

how do I deal with anger and its effects on mental health?

Everyone feels angry sometimes. Anger becomes a problem when it begins to impact a person's daily life and causes them to react in a way that might hurt themselves or those around them.

When is anger a problem?

Feeling anger is OK. Anger can help get us through hard situations, help us understand ourselves better and can motivate us to change things we don't like about our life.

Anger can become a problem when it affects a person's daily life and relationships. This might be because they find their feelings of anger overwhelming or hard to control, because they express their anger in ways that might hurt themselves or others around them, or because they find it hard to express their anger. Difficulties with anger can be a sign that someone might be experiencing sadness, depression, isolation, discrimination or another mental health difficulty.

Learning to be aware of our anger, and to express it in a safe and healthy way, is an important part of good mental health. If you feel angry a lot, or have trouble controlling or expressing your anger, there are lots of things you can do to help manage this in a healthy way.

Signs my anger might be a problem

Some signs may include:

- feeling angry a lot of the time at an intense and overwhelming level
- behaving aggressively (verbally, physically, passive aggression)
- having trouble expressing anger
- feeling sad and distressed as a result of getting angry
- using alcohol or other drugs to manage anger
- feeling the need to use aggression to get people to do something
- withdrawing from people or situations
- bottling things up
- regretting the things you did or said when you were angry
- expressing anger by saying or doing something violent (e.g., shouting, swearing, throwing or hitting things).

Why do I feel angry?

Anger can be our way of expressing or responding to a range of other feelings, like:

- frustration
- embarrassment or humiliation
- guilt or shame
- jealousy
- hurt or sadness
- feeling unable to control a situation
- feeling threatened or scared
- feeling unfairly treated
- feeling misunderstood or not heard
- feeling the pressure of living in two worlds
- feeling a loss of connection to family, community or identity.

Anger vs aggression

Anger can sometimes lead to people acting in an aggressive or violent way, but they're not the same thing. Anger is a feeling. Aggression and violence are actions. It's these actions that can lead to problems.

Anger can sometimes feel intense and overwhelming, but it doesn't necessarily lead to violent or aggressive behaviour.

How can I manage my anger?

Here are five steps you can take to help manage anger in a healthy way:

- 1 Start to understand your 'angry' triggers and signs.** Think about the things that regularly trigger your anger (like running late or being blamed for something you didn't do). This might help you find a way to respond differently. It might be possible to avoid these triggers in future, react differently when they happen, or allow you to let others know your triggers so that they can help.

Know your 'angry signs'. These can be things like; feeling hot or flushed, clenched fists or teeth, a tight feeling in your chest, or your heart beating faster. If you recognise the early signs of anger, you're in a position to try some new ways to manage this feeling.

- 2 Neutralise the situation and your body's reaction.** As anger increases, so does our body's physical reaction. There are a few ways to reduce the intensity of our body's reactions:
 - Slow your breathing. Taking some long slow deep breaths can help to slow down your heart rate, lower your core temperature, and get your thinking brain back online.
 - Taking a break. Leave the situation until you've calmed down – this can stop you from acting in a way that hurts you or someone else.
 - Reconnecting with nature. Connecting with nature can help calm down the mind and body and give you some space so you can decide how to respond to the situation.
 - Using delay or distraction. Count slowly to 10 or do something physical – like push-ups or bouncing a ball.

These strategies can help you feel more in control, and stop you from saying or doing something that you might regret.

- 3 Understand why you're feeling angry.** Understanding the underlying things that may be contributing to your anger can help you to get back in control of your response to anger. This can make it much easier to work out solutions or alternatives to aggression.

- Did someone do or say something that upset me?
- Do I have other feelings right now that might affect the way I'm reacting – like being sad or embarrassed, or feeling a loss of connection to people that are important to me?
- Does the situation bring up bad memories?
Some people find it easier to write down or draw their answers to these questions.

- 4 Explore your solutions.** This can be hard to do when you're angry. It's best to try these when you're feeling calm and safe. Think of some helpful ways to express and resolve your anger. Ask yourself questions like:

- How can I explain the situation in a respectful way?
- How might other people feel about this situation?
- What might I suggest to a friend if they asked me for help in this situation?
- What have I seen other people do that helps them deal with anger?
We can't always change the things that make us angry, but we can change the way we respond.

- 5 Reach out.**

- Your family and friends, a teacher or coach, your mob or Elders, might have ideas about how you can express your anger in healthy ways. Talking with them can be a great place to start.
- If you're being harassed, bullied or discriminated against, there are people who can help. A counsellor, a welfare officer at your school or your GP (general practitioner) could help you manage what's going on.
- If your anger-related problems continue without improvement, then talking to your GP or a mental health professional can help. They can teach skills, like relaxation and communication, help you understand your anger, and help you deal with anger in a healthy way.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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what is anxiety?

(it's more than feeling stressed or worried)

Anxiety is something that we all experience from time to time. It's our body's way of preparing us to manage difficult situations.

Sometimes anxiety can help us perform better by helping us feel alert and motivated.

Anxiety can come and go – but for some of us, it can stick around for a long time and end up having a big impact on daily life. When this happens, it might be time to do something about it.

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety differently, but there are some common signs and symptoms.



Physical signs can include:

- heart racing
- faster breathing
- feeling tense or having muscle aches (especially neck, shoulders and back)
- sweating or feeling dizzy
- shaking
- 'butterflies' or feeling sick in the stomach.



Changes to thoughts, feelings or behaviour can include:

- worrying about things a lot of the time
- being unable to control the worries
- having trouble concentrating and paying attention

- worries that seem out of proportion
- being unable to relax
- avoiding people or places like school or parties
- withdrawing from friends and family
- feeling annoyed, irritated, or restless
- difficulty getting to sleep at night or waking up a lot during the night.

What are the common types of anxiety disorders?

Anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worries or fears and are some of the most common mental health challenges experienced by young people. They can significantly affect how a person feels, thinks, behaves and interacts with others. People can experience different types of anxiety disorders, but it's important to know that they can all be treated.

Generalised anxiety disorder

Some people may worry, and feel their worries are out of control. They might feel tense and nervous most of the time, have trouble sleeping or find it hard to concentrate.

Social anxiety disorder

Some people may experience intense anxiety in social situations because of fear of embarrassment or judgement. This may lead a person to avoid situations where there are other people, like work, school, uni, TAFE, or hanging out with friends.

Separation anxiety disorder

Some people experience intense fear about being away from loved ones – like parents or siblings – or often worry about them being hurt.

Panic disorder

Some people have recurring panic attacks and ongoing fears about experiencing more panic attacks.

Agoraphobia

Some people feel intense anxiety about being in particular environments outside the home. This can include public spaces, public transport, enclosed spaces or crowds.

Specific phobias

Sometimes a person may experience a fear of a particular situation or object – like spiders or animals – that leads to a person avoiding that situation or object.

Lots of people avoid things they're scared of. When it's getting in the way of daily life, it's time to get support.

What are panic attacks?

Panic attacks are sudden rushes of intense anxiety or fear, together with frightening thoughts and physical feelings.

Frightening thoughts might include:

- 'I'm going to die.'
- 'I can't breathe.'
- 'This isn't going to stop.'
- 'I'm having a heart attack.'

Physical feelings might include:

- pounding heart
- sweating
- difficulty breathing
- shaking
- feeling dizzy
- feeling sick.

Panic attacks can feel overwhelming, but usually only last about 10 minutes. It's important to know these feelings pass.

What can I do to manage anxiety?

There are ways to manage your anxiety, some include:

- 1 Care for yourself.** Managing anxiety starts with good self-care. Try to eat well, get enough sleep and stay active to help your overall mental health and wellbeing. You can also learn about stress and different ways you can manage it.
- 2 Talk about it.** It's a good idea to talk about how you're feeling – whether it's with your family, friends, a teacher, coach, your mob, or Elders. They can support you, help you understand what's going on, stick to your self-care goals, and get extra help if needed.
- 3 Notice your thinking patterns.** Being aware of how your thoughts can influence your anxiety is an important step towards managing it. It can help you understand what contributes to your anxiety and what your triggers are. This can help you to handle them differently and learn new ways to cope.
- 4 Be aware of avoidance.** It's normal to want to avoid situations that make you feel anxious. It might help in the short term, but over time it can make your anxiety feel worse. This is because you don't get the opportunity to learn that the thing you fear may not happen or be as bad as you think.

Learn some skills to cope with anxiety – like helpful self-talk and relaxation – then gradually face the things you fear and put your skills into action. As you get better at managing anxious situations, you'll become more confident and motivated to keep it up.

- Try new breathing strategies.** Lots of anxiety symptoms involve a cycle of physical sensations - pounding heart, shortness of breath, trembling, or butterflies in the stomach. Working on controlling your breathing is a good way to try to interrupt that cycle. There are some apps and websites that can help.

- Limit your use of alcohol and other drugs.** While these things might help you to feel good in the short term, they can make you feel much worse in the longer term. See the Limit alcohol and other drugs to help your headspace Fact Sheet.

Anxiety and depression

Many young people experiencing an anxiety disorder may also experience symptoms of depression. This can make things much more confusing. If you think this is happening for you, it's important to reach out for support.



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understanding bullying

Bullying is not just 'playing around' or harmless fun. Bullying happens when someone has (or thinks they have) more power than someone else.

This could be:

- power in numbers
- being older or stronger
- being popular
- being in the majority.

