



Get Ready!

14

ICAS 30-Day Healthy Mind Toolkit



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Did you know?

Every day, there are countless elements that could potentially affect our mental health. According to clinical psychologist Dr Sandrina Haeck, these fall into 8 major areas of our life:

- ✈ Psychological and emotional factors
- ✈ Physical factors
- ✈ Spiritual factors
- ✈ Intellectual factors
- ✈ Financial factors
- ✈ Familial factors
- ✈ Relational factors
- ✈ Social factors



To commemorate Mental Health Month this October, we've developed a **30-Day Healthy Mind Toolkit**, designed to shape up your habits and help you to implement positive behaviour that can improve your mental health over time.

Let's get started!

The first 8 days of this toolkit involve detoxing yourself of bad habits or current conditioned responses. After this period, you'll begin replacing these bad habits with positive ones, practising and cementing them over the course of your journey, so they can become a permanent part of your behaviour.

Take our initial assessment to establish where your habits are impacting on your mental health.

Healthy mind quiz



How much exercise do you get in a week?

- a. I get the recommended 150-300 minutes of exercise a week
- b. I get about 60 minutes of exercise a week
- c. I know I don't exercise enough



How would you rate the quality of your sleep?

- a. Most nights, I sleep long and deeply enough to wake up feeling refreshed – 8 out of 10
- b. Not too bad, but it could use improvement in both quality and quantity – 5 out of 10
- c. I struggle with sleep regularly – 3 out of 10



How would you rate your level of stress, in general?

- a. I am rarely stressed, and when I do experience stress, I'm able to manage my emotions relatively well
- b. From time to time, I feel somewhat overwhelmed by the stressors in my life, but I'm usually able to cope
- c. I struggle with stress, and my body suffers as a result. I experience headaches and/or exhaustion, a compromised immune system, lack of sleep, and a change in appetite



How do you fuel your brain for better mental health?

- a.** I usually follow a healthy diet, and I get enough fruits, veggies, whole grains, oily fish, lean meats, dairy and probiotics. I also try to stay away from processed and fried foods, as well as sugar
- b.** I don't eat as well as I ought to, and indulge in unhealthy options several times a week
- c.** I struggle to get enough healthy foods in my diet, regularly eating processed, fried and sugary foods



Do you make time for learning new things and challenging yourself intellectually?

- a.** Yes. I make a point of dedicating time to learning and intellectual development
- b.** Not really
- c.** No



Do you struggle with procrastination?

- a.** No, I rarely have trouble with procrastination
- b.** From time to time, yes
- c.** Yes, I have a hard time reaching my goals, due to procrastination



What is the current state of your inner thoughts and self-talk?

- a.** Good. I actively focus on mindful, constructive and positive thoughts
- b.** Average. I struggle with negative or intrusive thoughts from time to time
- c.** It's not good. My self-talk is often destructive



Do you make time for your family and loved ones?

- a. Yes. I talk to or see family members and loved ones regularly
- b. Now and then. I'm often too busy with other things
- c. No. I rarely make time for them



How much time do you spend on social media each day?

- a. Less than half an hour
- b. Around 2 hours
- c. 4 hours or more



Do you work with a budget and maintain a clean financial lifestyle?

- a. Yes. I maintain a realistic budget and work at having a clean financial lifestyle
- b. I struggle with this and often buy unnecessary things, which causes stress
- c. No. This is a cause of concern for me



Do you prioritise empathy, compassion, good communication and quality time in your relationships?

- a. Yes. We're aware of what needs work, and we actively try to practise good communication in our relationship
- b. Sometimes, but this could use some work
- c. No. We often fight because these qualities aren't present



Results

If you scored mostly A

Congratulations! You seem to be doing quite well and managing your mental wellbeing adequately. This toolkit will help you to continue developing your positive habits. If there are areas that you feel need improvement, identify the negative habits that you engage in most, and, over the course of your journey, focus on how you can avoid them.

If you scored mostly B

You seem to be displaying signs of having some difficulty in managing your mental wellbeing. That's okay, and you're not alone. Pay attention to key areas of your general wellbeing, such as your sleep routine, how much you exercise, your diet, and your response to stress. Identify your most negative habits and how often they play a role in your mental health, so, over the course of your journey, you can focus on how you can avoid them.

