be.

Do you have any feedback on the workbook? Or suggestions for future updates/tools?

Please email us at hello@thewellnesssociety.org.

We love to hear from you!

*Published by The Wellness Society
A full list of references is available on request
by emailing hello@thewellnesssociety.org*