Bullying can increase the risk of developing mental health problems for everyone involved, particularly those experiencing the bullying.

Bullying can take place anywhere. It can happen at home, at work, in school, at TAFE/uni, online or over the phone.

Types of bullying

Verbal

(e.g. putting someone down or threatening to cause harm)

Physical

(e.g. contact that hurts someone or breaks their things)

Social

(e.g. spreading rumours, excluding someone, embarrassing someone in public)

Cyberbullying

(e.g. sending harmful messages, pictures or comments on social networking sites, like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok or Snapchat)

This type of bullying can be anonymous and posted online where it can be seen by lots of people. And it can go on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so people don't get a rest from it

Bullying can also be done secretly, like doing or saying something behind someone's back. This can be harder to see, but it's no less damaging.

Bullying is not OK. It's not simply 'a normal part of growing up', and help is always available to make things better.

Unfortunately bullying is common. If you're having problems with bullying, it's important to build your supports and know you're not alone. Building a support network of family, friends, Elders, staff from school or work and/or mental health professionals is important to get support and put a stop to bullying as quickly as possible.

Why does bullying happen?

There are many reasons why someone might use bullying behaviour. People who bully may have experienced bullying, trauma or violence themselves. It's still important to remember though, this doesn't make it OK. People might use bullying because they feel peer pressure, and are trying to feel more secure, more powerful, 'look cool' in front of others, or feel better about themselves. This may be their way of coping if they haven't learnt healthier ways to cope or aren't getting the support that they need.

Bullying behaviour can also happen because of jealousy, lack of knowledge, fear or misunderstanding.

It's important to know that bullying is very complex, and it can change depending on the situation or who's around. A person might use, experience or be a bystander to bullying behaviour. Each of these different roles can have a negative impact on mental health and can make experiencing mental health problems more likely.

What are the effects of bullying?

Anyone who has experienced bullying might feel:

afraid	alone	unsafe
angry	stressed	humiliated
ashamed	rejected	

Sometimes a person feels there is no escape and does things to 'fit in', like changing their appearance or acting differently. They may believe some of the awful things said about them, which can impact their sense of self. Sometimes they might want to hurt others, or themselves, because of it.

Being bullied can affect a person's performance at school, uni, TAFE or work, and can continue to affect them through adulthood.

Experiencing bullying can also increase the risk that someone will develop depression and anxiety in the future, and it can increase the risk of self harm, suicidal thinking and suicide.

Young people report one of the worst parts of bullying is feeling like they're going through it alone, which is why it's so important to support anyone going through a tough time, or reaching out if you're struggling yourself.

What can you do about bullying?

If you're being bullied face-to-face, try these steps:

- **Stay calm.** Try focusing on your breathing as a way to stay calm. Staying calm and not showing that you are overwhelmed can help you to feel better.
- **Don't fight back**, as this can make the situation worse, get yourself hurt or blamed for starting the trouble.
- **Try to ignore the bullying** by calmly turning and walking away. If the person doing the bullying tries to stop or block you, try to be firm and clear. Having friends to stand with you or walk you away is a great idea in these moments.
- **Try to avoid the person** who is bullying you or ask a friend to stay with you when they're around.
- **Tell a trusted adult** what has happened straight away. They can support you and help you find ways to get the bullying to stop.
- **Get some more information.** Schools, universities, TAFEs and workplaces have anti-bullying policies that can help you to find out what you can do.

If you're being bullied online (cyberbullied) here are some things you can do:

- **Report any bullying** to the site where it is occurring. All social media platforms have a reporting system. It's anonymous, straightforward and depending on what you've reported, there's a chance it could get taken down quickly.
- **Keep everything that is sent** to you with screenshots, whether they're nasty comments, pictures or messages – try to get a permanent copy of it. This is so you can show these to someone you trust later on.
- **Contact the eSafety Commissioner**, if after 48 hours the image or content has not been removed by the site, or if you're feeling afraid or threatened.
- **Talk to friends you trust.** Let them know how you're feeling and that you need their support and advice.
- **Ask your friends** to stand up for you by challenging the bullying in low-risk ways.
- **Talk to your parents, carer, teacher** or another trusted adult about what's happening. When parents and schools work together, this is the best way to address it.
- **Block the person** or people from being able to contact you and change your privacy settings to protect what you post on social media.
- **Delete your current online account** and start a new one if the bullying is persistent and ongoing. Only give your new details to a small list of trusted friends.

Remember, it's unlikely that everyone agrees with the person bullying or is going along with them, even if they don't say something to support you.

They might be afraid of getting involved or could be ignoring the person bullying as a way of not joining in. It's important that everyone feels comfortable standing up for one another in ways that won't put them at risk.

Who is a bystander?

Someone who sees or knows about the bullying is called a bystander. It can feel difficult to step in but a bystander can have a big effect on whether the bullying continues or not. They also have the ability to help someone who has been targeted see that they have people who support them and care for them.



What can I do if I'm a bystander?

- Try not to support the bullying by looking on and doing nothing, laughing at the person being bullied or by 'liking' or sharing hurtful photos or posts online.
- If you feel safe, step in and speak up in an assertive but not an aggressive way. Show the person that you are there for them by spending time and chatting with them and helping them to walk away from the situation. Remind the person being bullied there is always help available.
- It's important to think carefully about your safety before you try to stop the bullying. If you can't safely take action yourself, report it to a trusted adult and let them know you want to remain anonymous.

Ways you can support a friend

- **Ask them about their situation.** Remember to be respectful, caring and understanding. They may not feel like answering and that is OK.
- **Listen to them and let them know they're not alone.** You don't have to have all the answers, but it may help them to know that a lot of other young people are going through this as well.
- **Reassure them that things will get better.** Remind them that they don't have to handle this on their own.
- **Support them to seek help.** Help them decide how to approach the situation. Discuss who they could talk to about the bullying, like a trusted adult. If the bullying is at school, a trusted teacher is a good place to start.
- **Make sure they're safe.** Sometimes this may mean you need to take action and speak to a trusted adult, even if they don't want you to. Let them know what you're planning to do if this is the case – they might not be happy about this initially but in the long run they will usually understand why you did it.
- **Look out for their mental health.** Bullying can have a serious effect on someone's mental and physical health. If you feel like your friend is struggling because of bullying, they may need professional support. They can visit a general practitioner (GP), go online to eheadspace or their local headspace centre.

Where to get help

If you or someone you know is needing support with bullying, reach out to a trusted family member, friend, teacher, an Elder or a counsellor and let them know what's going on for you. Though it can be hard reaching out to others, it can help you feel supported and less isolated.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of intense emotions or if you have thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately

For immediate help contact triple zero (000) if it is an emergency.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace.org.au, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au



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how to deal with a relationship break-up

Dealing with relationship break-ups

Relationships begin and end all the time. It's a normal life experience and it doesn't mean you won't be close to someone again. A relationship break-up can be tough no matter what the situation. Everyone feels different when they're going through a break-up. It's OK to feel sad, angry or let down – lots of people do.

Sometimes you need to prioritise looking after yourself and there are things that you can do to make it easier to handle. Things like hanging out with friends, eating healthily and making sure you sleep well.



It's OK to feel sad after a break-up and it can take time to get over the loss of a relationship

After a break-up many people experience a range of feelings, like sadness, anger or guilt – which may lead to feeling rejected, confused or lonely. You might even feel relief, which can be just as confusing.

Some feel as though their world has turned upside down and that things will never be good again. Many feel restless, lose their appetite and have less motivation or energy to do things. It might be tempting to try and move on quickly – but it takes time, work and support.

Actions to help you after a break-up

- Give yourself some space. It might be helpful to try to have some space from the person for a while after the break-up – this can mean online, too.
- Keep busy. You might find yourself with too much free time on your hands, especially on weekends. Plan ahead and do things that you usually enjoy.
- Talk to friends and family and others who can support you. It's OK to want some time to yourself but hanging out with supportive people can help get your mind off things, and get a different perspective.
- Take time out for you. Do things that you find relaxing, like watching a movie, playing or listening to music, meditating, reading or playing sport.
- Try not to use alcohol and other drugs to deal. While they might help you feel better at first, the after-effects will leave you feeling much worse.
- Give it time. Allow yourself time to cope with the change.
- Try to get regular sleep and exercise.

Advice from our headspace clinicians

- It may take some time to get over. Recognise there will always be good moments and bad moments, which will turn into good days and bad days. Whatever you're feeling now won't last forever.
- If you ended a relationship it doesn't necessarily make the breakup decision any easier.
- If someone broke up with you, it doesn't mean anything is wrong with you.
- Many people feel upset or angry during this time. Always make sure you express your feelings in a safe way – for yourself and others.
- It's better to be single than in a bad relationship. Remember – you don't need a partner to feel happy.
- Try not to worry about how the situation will look to others. Now is the time to focus on your own self-care.
- A break-up is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and what you want in future relationships. Working on yourself is the best way to be in a position to have a good relationship.
- With time and support you can pull through a relationship break-up and come out as a stronger and more resilient person.

How to break up with someone

Be considerate about how you end a relationship. Always think about how you would want to be treated in the same situation.

Try to end things in a way that respects the other person, but be honest. Be clear and tell the other person why the relationship is over. Understand that the other person might be hurt and possibly angry about your decision.

Try to end the relationship in person, rather than by text or online.