If you scored mostly C

You seem to be suffering from the effects of several bad habits, and your routine may need a little work. That's where this toolkit can be very helpful. Identify the areas that are most problematic and focus on avoiding these behaviours.



Disclaimer: This quiz isn't a diagnosis. It's simply a general guideline to some of the key values that keep mental health on track. .

On your marks!

Use our **Healthy Mind Quiz** to identify a negative habit from one of the 8 areas of your life (psychological and emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, financial, familial, relational and social), and focus on removing it daily over 8 days. Add these negative habits in the table below. Each day, add to the previous day's work and build on that by removing another negative habit.

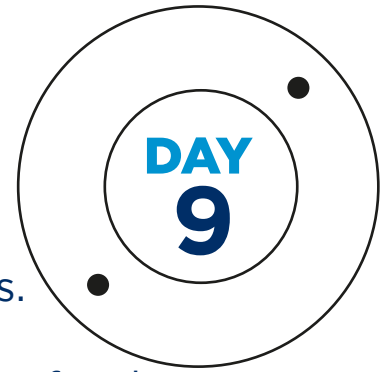
Time for a detox	
Negative habit	Life area affected by it
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	
Day 8	

Out with the bad, in with the good!

For the rest of the month, begin replacing negative habits with positive ones. Remember to keep avoiding bad behaviours associated with poor mental wellbeing, as you did in the first **8 days**.



Your activity for the day



Shape up your grocery list

It's time to fuel your brain with healthy foods.

Before you go to the grocery store, add these foods to your shopping list:

- ➔ **Leafy-green vegetables**, such as spinach and kale
- ➔ **Fresh fruits**, such as bananas, berries, apples, kiwifruit, stone fruit, pears and grapes
- ➔ **Lean proteins**, such as eggs, oily fish (salmon is a good option), chicken, soybeans, nuts, seeds and lean meat
- ➔ **Healthy fats**, such as olive oil, coconut oil and avocado
- ➔ **Whole grains and complex carbohydrates**, such as quinoa, millet, beets, oats, sweet potatoes, starchy vegetables and brown rice
- ➔ **Probiotic-rich foods**, such as yoghurt, kefir, kimchi and sauerkraut

How this activity affects your mental health

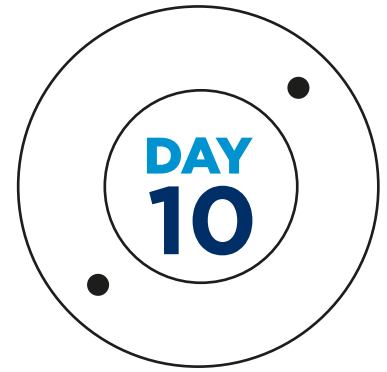
According to October Boyles (MSN, BSN, RN) folic acid, which is found in spinach and other leafy greens, can be a powerful deterrent to both depression and insomnia. In addition, whole grains are effective in helping the brain to absorb tryptophan, and when eaten with protein options such as chicken and turkey, can boost brain function and reduce symptoms of anxiety.

Lutein is linked to improved brain function, and is found in avocados.

Probiotics are important for digestive health, which is directly linked to mental health, and reducing stress and anxiety.



Avoid social media and electronics for 2 hours before bedtime



There is a direct link between how much sleep you're getting (and the quality of that sleep) and your mental health. Your mental health is also affected by how much exposure you're getting to screens and blue light emissions.

Tonight, set a time for going to bed and waking up tomorrow. Also, prioritise your sleep hygiene by avoiding electronics for 2 hours before bedtime. Instead of reaching for your phone, enjoy at least an hour getting ready for bed with relaxing routines, such as reading a book, journaling or listening to soothing music.

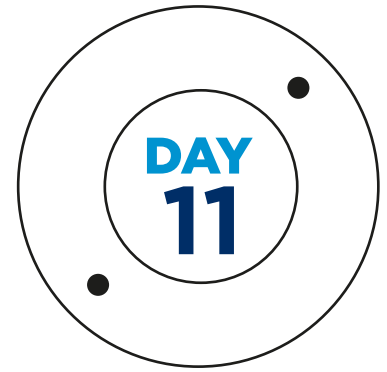
You'll undoubtedly get better, longer and deeper sleep, which gives your brain a chance to recharge

How this activity affects your mental health

The American National Sleep Foundation recommends improving your sleep hygiene and fostering new habits that encourage good rest at night. It may be difficult at first, but all areas of your health will benefit.



Keep learning



Your brain is a muscle, and, like any of the other muscles in your body, it needs exercise.

Some ideas for doing this include:

- ➔ Attending a seminar
- ➔ Learning a new language
- ➔ Learning a new skill
- ➔ Learning how to play a new game with the family

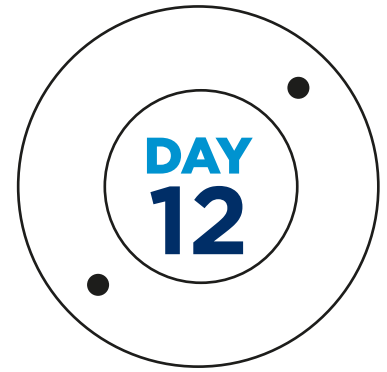
How this activity affects your mental health

When we keep using our brain to acquire new skills or knowledge, our self-esteem, sense of purpose and connections with others benefit.

Those who are engaged in learning tend to have an improved ability to cope with stress, and enjoy better self-confidence and a sense of hope. Because the brain is getting exercise, mental agility also improves.



Engage in a stretch workout



Stretching is one of the simplest and most effective ways of dealing with stress, ensuring a sense of calm, and offering improved emotional and mental balance. Engaging in stretching exercises is beneficial in dealing with anxiety and workload fatigue.

You can find great stretch routines on YouTube or most fitness apps.

Take a few minutes in your day to breathe deeply and engage in healing stretches.

How this activity affects your mental health

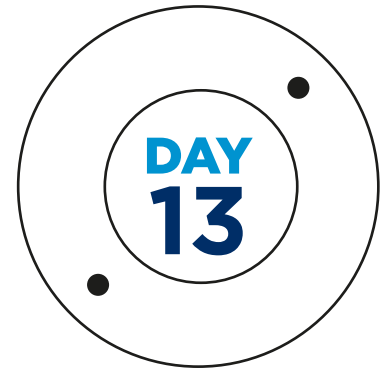
According to Suné van der Colff, a physiotherapist and movement specialist, movement is healing.

Because nowadays many of us spend a large part of our day at our desk, we regularly suffer from the effects of bad posture, ineffective breathing patterns, weakness and stiffness, which, in turn, set off a downward spiral of poor general health and strength.

Stretching is a great way to improve both mental health and general wellbeing.



Ask your partner out on a date



If you're in a relationship, this is an opportunity to make your partner feel special and remind them that you care about them. Go somewhere that has meaning and make it memorable.

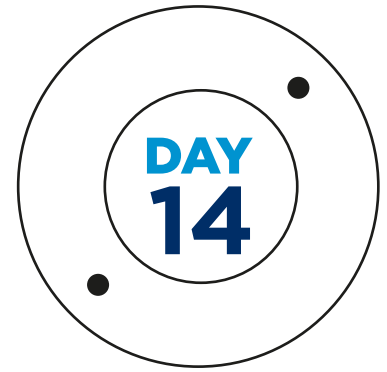
If you're single, remember that you need to be able to enjoy your own company, first and foremost. Take the opportunity to do something you enjoy and treat yourself to a good time.

How this activity affects your mental health

Our romantic relationships play a crucial role in the state of our mental health. When we invest in our relationships, we get to enjoy a more meaningful togetherness, which helps us to deal with stress better. This may take a bit of effort, but it's always worth it.



Enjoy a short workout



Physical exercise is important for overall health, but movement is crucial for mental health too.

Start small – no more than 8 minutes of exercise, which will build over the course of your journey. You just need to get your body moving and the blood flowing for a short while.

Some ideas:

- ➔ Complete a short workout on YouTube with a trainer
- ➔ Run up a hill a few times
- ➔ Find a good 8-minute workout online or on a fitness app such as FitOn
- ➔ Do some walking lunges or jump squats
- ➔ Play a quick game of volleyball, badminton or bats-and-balls

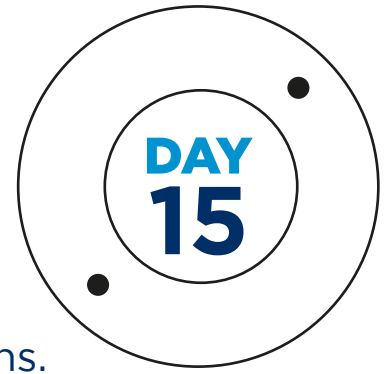
How this activity affects your mental health

Endorphins – which are considered our body’s natural, no-side-effect opiates – are released when our heart rate increases during exercise. They help us to feel and function better through the improvement of our mood and self-esteem, as well as the quality of our sleep.