When your ex moves on

It can be really upsetting if you find out that your ex has a new relationship. Try to avoid thinking about them being with someone else. Don't contact or post about your ex and lash out at them, because this won't make you feel any better.

If you're feeling angry or jealous when getting over a difficult break-up, it's important to remember to stay safe. Get help and talk about it with someone you trust.

Thinking about a new relationship?

It can help to take some time out before beginning another relationship. Think about what you want in your next relationship, such as having more independence or being more honest with the other person.

Remember that being in a relationship won't necessarily make you feel happier. Getting more confident and comfortable about being single is also a healthy step.

When to get some help

Break-ups can feel like the end of the world, but most people work through them in time and without any serious problems. Sometimes a break-up can lead to someone experiencing other problems, such as depression. These feelings can affect your daily life and stop you from doing the things you enjoy. If it's been longer than two weeks, it's time to take action.

If you feel unsafe in any way, or you're struggling to move on (for example, if you're feeling jealous or angry, or notice yourself constantly checking their online activity), it's important to talk things through with someone you trust. This may be a friend or family member. Your general practitioner (GP), a counsellor, or someone at your local **headspace** centre can also provide you with confidential support.



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understanding depression

(it's more than sadness)

Many people feel sad after they have gone through stressful or difficult times. This could be a relationship break-up, trouble with family or friends, changing schools or exam times. It's normal to feel down from time to time, and it can actually help you to figure out what's important to you.



The word 'depression' is often used when people are talking about moments when they're feeling sad or down. However, depression and feeling depressed is more than 'feeling sad'.

Different people will experience depression in different ways. It usually includes these signs and symptoms for a period of at least 2 weeks.

Signs and symptoms

Changes to your feelings or emotions

Like feeling unhappy, numb, empty, irritable, guilty or like everything is too hard.

Changes to your thoughts

Like having negative thoughts, struggling to concentrate, or having thoughts of self harm or suicide.

Physical changes

Like feeling tired most of the time, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite or unexplained aches or pains.

Behaviour changes

Like withdrawing from family or friends, not getting things done or using more alcohol and other drugs.

There's no simple answer to why depression happens. For some, it can be a combination of challenging life events or issues. These might include things like prolonged stress, traumatic relationships, discrimination, bullying or social isolation.

Other things that have been linked to depression are things like decreased sleep, increased alcohol and other drug use, lack of exercise and poor diet. For others, it might be connected to a family history, or other individual coping style factors. But sometimes there's no clear reason and that's OK, too.

It's important to address depression early before it starts having a bigger impact on your life.

What can I do?

People experiencing depression can and do get better.

A part of depression means it can feel hard to find the energy or motivation to make some changes. Sometimes it might feel like nothing will help. That's why recovery is often made easier when someone has support from people around them, including family, friends, school and community groups.

It can help to start with one thing you know you can do, then slowly add things in step by step. This can help you feel like you're making progress.

1 Take care of yourself

Looking after our minds and bodies can help us with our general mental health and wellbeing. You can:

- eat well to improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing
- sleep well to help your brain and body rest
- get moving to help you sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood
- avoid, or at least limit your use of, alcohol and other drugs.

2 Notice your thinking patterns

Being aware of our thoughts and feelings is an important step toward improving how we feel. Taking notes on this can help you to figure out which thoughts make you feel better or worse. Keeping a journal can help you to understand this more.

3 Talk about your thoughts and feelings

It's a good idea to talk to someone you trust about your thoughts and feelings. Talking to others can help you feel understood and may help you see things from a different point of view. You might:

- talk to your family or friends, a teacher or coach, your mob or Elders
- get support from online communities or resources
- connect with others and be part of a group, like a sporting club or religious group, to manage feelings of loneliness.

4 Get into life

Sometimes it can be difficult to think of enjoyable things when you're feeling low. It might take some extra effort, but try to do something that you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it. This can be very helpful in lifting your mood. Try to notice any changes in how you feel before and after these activities.

Learning new skills can also help boost your confidence and give you a feeling of achievement.

5 Try some relaxation strategies

Practicing relaxation techniques can help you manage stress and help ground you during the tough times. It can help ease heavy emotions. There are lots of websites and apps that can help you with this – just google 'meditation apps'.


The link between depression, suicide and self harm

Some young people who experience depression also self harm or experience thoughts of suicide. Self harm and thoughts about suicide are often ways of trying to cope with difficult emotions.

If you have thoughts of suicide or self harm it's really important to talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend, an Elder or teacher. Or get professional support.

How do I get help?

For some people, using the tips on this fact sheet will be enough to help manage symptoms of depression, but if you experience these symptoms most of the time, for longer than two weeks – it's time to reach out for support.

 **An important part of professional support is talking (psychological) therapy. This can help you learn more about how your depression works and how to address how you feel.**

You have lots of options for getting support with depression:

- mental health professionals at headspace centres and eheadspace (online and phone support) can help
- if you're at school, TAFE or uni, you may be able to access a counselling or student wellbeing service
- in certain instances, your general practitioner (GP) might also suggest antidepressant medications. The GP or service you reach out to will help to recommend an approach that works for you.



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what is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is a diagnosed type of disordered eating.

Disordered eating is when a person has an unhealthy relationship with food and eating. These habits and behaviours can lead to the development of an eating disorder, which impact every aspect of someone's life.

We can all experience unhealthy eating habits from time to time.

Unhealthy eating habits come and go, but for some people, they can become a real problem. Extreme concerns about weight or how our body looks, are a sign that it's time to seek support.

Disordered eating often begins with dieting, but many factors can increase the risk that this may develop into an eating disorder. These include:

- family factors – like a family history of eating disorders
- individual factors – such as low self-esteem or wanting to do things perfectly all the time
- outside factors – like the influence of the media and social pressures to look a certain way
- life factors – like feeling overwhelmed and stressed by exams, work or relationships.

What to do if you think you have disordered eating

Many people with disordered eating feel that their experiences aren't bad enough, or they aren't 'thin enough' to need professional help. No matter what a person weighs, how much or little they eat, anybody experiencing unhealthy eating patterns and distress about how they look should seek professional support. Eating disorders are a serious – and times life-threatening – health issue. If you're having problems with disordered eating or body image, it's important to seek professional support. The sooner you ask for help, the faster your recovery will be.

What are the symptoms and warning signs?

The most common signs of disordered eating are:

Changes in behaviour

- using food as a way to manage or express emotions
- repetitive or obsessive dieting
- frequent binge eating

Changes in thoughts and feelings

- thinking and talking about food, weight and body appearance a lot of the time
- feeling out of control in relation to eating patterns
- worrying about places that involve food and eating
- preoccupation with exercise or body building
- feeling guilt and or shame about eating patterns
- fearing gaining weight
- difficulty concentrating

Changes in the body

- often feeling tired and low in energy

People will experience these symptoms differently. It's important to seek professional support to make sense of them. Talking to a GP (General Practitioner) or someone that you trust – like a family member or friend – can help.

Common types of eating disorders

Anorexia nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is when a person experiences all of the following:

- getting less energy (food) than their body requires to maintain health
- having an intense fear of gaining weight
- seeing their body size or shape in a distorted and disturbed way.

People experiencing anorexia nervosa also have weight loss and/or are underweight. There are two types of anorexia nervosa:

- **restrictive** (not eating enough and/or exercising a lot more than food intake)
- **binge-purge** when a person eats (sometimes to excess) and then through some method removes that food.

Many people may change between these types.

Bulimia nervosa

Bulimia nervosa involves a cycle of binge eating (eating a large amount of food quickly, in a way that feels uncontrolled), followed by actions to get rid of the food eaten.

People experiencing bulimia nervosa usually have strong feelings of distress, guilt and shame about these experiences, and are often very critical of their body.

Binge eating disorder

Binge eating disorder involves repeated episodes of binge-eating, often with a sense of loss of control while eating.

Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder

A person may avoid eating certain foods based on the sensory characteristics such as the smell, appearance or texture. This can lead to unintentional weight loss and other issues with nutrition and physical health.

Other specified feeding or eating disorders

These terms are used to describe an eating disorder that significantly impacts a person's life, but does not meet full criteria for one of the other types of eating disorder.

For more info about eating disorders visit The Butterfly Foundation or the InsideOut Institute. butterfly.org.au or insideoutinstitute.org.au

What are the related mental health problems?

Young people experiencing eating disorders are more likely to have these other mental health difficulties also:

- anxiety
- neurodevelopmental disorders (such as ADHD, conduct disorder, oppositional defiance disorder)
- substance use disorders
- self harming behaviours and suicidal thinking.

Self-help tips to support recovery

Alongside professional help, if you think you may be developing signs of unhealthy eating habits, there are many things that you can do to help get on top of things.

Our headspace clinicians provided their tips for helping young people recover from mental illness:

Seek support from people you trust

Knowing that you're not alone on your recovery journey can be really powerful. Reach out for support from a close friend, family member, school counsellor or others who have experienced an eating disorder in online support groups, like The Butterfly Foundation and the InsideOut Institute.

Try to be open about your feelings – feelings of anger, fear, exhaustion, guilt, shame – they are all part of being human. Being open and honest about these feelings with supportive people can help to remind you that you're not alone, and to find self-acceptance.

Reconnect with who you are

Disordered eating can be tough and at times you might forget there is more to you than these challenges. Reconnecting with the other parts of you can help to build up your identity 'outside' of the disorder. Part of the recovery process can be getting to know yourself again, or even re-defining yourself in some ways. Try getting back into things you used to enjoy or experiment with new things.