Exercise is also important for the optimum functioning of the body’s cardiovascular, immune and digestive systems, which are better able to fight off the negative effects of stress.



Clean up your financial habits



Finances can be a major source of stress. If you want to enjoy good mental wellbeing, it's vital to live a financially clean lifestyle and to keep your expenses within your means.

The aim is to work and live within a realistic budget, and that is your focus for today. Take some time to sit down and balance your income vs expenses. Most bank apps have a good feature designed for this, and they're usually very user-friendly.

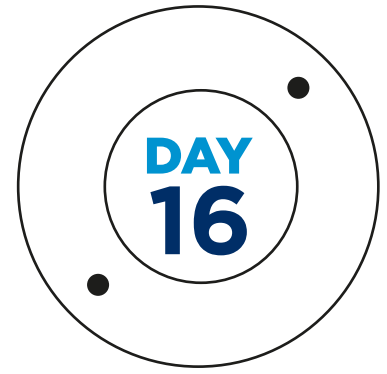
Also, take a look at your recent purchases, and determine which unnecessary items you can cut out.

How this activity affects your mental health

According to a survey conducted by CreditWise, money is the biggest stressor for 73% of respondents, followed by politics, work and family. It's also one of the two topics most couples fight about most. For this reason, it can be very helpful to your overall wellbeing to master your finances sooner rather than later.



Enjoy a healthy meal



Using some of those healthy items you added to your shopping list earlier in the month, find an interesting recipe online and set aside time in your day to prepare a delicious meal. It can be breakfast, lunch, dinner or just a snack – whatever is most suited to your schedule.

Some ideas:

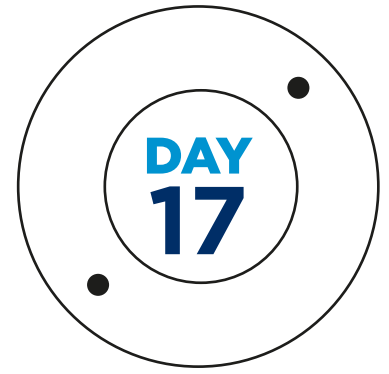
- ✈️ Avocado and black bean eggs
- ✈️ Green smoothie
- ✈️ Protein berry smoothie

How this activity affects your mental health

Your brain requires nutrients to function properly. When you fuel it with the right foods and take the time to prepare them, your mental wellbeing will benefit.



Enjoy coffee with a loved one



It's time to prioritise your relationships with family and friends. Being able to sit down with a loved one, enjoying your favourite beverage and chatting about what is going on in your life, is a privilege – and also good for your mental wellbeing.

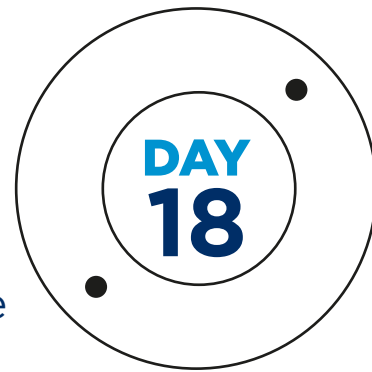
Make some time for this today, so you can both enjoy the stress-relieving benefits.

How this activity affects your mental health

One of our greatest strengths – particularly when it comes to our mental health – is the people in our lives in whom we can confide.



Enjoy green therapy



Nature can be a wonderful therapist. Actively spending time in green spaces can help us to be calmer, more mindful and more tolerant.

To reap the benefits of green therapy, find a space that is safe where you can engage the powers of nature. Leave behind your mobile phone and any other distractions, and give yourself a complete mental break for about 20 minutes.

Calm your mind and pay attention to:

- ➔ Sight - the colours of nature, and the variety around you
- ➔ Smell - the fragrance emitted by the trees
- ➔ Hearing - nature's sounds and birdsong
- ➔ Touch - the crinkling of a leaf in your fingers
- ➔ Taste - the flavour of foods, especially fruits, from the forest

How this activity affects your mental health

A study that looked at the relationship between nature and crime in urban areas showed that green spaces have the potential to reduce violent crime and gun violence. When community green spaces are properly designed and maintained, communities were not only safer, but residents also enjoyed better health overall.



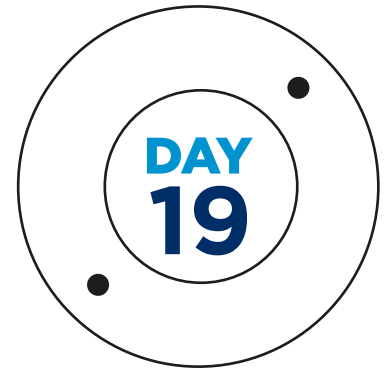
Forest bathing, a Japanese therapy practice, involves immersing yourself in natural surroundings, which gives your consciousness a sensory “bath”.

Keep stretching

You'll have noticed that you sleep better and enjoy better movement after you've engaged in a good stretch.

Take a few minutes to breathe deeply and engage in healing stretches.

There are some great stretches online, if you take the time to look for them.



How this activity affects your mental health

The more we move, the more we heal.



Continue flexing your brain



It's time to exercise your brain again. Choose another item from the list of options and enjoy the benefits that continued learning brings to your mental wellbeing.

Some ideas:

- ✈ Listen to a good podcast
- ✈ Listen to a Ted Talk during your coffee break
- ✈ Read a book
- ✈ Complete a sudoku puzzle

How this activity affects your mental health

Exercising our brain and acquiring new knowledge keep the brain supple and, later in life, help to prevent age-related diseases that interfere with cognitive function.



Time for another workout



Now that you know how good it feels to exercise, aim for a 16-minute workout. Push yourself a little harder, and work to build your fitness.

Some ideas:

- ✈ Complete a short HIIT workout on YouTube with a trainer
- ✈ Complete a workout with weights
- ✈ Find a good 16-minute workout online or on a fitness app such as FitOn
- ✈ Go for a run
- ✈ Play a quick game of volleyball, badminton or bats-and-balls
- ✈ Enjoy a dance workout
- ✈ Enjoy an exercise class such as Tabata

How this activity affects your mental health

Exercise makes us happier, improves self-esteem, prevents disease, and is one of the best things you can do for mental and overall health.



Improve your mood

One of the easiest ways to feel better is right outside your door.

There are simple and practical ways to improve your mood daily. These include getting more sunlight, drinking more water, doing something nice for someone else, connecting with loved ones, laughing, getting a good night's rest and eating a healthy diet.



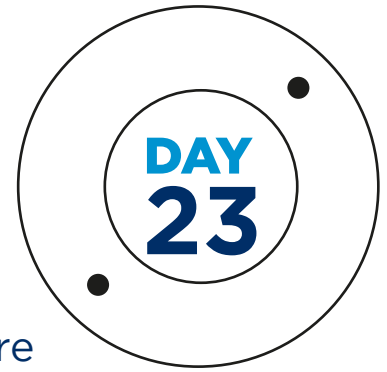
How this activity affects your mental health

When we're exposed to sunlight, the brain releases a hormone called serotonin, which is associated with improved mood, and a better sense of calm and focus.

The effects of sunlight are powerful, protective, healing and restorative – and it's free!



Keep your financial habits clean



You've started working on your financial habits; now build on your progress.

Check on your budget and look at how you're faring. If you see something you want to buy, control the impulse, write the item or service down, and, in a week's time, revisit it to see if it's still what you want. If it is, work on a savings plan, so it fits into your budget.

How this activity affects your mental health

When we work on practising good financial habits, we remove one of the biggest stressors in our life, which is a good step towards better stress management.



Keep cooking

Let's stock up on healthy groceries again. Build on your healthy cooking and eating habits by trying another delicious meal that will fuel your brain.



Some ideas:

- ✈️ Fresh pasta with roasted vegetables
- ✈️ Chicken burger with sweet potato fries
- ✈️ Lentil and vegetable stew with kale
- ✈️ Roasted salmon and chickpea salad

How this activity affects your mental health

Your brain requires nutrients to function properly. When you fuel it with the right foods and take the time to prepare them, your mental wellbeing will benefit.



Prioritise your relationship



If you're in a relationship, make some time today to work on your communication. Write a sweet note or send a text telling them you're thinking about them.

When they speak, make sure to actively listen before you respond. Make an effort to remember the things they say.