Be kind to yourself

Recovery can take some time and it can feel exhausting, so try not to be hard on yourself if things aren't going well. Keep a journal to record your achievements and successes along the way. When you hit a rough patch, looking back at this journal can help keep your energy and motivation up.

Celebrate the wins that you have, even if they're small. Show yourself a lot of love and pride throughout these wins.



How can I get help?

It can be a good idea to see a GP (General Practitioner) who can help support you with your physical health needs as well as assist you in accessing the right mental health support.

You can make an appointment to chat to someone at your local headspace centre, or find online and phone support at headspace.org.au. Your school, university or workplace might also have a counselling or student wellbeing service.

Other useful websites

- The Butterfly Foundation – resources, phone, email, and live webchat support. butterfly.org.au
- InsideOut Institute – information about eating disorders. insideoutinstitute.org.au



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headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health

what is gender identity?

Gender identity is how you perceive your gender, how you show this to others, and how you want others to treat you.

About gender identity

The physical features you were born with (sex assigned at birth) don't necessarily define your gender. Although gender has traditionally been divided into 'male' and 'female', it's now widely recognised that gender is not that simple and that there are a diverse range of gender identities.

For example, you could identify with a gender that's different from the sex you were assigned at birth, such as:

- being assigned female at birth, but you identify as a male
- being assigned male at birth, but identifying as a female
- you identify somewhere between male and female
- you recognise yourself as another gender identity.

Some people may not have a label for what they are experiencing and some might be questioning their gender identity.

Young people who are gender diverse or do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth can live exciting and fulfilling lives. But, a lack of understanding, acceptance, discrimination and transphobia contribute to an increased risk of depression, anxiety, self harm and suicide.

It's important to know that gender diversity does not cause mental health problems.

Why might this be difficult for me?

Some common experiences that can affect your wellbeing and increase vulnerability to developing mental health difficulties are:

- feeling 'different' from other people around you
- experiencing bullying about your gender identity, whether verbal, physical or online
- experiencing discrimination – being treated differently or excluded – because of your gender identity (note, this is against the law in Australia)
- feeling pressure to define or deny your feelings regarding your gender identity
- feeling unsupported or worried that your gender identity will not be accepted by friends and family members, along with the possibility of being rejected or isolated
- feeling stressed and anxious in relation to the pressure to conform with your sex assigned at birth.

Feeling these pressures can be stressful, especially with any other stresses you might be experiencing in your life, such as managing school or university, job hunting, forming relationships or making sense of who you are and your place in the world.

How do I know if I'm struggling with my mental health?

It can be hard to know if you're experiencing early signs of a mental health problem. Things to look out for include:

- changes in mood – feeling sadder, more anxious or more irritable
- changes in behaviour – being less talkative, becoming withdrawn or being more aggressive
- changes in relationships – falling out with friends or your partner, or conflict with family
- changes in appetite – eating too much or too little, or losing or gaining weight without trying to
- changes in sleep patterns – not sleeping enough, or sleeping too much
- changes in coping – feeling overwhelmed or tired of life
- changes in thinking – more negative thoughts, or thoughts of self harm or suicide

If you have been struggling with any of these things for a long time, you might not see them as changes.

Getting the right help and support

While it's normal to occasionally experience some of these things, if you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life are being affected, then it's time to ask for help.

Getting help when problems develop can reduce the effects of mental health problems and can help prevent more serious issues developing in the future.

Some transgender or gender diverse young people find it especially hard to ask for help.

This might be because of discrimination by health professionals in the past, worries about privacy, or difficulty talking to strangers about gender identity.

It's important to find someone you can trust to support you throughout your journey. This might be your general practitioner (GP) and/or other health professionals experienced in working with gender diverse young people.

headspace can also help connect you with specialists for specific needs around gender transition if you decide to go down that path.

A trusted friend, teacher, or family member might also be able to recommend someone to talk to. It can take time to find the health professional who is right for you, so don't give up if you don't find the right person straight away. Remember that you don't have to discuss your gender identity if you don't feel comfortable or safe.

You can find 'tips for a healthy headspace' if you're feeling stressed or having a hard time.

Remember that you're not alone and there are many young people exploring and questioning their gender identity. If you want to talk through any questions or concerns about your gender identity, or if you're having a hard time, there are people who can help and support you.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of intense emotions or if you have thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.

For immediate help contact triple zero (000) if it is an emergency

National 24/7 crisis services:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467 or suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- **beyondblue:** 1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au

Additional youth support services 12-25 years

- **headspace:** visit headspace.org.au to find your nearest centre or contact eheadspace, our phone and online service (12-25 years)
- **Qheadspace:** Chat anonymously with other young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and ask questions of our headspace queer peers
- **Qlife:** Chat to a volunteer LGBTIQ+ counsellor over the phone or through web-chat every day from 3pm to midnight (all ages)
- **ReachOut:** (under 25 years). Find a gender diverse support services or social network in your state
- **Minus18:** Have lots of resources about gender diversity for young people and their families
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800 (5-25 years)
- **SANE Australia:** 1800 187 263 (18+ years)



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what is a general practitioner

(and what can i expect)?

What is a general practitioner (GP)?

GPs are doctors trained to help you with any type of physical or mental health issue.

You can visit a GP if you're concerned about:

- sexual health and contraception
- alcohol and other drug use
- relationship problems
- your mood or worrying thoughts
- your sleep, appetite or ability to concentrate
- other physical and mental health concerns.

You can visit a GP for free and your health issues are kept private.

How do I find a doctor?

To find a GP you can ask a friend, family member or someone you know who they recommend or drop in to a medical centre and ask about what services they offer. Schools, TAFEs and universities also often know about local GPs and sometimes even have their own medical services. Start by asking a wellbeing staff member if you aren't sure how to access these services.



A quick search on [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find a GP nearby.

A family GP can be a good place to start if you need some help and feel comfortable talking to them. Even if they know your family, a GP is still required to keep your information private. If you're worried about this you should talk to them.

You can also contact your nearest headspace centre, which might have GPs and can also connect you with other health workers if needed.

How do I book an appointment?

- Many GPs have online bookings, to book a GP appointment online you can start with [healthengine.com.au](https://www.healthengine.com.au). You can also phone or drop into a medical centre to see a GP.
- You will need to provide your contact information, but you don't need to explain what the problem is if you don't want to.
- If you have more than two things to discuss, or want a mental health care plan, book a longer appointment.
- If you feel uncomfortable going by yourself, bring someone you trust – your doctor won't mind at all.

You might find that some GPs don't have appointment times for new patients. Let them know if it's an urgent problem and they may be able to provide other options.

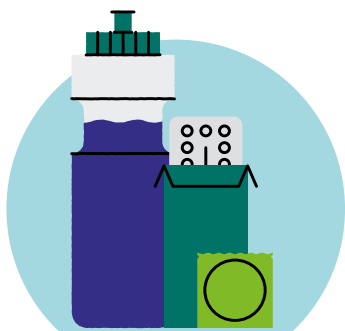
How much will a GP appointment cost?

Many GPs provide 'bulk billed' services (free appointments covered by Medicare) to young people and people with Health Care Cards. This is usually the case with headspace GPs. Sometimes your GP might charge a 'gap' fee, which is an extra cost you will need to pay. If you're worried about this, check the costs when you book your appointment.

To be bulk billed, you'll need to have a Medicare card or know your Medicare number (if you don't know this, ask reception when you book your appointment, and they can help).

If you are listed on a joint Medicare card, you can use that card. This appointment may be listed on the Medicare record for that card – which means your parent(s)/guardian may be able to see that you've had an appointment. Although the appointment will be visible for the card owner, what you speak about is still kept private.

If you're an Australian resident or citizen and 15 years of age or older you can have your own Medicare card. Having your own card means that you can keep your visits to the doctor confidential. For more information or to apply for your own card go to humanservices.gov.au/individuals/medicare



Advice from our headspace clinicians

- Standard GP appointments usually take between 10-15 minutes. A longer appointment will take 20-25 minutes.
- First appointments with GPs at headspace centres are usually longer than a standard appointment. You might be seen by another health worker, too – depending on what you need to speak about.
- The GP will ask a range of questions about your health and may want to do a physical check-up, like blood pressure, heart rate and temperature, or examine other parts of your body relevant to your problem.
- A GP can't do any sort of examination without explaining why it's necessary, what will happen and getting your permission.
- The GP will then discuss the concern with you and talk about what you can do next. Ask your GP questions about your health problem so you know exactly what's going on. Try to be open and honest about your concerns and situation so that you can make a plan together.
- Don't be embarrassed to ask questions if you don't understand something. Your GP is there to help you and has seen all sorts of people and problems. If you think you will forget or feel too awkward, write down your concerns before the appointment and give this to your GP.

What are my rights to privacy?

- **If you're not feeling comfortable and safe with your GP, it's OK for you change to another and ask them to transfer your medical records.**

By law, all GPs (and any clinical staff working with the GP) have to keep information about their patients private. This means they can't discuss your visit with anyone else, with a few exceptions. If a GP thinks you're likely to harm yourself or someone else, they have a duty of care to make sure you stay safe, so they may need to tell other people.

The only other time a doctor will release your information is if ordered to do so by a court, but this is rare.

If you want to know more about your rights to privacy and confidentiality, ask your GP at your next appointment.



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understanding grief and loss

(it's a natural part of life)

Grief is an individual experience, it's what happens after you lose someone or something important to you. You don't have to know the person for their loss to impact you. Everyone experiences grief differently. Our culture, gender, age, past experiences of loss, and belief systems can also affect the way we grieve. So try not to compare yourself to anyone else, or get too worried about the way you grieve – everyone grieves differently.

What is grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss and it can affect many parts of our lives. Sometimes it can make the simplest task feel like climbing a mountain.

You might feel some or all of these:

- shock
- longing
- guilt
- disbelief
- anger
- abandonment
- pain
- resentment
- anxiety
- intense sadness
- regret
- worry.

The combination of any of these feelings might make it feel like you're out of control. Other times you might only feel one of these emotions, or a numbness that doesn't feel like anything at all. Sometimes these intense bursts of emotion can last for a long time, other times they can come and go quickly.

Changes to thoughts

When a big change happens in your life it can be hard not to think about it all the time. You might notice your mind wanders and you have trouble focusing.

Some people find it hard to care as much about the things they normally care about. It can feel like nothing matters compared to the loss they've experienced. Some people might think that the world doesn't make sense anymore, and they can't figure out their place in it.

Changes in your body

Our mind and body are closely connected, so it makes sense that grief can have a big impact on our bodies. You might experience:

- headaches
- body aches
- weight changes
- changes to your sleep
- changes to eating routines
- colds
- tiredness
- generally feeling sick and run down.

Changes in what you do

You might notice some big changes in the sorts of things you do or don't do. After a big loss, some people feel like doing nothing. They can have trouble finding the energy to keep up with day-to-day life. They might not want to see their family and friends, or withdraw from doing things they enjoy.

Other people find that keeping busy helps them to get through the day.

How long will this go on for?

It's hard to know how long grief will affect you because everyone's experience is different. However, it's important to know that eventually, things will get easier.

It might be helpful to think of grief like the ocean. Sometimes the power of the ocean is so strong you can feel out of control. Other times it feels manageable and you are able to drift along with the waves. The pain of grief can come in huge waves, smaller waves or sideways waves. Sometimes there might be waves you didn't see coming, and sometimes there are periods of calm between the waves.

What else should I look out for?

When you're experiencing grief, you might have trouble maintaining relationships and feeling connected to others. You might not be as patient when you're grieving, or you might find you get in conflict with people more often. This can be hard, because staying connected to others can be a really important part of getting supported while we grieve.

Grief isn't depression. But it's important to know that grief can leave you vulnerable to experiencing depression in the future. If you're not sure what's happening for you, it can be helpful to reach out for support.



During tough times, some people can turn to alcohol or other drugs to try to get through the pain. This might feel helpful at the time but it can create other problems and you might be more likely to say or do things you'll regret.

What can I do to help with my grief?

Grief, and everything that can come with it, can be really intense. If you've experienced loss there are things you can do.

Healthy habits

Doing simple things for your physical health can really help you handle the challenges of grief. Start with little goals, like fitting in some fruits and veggies and drinking enough water. Staying active and locking in good sleeping habits can also help.

Get into life

You might not feel like it but doing things can be one of the best ways to help things improve. Find something that works for you like playing or listening to music, walking, hanging out with friends, watching movies, playing sports or reading.

Take it easy on yourself

Being kind to yourself is a good idea at all times, but even more so when you're having a tough time. Remind yourself that grief hurts, it's hard and it takes time to heal. Feeling confused, overwhelmed, angry (or anything else) and having a cry is OK.

How can I get help?

If you're finding it hard to cope and/or your social, work or school life are being affected, then it's a good idea to ask for support.

Find someone you trust and let them in on what you're going through. If you're feeling up to it, let them know what you need from them. Maybe you just need them to listen, or maybe you need a distraction to get you through tough days.

If you want professional support, you have lots of options. You can:

- contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (13 11 14)
- check in with your local GP (general practitioner).



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understanding sex and sexual health

Sexual relationships are a normal part of life. It's important to feel in control and make the decisions that are right for you to make sure that your sexual relationships are positive and healthy.

Am I ready for sex?

If you're thinking about having sex you probably feel nervous and excited. Even if it's not your first time it's normal to experience these emotions.

It's important that you feel confident and ready, so it might be helpful to ask yourself these questions:

- am I doing this because I want to?
- do I feel safe?
- do I feel comfortable talking about sex and contraception?
- do I feel comfortable having sex with someone sober?
- do I know how to have sex safely?
- what is the law about sex in my state?

What is sexual health?

Good sexual health requires a respectful and positive attitude around the decisions you make. It's also about having the right information so you can enjoy yourself and prevent things like sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies. Sexual health is something that we all need to think and talk about, regardless of gender or sexuality.

What is sexuality?

Sexuality is an important part of who we are, what we feel and how we respond to others. It's about how we feel sexual pleasure and who we're attracted to. Everyone has different preferences and this is completely natural and normal.

A person may identify as:

- gay
- lesbian
- straight
- bisexual
- heterosexual
- pansexual
- queer
- asexual
- something else (or not yet sure).

What is consent?

Sexual consent is an ongoing and freely given agreement between people who are engaging in sexual activity together.

- Consent to any sexual act needs to be stated clearly – this means there is no confusion or doubt that someone has given consent, don't just assume they're into it
- Setting physical/sexual boundaries means continuously checking in with each other about what is and isn't OK. If someone consents to one sexual act, it doesn't mean they consent to another. Ongoing communication is one of the key steps to healthy boundaries.
- People can change their minds anytime. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage it's perfectly OK to let the other person know that you want to slow down or stop.
- Alcohol and other drugs can impact our ability to give consent, say no to sexual activity or recognise when someone isn't giving consent. It can be helpful to limit alcohol and other drug use before sexual activity.
- Discussing and agreeing on contraception and actions to prevent sexually transmitted infections is another way you can maintain your boundaries by practising consent.

- The age that someone can consent to any kind of sexual activity varies slightly between states and territories in Australia. Check out [Youth Law Australia](#) for more information about the age of consent in your state and territory.
- If you want more information on sexual consent, [check out the handy guide](#) we put together.

What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

STIs get passed on during sexual contact, like kissing and touching (oral, anal and vaginal), through blood, saliva, semen or vaginal fluids. While medical treatment can cure some STIs, it may only help relieve symptoms for others – and not all types are curable.

Some STIs include:

- chlamydia
- gonorrhoea
- herpes/cold sores
- genital warts
- hepatitis
- HIV.

Some symptoms of STIs include:

- unusual discharge
- pain during urination/sex
- sores, blisters, ulcers, warts or rashes
- pain in the scrotum or testicles
- infertility.

These types of barrier protection are helpful in preventing STIs:

- the condom
- the vaginal condom
- dental dams.

How to start a conversation about sexual health

Talk with your partner/s about whether you, or they:

- have had an STI before, and whether it has been treated
- have had a sexual health check and when
- are in agreement about safe sex practices, like types of protection and contraception.

Practise safe sex

Even if sexual contact doesn't involve any blood, semen or vaginal fluids being passed between partners, you can still minimise the risk that you'll get an STI or BBV (blood borne virus). Remember, nothing is ever 100% risk free.

Sexual activity between people who have vaginas has a lower risk of STI transmission, but lower risk doesn't mean there's no risk at all. Similarly, anal sex (regardless of gender identity or sexuality) has a higher chance of resulting in an STI, but using condoms correctly can dramatically reduce that risk.

Preventing HIV

As well as using condoms, there are specific things that you can take before or after sex to reduce the chance of getting HIV from a partner. Talk to your GP or a sexual health nurse for more information.

Contraception

Contraception is using methods to prevent unintended pregnancy. There are different forms of contraception, that when used properly, can be very effective.

Types of contraception include:

- contraceptive pill
- condoms
- diaphragms
- contraceptive injections
- Implanon
- intrauterine device (IUD).

Condoms are the only form of contraception that can protect against both pregnancy and STIs.

Contraception is not 100% effective

There's always a very small chance of pregnancy. Using hormonal contraceptive (the pill) and a condom is the safest option to prevent unintended pregnancy.

If you're worried you may be pregnant, because you recently had unprotected sex, you can speak to a health professional about the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP). This is sometimes called the 'morning after pill'. It's important to take it as soon as possible after you had unprotected sex.

Getting tested

If you're sexually active, it's recommended that you get tested for STIs once a year, even if you use protection. This can be done as part of a routine visit to the general practitioner (GP) or at a headspace centre.

It can sometimes help to talk it through with someone first. You may want to get advice from someone you trust, like a family member, teacher or counsellor.

Your GP can also give you information to help you maintain your sexual health.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](#)



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understanding your sexuality and sexual identity

(The way you want to describe your sexuality, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.)

Sexuality is about how you see and express yourself romantically and sexually. There are lots of words people use to describe their sexuality, many of which are captured by the term LGBTIQA+.

What does LGBTIQA+ mean?

- **L** – lesbian (someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to other people who identify as women)
- **G** – gay (someone who is attracted to people who identify as the same gender)
- **B** – bisexual (someone who is attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not assume there are only two genders)
- **T** – transgender or trans people (someone whose personal and gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth)
- **I** – intersex (someone who is born with chromosomes, reproductive organs or genitals that don't fit the narrow medical or social expectations for what it means to have a male or female body)
- **Q** – queer (this term has many different meanings, but it has been reclaimed by many as a proud term to describe sexuality or gender that is anything other than cisgender and/or heterosexual)
- **A** – asexual (someone who has low or no sexual attraction to any gender, but may have a romantic attraction towards another person)/aromantic (someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others)
- **+** – (this acknowledges there are many other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities).