If you're single, take the time to journal about the areas in your life where you've made progress towards your goals. Celebrate yourself!

How this activity affects your mental health

Our romantic relationships play a crucial role in the state of our mental health. When we invest in our relationships, we get to enjoy a more meaningful togetherness, which helps us to deal with stress better. This may take a bit of effort, but it's always worth it.



Practice healthy sleep hygiene

Prioritise your sleep hygiene by avoiding electronics for 2 hours before going to bed. Instead of reaching for your phone, enjoy at least an hour getting ready for bed with relaxing routines, such as reading a book, journalling or listening to soothing music.



How this activity affects your mental health

When we make sleep a priority and practise good habits that support a healthy sleep routine, our body is better able to function as it should, and our brain receives the rest it needs to maintain good executive function.



Focus on your inner thoughts and self-talk



Make your thoughts and self-talk a priority. Be mindful of intrusive thoughts and correct them in your mind when they appear. For example, turn “I’ll never get the hang of this” into “As long as I keep working at it, I know I’ll see progress soon.”

How this activity affects your mental health

The way we speak to ourselves and the thoughts we allow in our mind have a direct effect on our mental wellbeing.

When we practise self-discipline, and allow only positive and constructive thoughts, it’s easier to deal with challenges.



Keep building your fitness

You're crushing it! Build your fitness with a 24-minute workout this time.

Congratulate yourself on the good work and making your mental wellbeing a priority.



How this activity affects your mental health

Endorphins are super-important for the body to keep functioning as it should, and exercise is one of the best ways to ensure that the body releases enough of them.



Enjoy some sunlight

When you wake up, set aside 5-15 minutes to enjoy the early-morning sunlight. Make yourself coffee and pick a good spot somewhere, to bask in the morning glow. Be sure to make it the first hour or two after sunrise, before the sun's rays become dangerous for your skin.



How this activity affects your mental health

Sunlight is responsible for the production of vitamin D in the body, which is an essential nutrient for the absorption of calcium.

Sunlight also helps to regulate the release of melatonin, the hormone responsible for helping you to sleep.



Have a last good stretch

You'll have noticed that you sleep better and enjoy better movement after you've engaged in a good stretch.

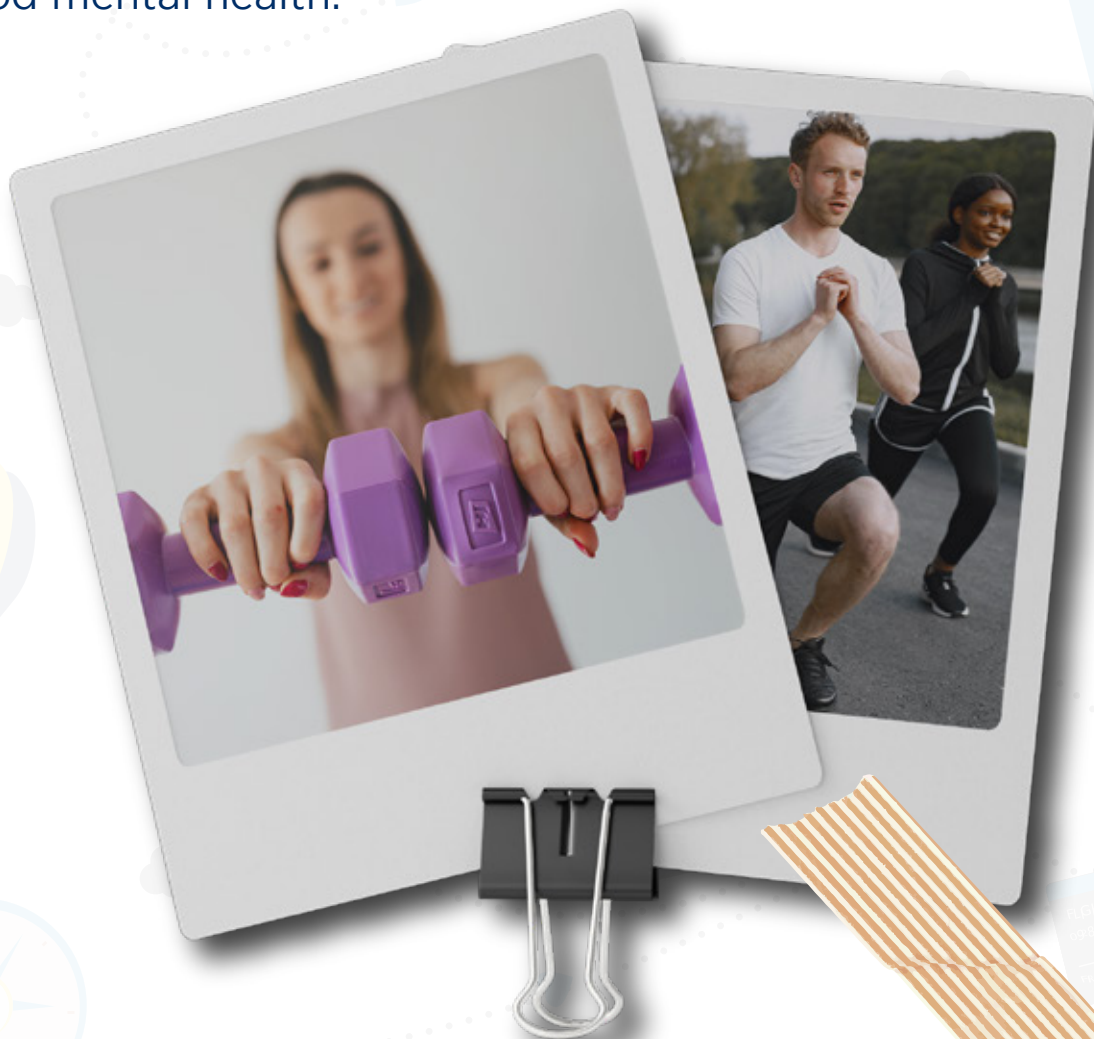
Take a few minutes to breathe deeply and engage in healing stretches.