The language around LGBTIQA+ has changed over time and will continue to evolve as society further develops understanding of people's different experiences. This is why the '+' is so important.

What if I'm not sure of my sexuality?

It's common for young people to be unsure of their sexuality (questioning) or to experience fluid sexuality (when someone's sexuality changes over time). Many young people prefer to identify as queer, as it's broader and does not place someone into a category.

Others might not like the idea of these terms and don't want to identify their sexuality at all and that's OK too. It's important to remember that your identity is yours. The way you want to describe it, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.

How do I explain it to others?

Coming out or inviting others in. The idea of coming out or sharing your sexuality with others can feel really scary.



Some people prefer to think of the experience as inviting others in rather than coming out.

Some people, due to safety, might choose not to share their sexuality with certain people around them. Everyone's journey looks different.

It's hard to know what other people will think or how they'll react when you talk to them about your sexuality. Unfortunately, it's not something you can control.

Not all people will have a consistently positive experience if they come out. Here are some things to consider when discussing your sexuality with others.

- Have the conversation when you feel ready.
- It's up to you to choose who you want to tell and what you want to tell them.
- You may want to suss people out first – perhaps by asking them for their thoughts on an LGBTIQ+ topic, like a TV show with a queer character.
- Have the conversation when everyone is comfortable and relaxed.
- Expect a range of reactions. People might surprise you.
- Give it time. Some people might respond better when they've thought about it for a while.
- Try to keep calm, even if the other person is not.
- If you need to call a time-out, have a plan in place. You could say something like, 'I still want to talk more about this but we're too worked up at the moment'.
- Responses can range from tolerance, to acceptance, to celebration. There may be others who don't accept your sexual identity no matter how you share it or how much time goes by. This can be painful, especially if it's someone you love or respect. But remember, you don't need anyone's approval or permission to be yourself.

Dealing with discrimination. If you're being unfairly treated because of your sexuality, this is called discrimination. Although discrimination is illegal in Australia, many young people still experience unfair treatment. If you have been affected by discrimination or any of these negative experiences, it's important to reach out for support.

Taking care of yourself

People exploring their sexuality may be faced with challenges that can affect their mental health and wellbeing, such as:

- other people making them feel 'different'
- fear of rejection
- bullying
- discrimination such as homophobia and biphobia (verbal or physical)
- feeling pressure to deny or change their sexuality
- worries about coming out to friends and family members
- feeling unsupported or misunderstood
- being excluded or left out at school, work or in the community
- a desire to suppress or avoid unwanted preferences.

If someone makes you feel badly about your sexuality, there are things you can do to take care of yourself.

Find a supportive community

It's important to remember that there is a strong LGBTIQ+ community to embrace and support you. Finding these communities can be tough, but be assured that they're out there! A simple Google search can help you find local support groups. Everyone deserves to be surrounded by people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.

Reach out for help

If you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life is being affected, then it's time to ask for help. A trusted family member or friend, teacher or coach can help or recommend someone to talk to.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing by:

- visiting the headspace website for tips for healthy headspace
- connecting with the LGBTIQ+ community through social groups and online communities
- checking out online support services, such as Qlife or ReachOut.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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tips for a

healthy headspace

Good mental health and wellbeing allows you to live your life in a positive and meaningful way and cope with life's changes and challenges.

Keeping a healthy headspace

Good mental health is a state of wellbeing where you feel able to work and study, feel connected to others, be involved in activities in your community and 'bounce back' when life's changes and challenges come along.

How can I boost my mental health?

Our headspace clinicians offered their insights on some practical ways to improve your wellbeing every day.

Get enough sleep. Sleeping well is good for your brain and body, and helps you feel energised, stay focused and protect your mental health. See our sleep fact sheet for more information and advice.

Eat well. Eating well can improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing. Fill up on nutritious food (like veggies, fruit and whole grains) and drink plenty of water to give your body and brain all the power it needs to function well.

Get in to life. Keep doing the stuff you love to do and the things that are important to you. It can help keep the fun in your life, give you a sense of accomplishment and purpose, boost your confidence and help to connect with others.

Some of these things, such as skating, reading or playing the guitar, might just be for fun, but other things like work or study can give you new skills and might help to give you meaning.

Stay active. Staying active can help you to sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood.

Make time to take a break from study or work or hanging out, whether it be going to the gym, kicking a ball around with a mate or just going for a walk. Whatever it is, start small, and make sure it's something you enjoy.

Connect. Spending time with family, friends (including pets) and people in your community can help strengthen your mental health and wellbeing. You can try things like:

- volunteer work
- hobbies
- clubs or committees
- sports.

Just like physical fitness, mental fitness takes regular effort. But sometimes life can get in the way of improving your mental health. Here are some important things to know.

Learn new ways to handle tough times. Taking time to think about how you're handling tough times is really important. Sometimes the things we do naturally can help, and other times they don't.

Increase your options for handling tough times as they'll come in handy now and into the future. Some options to consider include:

- using art, music or journaling to express yourself
- spending time in nature
- setting some small goals, and getting help seeing them through
- talking kindly to yourself
- searching for websites and free apps that can help.

Cut back on alcohol and other drugs. Cutting down on the amount of alcohol and other drugs that you take, or avoiding alcohol and other drugs altogether, will help you sleep better, feel better, and keep a healthy headspace.

Even though alcohol and other drugs may make you feel good in the very short term, they can impact your mental health and make you feel much worse in the long run.

How can I get help?



"If a problem feels like it's too big to deal with by yourself it probably is. It's important to speak up and get support from friends and family."

Dani, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

If you feel like support from family and friends isn't enough, seek professional help. You can see your general practitioner (GP), make an appointment to chat to someone at your local headspace centre or visit eheadspace for online and phone support.

Remember, keeping a good mental health involves building your mental fitness, so you can stay on top of things and get the most out of each day.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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get in to life

(to keep your headspace healthy)





“Whenever I’m going through a difficult time, I know that doing things I enjoy – such as reading, listening to music, going out in nature – helps to lift my mood. It is a distraction from issues that may be weighing me down. It gives me a chance to get out of my own head for a while.”

Alessandra, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Achieving small tasks and doing things you enjoy can boost your confidence and lift your mood – helping you keep a healthy headspace.

The things you do and your mood

The activities you make time for have a big impact on your headspace. When you spend time doing things you enjoy (or used to enjoy), it can give you relief from hard times, and build some fun in your life. Likewise, when you set and achieve small tasks that are important to you (such as completing homework or giving back to your community) it can help to create a sense of accomplishment and meaning.

In a nutshell, doing ‘stuff’ matters. Yet, if you’re going through a difficult time, doing anything can seem like a lot of effort. And if you’re feeling low you may lose interest in things you once enjoyed.

So, what should you do? The key is to focus on doing – even if you don’t want to or feel like it. As you set and achieve even small tasks you will learn more about yourself, build confidence and improve your wellbeing.

Here’s how ‘doing stuff’ can help your headspace:

- give you a sense of achievement and purpose
- build your confidence
- lift your energy
- improve your motivation
- it can help get you out of a rut if you’re not feeling energised.

Ask an expert: how can I do more stuff?

Here’s how our headspace experts suggest you get started:

- **Set small goals.** Setting and achieving goals builds confidence and self-worth. Think of a small task you want to do every day (maybe it’s making your bed, going for a 15 minute walk or calling a friend for a chat). It can be anything, the important thing is to set the goal and follow through.
- **Find activities you enjoy.** If you’re going through a hard time, you may not feel excited about doing anything. But think back – what did you used to enjoy? This can be a good place to start.
- **Make a schedule.** When you think of an activity, make time for it. Look ahead at your week and block out some time for the things that you enjoy.
- **Persist.** Find ways to follow through with your scheduled activity, even when you don’t feel like it. You may not feel like doing anything, so it might help to learn new ways to handle this.
- **Reflect.** Once you begin achieving your goals, take some time to reflect on how it makes you feel. Did you enjoy it? Did you feel a sense of accomplishment? If you did, that’s great. If not, that’s OK. You could try something else.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Maybe you try a new hobby that you’re not great at, but think of it as making time with yourself to learn and grow. Keep persisting and enjoy the journey of learning.

When you’re feeling low or stressed it’s important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life’s challenges.

Doing stuff and achieving little things every day is an important healthy habit, but it’s not the only one. Things like exercise, eating well, and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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learn skills for tough times



“It’s OK to feel not okay – tough times happen for everyone. The fact that you’re reading this shows that you’ve noticed things aren’t so great, or that a friend or family member’s not feeling so great, and you want to do something proactive or different...”

Liam – hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Developing your own positive ways to handle tough times can help develop your self-awareness, build confidence and leave you more resilient – all helping to keep your headspace healthy.

Developing your personal coping strategies

There’s no doubt about it, life can be hard sometimes. From relationship issues, to work and study stress, to days when we don’t feel great – we all go through stressful and emotional periods.

When that happens our coping strategies kick in – these are things that we’ve learnt over time that help us feel better. Some people naturally use ways of coping that are helpful – like journalling, meditation or speaking with friends. But for some of us, the way we cope can leave us feeling worse in the long term. We may stop doing things we enjoy, use alcohol and other drugs or disconnect from friends and family.

So, where should you start if you want to learn new ways to cope with difficult times? The important first step is to reflect on how you react to stress – taking time to understand *what* you do and *why* you do it. This builds your self-awareness. It can help you learn things about yourself that will help you handle tough times in the future. The more you understand yourself, the better you will be at applying more helpful strategies that *work for you*.

Learning new and positive ways to handle tough times can:

- improve your self-awareness
- give you a sense of achievement
- build your confidence
- lift your energy
- improve your motivation.

Develop your own healthy coping strategies

- **Notice how you respond in tough times.** Pausing for a few seconds before you engage in any type of coping strategy gives you the power to choose how you'd like to respond, rather than reacting automatically.
- **Reflect.** Think about whether your current coping strategies are helpful. This is not easy to do, and can take some practice. It might help to give yourself some time to ponder these questions, and write down anything that comes up:
 - How do I respond in tough times?
 - Do my thoughts or feelings influence what I do?
 - Is the way I respond useful or not?
 - Why do I think I respond in that way?
 - How can I approach the challenges differently?
- **It's never too late to begin.** It doesn't matter how long you've been having a tough time, there's always time to learn new coping strategies.
- **Make it work for you.** Your plan for dealing with tough times might be very different to someone else's. That's OK! Everyone is different. Coping with stress and emotion is individual.
- **Get support.** It can help to let those closest to you know your new coping strategies. That way, if you're distressed and struggling to think clearly, they can support you through your new plan.
- **Take notice.** Learn to notice how you handle these challenges and pay attention to whether the strategies are useful. Growth can come from how we manage the challenges that life throws at us. Noticing the benefits will help motivate you to try new ways, and help build your resilience.

Ideas for how you can handle tough Times differently

- journaling
- using artwork to express your feelings
- writing down what you find difficult and potential ways to handle it differently
- catching up with friends and family
- deep breathing
- disconnecting from social media for a while
- spending time in nature
- practising being kind to yourself
- meditation
- exercise (even a short walk can be helpful!)



“There are so many ways that you can do self-care, and for everyone that's different. I found goal-setting, or even schedule management, really helpful. Young people have a lot of stuff going on, they're trying to find work, keep active, keep up with study or work and it can get pretty hectic quickly, if you keep it all in your head.

Something as simple as having a diary – where you can plan out your days – can really help. It also just helps relax your mind from trying to keep everything in your head.

If you're able to do these positive things as part of your daily schedule, you can lean on this when you're feeling stressed. It's a lot easier to start when you're feeling OK, rather than when you're feeling really low.”

Liam, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

When you go through stressful periods, it's a good idea to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Having your own plan for looking after yourself in times of stress is important. Things like exercise, eating well and spending time on your relationships are also good for your mental health.

Regardless of your situation, there are lots of options to help you cope and you're never alone.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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build and create close connections





“I get a sense of satisfaction out of relationships, in terms of being able to connect with other people. It grounds me a lot. When I get stuck in my head, having relationships that I care about can bring me back out...”

Sophia, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Putting time into your relationships can help you feel connected, boost your energy and, ultimately, keep your headspace healthy.

Relationships and your mood

Healthy relationships are super important for your mental health. When you spend time with people you care about, who care about you, this can help you feel connected and supported.

Yet, we know relationships aren't always easy. Starting new relationships can often be scary. And if you're experiencing mental health difficulties you may feel like disconnecting from people, rather than reaching out.

But here's the thing – the more you work on your relationships, the stronger they get. Strong relationships can give you support when you need it and provide a sense of belonging and community. When you spend time connecting with and supporting others, your wellbeing improves, too!

Investing in relationships can improve your mood by:

- boosting your energy
- improving your sense of belonging
- helping you relax
- helping you feel supported.

Ask an expert: how can I work on my relationships?

Our headspace team have the following tips for navigating relationships.

- Focus on positive relationships that make you feel good about yourself. Build relationships where you support each other and where you feel you can be yourself.
- Every relationship can bring you different benefits, so try to keep a variety of people in your life, such as friends from work or school, teachers, parents, people who have similar interests and more.
- Communication is important. When you are open with people, they will be more open with you – which strengthens your relationships.

- Understand that socialising and keeping relationships can be hard and have challenges. Occasionally you may feel left out, different, even criticised. Just remember, it's normal to feel this way sometimes and the feelings will pass.
- Your relationship with yourself is an important relationship too. And, when you look after yourself it can teach you how to look after others as well.



“I find it hard to focus on relationships when I'm struggling. When I moved away from home for uni I was thrown into this environment where I didn't really know anyone and I did just have to make a lot of attempts at making friends. I think that's probably been a big source of anxiety for me – going out, trying to meet people and knowing it's not always going to work out.

I wasn't a big party animal, I wasn't really extroverted. But I learnt that you don't have to change yourself to try and fit into new friendships and new relationships and things like that. I focused on small level interactions that might not always eventually turn into a relationship. I think just having the confidence just to say, “Hi, how are you going?” Small talk was good to stay connected with my wider social environment.

I've come to see that working on relationships brings me out of my shell, not just talking to people, but getting out of the house and going to events and meeting new people as well. Sharing those new experiences, it gives me more energy, a bit more life and meaning, I guess. It's a chance to find out more about yourself and others.”

Sophia, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Healthy habits

When you're feeling stressed, anxious or low on energy it's important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Your relationships are so important for your general wellbeing. When you strengthen your relationships, and focus on forming healthy habits – such as cutting back on alcohol and drugs, sleeping well, and spending time with people you love – you put yourself in a great position to keep a healthy, happy mind.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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eating well for a healthy headspace





“When I started trying to improve my mental health I also knew I needed to improve the way I was eating. I started by having healthier snacks around and cooking up big meals. That way, when I was hungry, I had something that I could eat.”

Kimberley, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Eating well gives you more energy, helps you sleep better, improves your concentration and, you guessed it, keep a healthy headspace.

Food and your mood

When you think of improving your mental health, you may not think about changing the food you eat, but there is a strong link between what we eat and how we feel!

We know an unhealthy diet can be associated with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, but now we are seeing a healthy diet (with a variety of fruit, veggies, nuts and whole grains) can actually improve mental health.

This is a pretty new and exciting area of research. In fact, two recent studies investigated whether healthy food could reduce depression symptoms. And the results were clear. People who ate a healthier diet improved their depression symptoms more than people who focused on only social support.

Here’s how eating well can improve your headspace:

- help you get a better night’s sleep
- give you more energy
- improve your concentration
- make you less likely to crave foods with high sugar, salt or fat.

Ask an expert: How can I eat for a healthier headspace?

Professor Felice Jacka is Director of the Food and Mood Centre. Here are her tips to eating a healthier diet for your mental health.

- Often we turn to unhealthy snacks when we are stressed. So it’s good to develop coping strategies that are not related to food, things like exercise or mindfulness.

- We know that some foods are very good for a healthy mind. So make sure your diet includes things like colourful fruits and vegetables, foods high in fibre (wholegrain cereals and bread, beans, chickpeas, lentils and nuts), fermented foods like unsweetened yogurt, olive oil, and fish (tinned is fine).
- Make small changes that are easy to stick to. Start by swapping an unhealthy afternoon snack for a healthy one, like a piece of fruit.
- You don’t have to be perfect, and don’t be too hard on yourself. A burger or a chocolate bar are fine every now and then (say, once on the weekend) but it’s important to make sure your diet includes a variety of nutritious foods, most of the time!
- Try to avoid too much red meat – a little bit is fine but keep it to 3-4 times per week.



“I’ve struggled with depression for many years. And for me, bad nutrition was a symptom of my mental health struggles. Basically, I would stop putting that time into self-care, and nutrition was a part of that.

Once I made some small changes I definitely noticed a difference. I can concentrate better, it’s easier to study, and it just makes me happier. It’s a sense of achievement.

I know if you are really depressed it can be hard to find the energy to even leave the house. So even doing your groceries online can be good – that way you have healthier options at home.”

Kimberley, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Healthy habits

When you’re feeling low and struggling with life it’s important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life’s challenges.

Eating well is one of these healthy habits, but it’s not the only one. Things like exercise, sleeping well, and spending time with people you love also play an important role in good mental health.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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sleeping well for a healthy headspace





“After making small changes to my routine I really noticed the positive benefits of quality sleep. I feel brighter, more optimistic, and energetic when I sleep well.”

May Lyn, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Getting the right amount of quality sleep can give you more energy, improve concentration, help you better deal with stress and, you guessed it, keep a healthy headspace!

Sleep and your mood

Quality sleep is like a mental health superpower.

When you get enough sleep it's easier to manage your emotions, you have more patience and you deal with stressful situations better. Also, you reduce your risk of mental health challenges in the future!

Yet, it's so common to struggle to sleep. That's because your sleep can be impacted by many things – from the food you eat to feeling worried or anxious and even using your phone before bed.

So... how much is enough? If you're aged between 12-17 then 8-10 hours sleep is ideal, while 18-25 year olds should try to get 7-9 hours.

Here's how those zzz's can improve your headspace. It can:

- give you more energy
- improve your memory, attention and concentration
- make you less likely to crave unhealthy snacks
- help you better deal with stressful situations.

Ask an expert – how do I sleep better?

Michael Gradisar is a sleep expert from the National Sleep Foundation. Here are his quick tips for improving your sleep.