You can find some great stretches online, and most fitness apps have good options.



How this activity affects your mental health

Stretching is a great way to protect the body against injury, and to maintain strong, healthy muscles, a healthy brain and good mental health.



Rate your experience



CONGRATULATIONS!

You've successfully made it through the **30-Day Healthy Mind Toolkit!** No doubt your habits are improving by now, and you're enjoying the effects of the positive behaviour.

Take this final assessment to establish how the 8 areas of your life have changed, thanks to the implementation of positive habits.



How do you feel about exercising after 30 days?

- a. I look forward to it and enjoy how I feel after I've been physically active
- b. I have no energy or motivation to exercise, and I struggled throughout my journey



How would you rate the quality of your sleep?

- a. I sleep well most nights, deeply and long enough – 8 out of 10
- b. I struggle with sleep – 3 out of 10



How would you rate your level of stress, in general?

- a. On a scale of 1-10, I rate how much I stress at 2
- b. On a scale of 1-10, I rate how much I stress at 8

4

How do you feel your dietary habits have impacted on your mental wellbeing?

- a. I enjoy better concentration and brain function. I feel better overall, and I like the fact that this means I'm becoming better at taking care of my body
- b. I have no motivation to eat better or find new recipes, and I struggled to maintain a healthy diet over the course of my journey

5

Do you think your intellectual health has improved since starting your journey?

- a. Yes. I enjoyed learning new things and developing my intellectual capacity
- b. Not really, no

6

What is the current state of your inner thoughts and self-talk?

- a. Good. I actively focus on mindful, constructive and positive thoughts
- b. It's still negative and often destructive

7

Do you feel you've benefited from focusing on your relationships?

- a. Yes. My relationships seem to be healthier now, and it was good to prioritise them
- b. No

8

How are your levels of stress after implementing some financial changes?

- a. Better than they used to be
- b. Not much better than they used to be



Disclaimer: This quiz isn't a diagnosis. It's simply a general guideline to some of the key values that keep mental health on track. .

Results

If you scored mostly A

Well done. You seem to have made the most of these past 30 days and will hopefully continue to reap the benefits of your new positive habits. Try to get between 150 and 300 minutes of exercise a week, continue eating healthy meals, maintain the habits so you can get enough sleep, practise self-discipline when it comes to social media and electronics, prioritise your relationships, continue to challenge your mind, and keep checking your inner thoughts and self-talk. Lastly, don't forget the power of sunlight and green therapy!

If you scored mostly B

If your stress levels haven't changed, and you continue to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety, and if other areas of your health are suffering too, it's probably time to speak to a professional. Contact ICAS, your therapist or primary physician to access help.





Contact info



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