- At least an hour before bed, switch from video games, YouTube and social media to TV or watching a movie.
- Lower the brightness on your phone and computer screens at night. Some have features where you can automatically dim and change the colour of your screens to help you prepare for rest.
- If you find it hard to wind down, try a mindfulness exercise like one from the Smiling Mind app.

- Try to sleep the same amount every night. An extra hour, every now and then, is fine – but any more can confuse your body clock.
- If you need to get up during the night try to avoid turning on bright lights and hop back into bed quickly.
- Avoid caffeine at least six hours before you go to bed.
- If you can, avoid napping during the day.



“For years, whenever I was feeling low and stressed I would stay up really late. It really affected my mental health.

I read about the link between quality sleep and mood so I decided to try to improve my routine. I began with small changes – aiming to be in bed before 11pm. And from about 9pm I would watch Netflix or read, instead of browsing the internet or chatting with friends online. Slowly my routine changed and now I really notice the positive benefits of quality sleep – I feel a lot brighter, optimistic, and energetic when I sleep well. And I'm more productive!

It can take a while to find something that works and things can get thrown out of whack. So it's important to be patient and flexible. Try different things and be kind to yourself.”

May Lyn, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

When you're feeling low or stressed it's important to put healthy habits in place that build your emotional strength – to prepare yourself for riding life's ups and downs.

Getting a good night's sleep is one of these healthy habits, but it's not the only one. Things like exercise, eating well, and spending time with people you love also play an important role in good mental health.



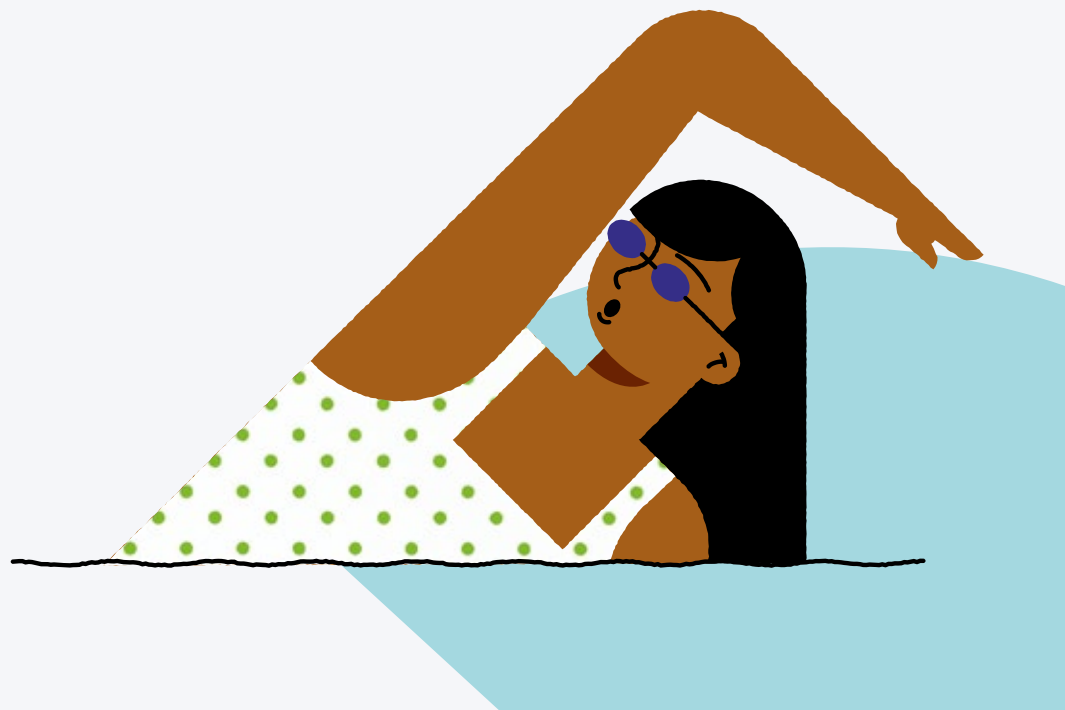
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stay active for a healthy headspace





“I visited a clinician a few years ago who recommended that I start exercising to help support my mental health. Having always been active as a child, feeling depressed and low on energy had stopped me from keeping physically active.”

Niharika, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Staying active can improve your sleep, give you more energy and help manage stress – all helping you keep a healthy headspace.






Your mood when you move

We get it – when you’re feeling stressed or low you probably feel more like watching TV than being active. Yet it’s often that the moment you need it most is when you least feel like moving your body.

You may know that exercise is good for your physical health, but what you may not know is that it also improves your wellbeing too!

And exercising doesn’t have to be running on the treadmill. It’s really anything that gets your body moving and increases your heart rate. Activities like walking, playing team sports with friends, dancing or swimming will all help you release stress and give you a better chance at improving your mood.

There are so many benefits to staying active. It can:

-  help you sleep better
-  raise your energy levels
-  improve your confidence
-  boost your mood
-  release stress and lower anxiety.

Ask an expert: how can I get started?

Alex Parker is an Exercise and Mental Health Professor. Here are her tips to help you get active.

- Start small. If you start by setting small goals you will be more likely to do them and this will help you feel more motivated.
- Keep track. Monitor your progress and track how you feel after you exercise. This will help you see connections between how moving more helps you feel better.
- Do what you enjoy. Whether you enjoy working hard, for short periods of time, or prefer swimming at the beach, do what feels good. It will be a lot easier to stick to it if you’re having fun!
- Make the time (even when you’re busy). When you’re busy and stressed, exercise can be the first thing you stop. Yet, being active during busy times will actually help you through tough periods.
- Set a routine. Plan ahead and make physical activity a part of your routine. Things like having your workout gear ready the night before and setting an alarm can help you stick to your goals.



“It wasn’t easy to get back into it. I started small with short walks and built it up over time.

The more active I became – walking, running, weights at the gym – the stronger I felt and the more energy I had. I felt more calm and found it easier to focus. My self-esteem improved – being strong physically helped me feel stronger mentally.”

Niharika, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

When you’re feeling low and stressed, it’s important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life’s challenges.

Staying active is one of these healthy habits, but it’s not the only one. Things like sleep, eating well, and spending time with people you love also play an important role in good mental health.



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what is
mental health?


what is
mental illness?

Being mentally healthy is about being able to work and/or study to your full potential, cope with day-to-day life stresses, be involved in your community, and live your life in a free and satisfying way. A person who has good mental health has good emotional and social wellbeing and the capacity to cope with change and challenges.

Mental health isn't a fixed state. It's not like one person has it now and always will, and another doesn't and never will. Mental health can be thought of as sitting on continuum (or scale) that we all move along, all the time, depending on how things are going for us.

Sometimes there are things totally out of our control that can have a big impact on our mental health. But there are also a lot of things in our control that we can do to support our mental health. We've tried to capture them in our seven tips for a healthy headspace. Generally, it's a good idea to incorporate these things into your everyday routine so that they become a normal part of life, and support you to handle challenges when they come up. They are:

- eat well
- stay connected to family and friends
- learn new ways to handle tough times
- reduce or cut out alcohol and other drugs
- stay active
- get enough sleep
- get in to life, and do what's important to you.

 **Knowing there are a lot of things in your control that can support your mental health is really empowering.**

This might also help you to understand what may have contributed to any hard times you've had in the past. Think of a time you had less sleep than usual or were having a lot of difficulty with family and friends – were you able to cope as well with the demands of daily life?

The mental health continuum

The mental health continuum and **7 tips for a healthy headspace** can be used to help us understand that most of the time, mental illness doesn't appear out of nowhere. Most of the time there are early signs that we or someone else might be having a tough time.

If we're experiencing some early warning signs we might refer to these as mental health difficulties. These are very common, and usually don't last for long periods or have a big impact on our ability to do the things we want to do, or be the person we want to be. Even so, they are noticeably different from good mental health. So what are early warning signs? They can include things like:

- not enjoying, or not wanting to be involved in things that you would normally enjoy
- changes in appetite or sleeping patterns
- being easily irritated or having problems with friends and family for no reason
- finding that you aren't performing at school, TAFE, university or work like you used to
- being involved in risky behaviour that you would usually avoid, like taking drugs, having unprotected sex or drinking too much alcohol, or depending on substances to feel 'normal'
- feeling sad or down or crying for no apparent reason
- having trouble concentrating or remembering things
- having negative, distressing, bizarre or unusual thoughts
- feeling unusually stressed or worried
- feeling like things have changed or aren't quite right.

If someone has been experiencing these early warning signs for a longer period of time (at least two weeks), and they're having a big impact on their ability to do everyday things (like catch up with friends or go to work, study or school) then these might be signs of a mental illness. The term 'mental illness' is used to describe a recognised, diagnosed disorder. Someone can only be diagnosed with a mental illness after an assessment by a mental health professional.

Mental ill-health is anything from a mental health difficulty to a diagnosed mental illness. Almost half of the Australian population will experience some form of mental ill-health at some point in their life. When mental ill-health starts to impact your everyday life for more than a few weeks it's a good time to get some support.

Causes of mental ill-health problems

It is often a combination of multiple factors that can cause us to experience mental health difficulties, or a mental illness. These can be:

- difficult life experiences: abuse, neglect or the loss of someone close to you
- individual factors: self-esteem, coping skills and thinking styles
- current circumstances: stress at school or work, money problems, difficult personal relationships or problems within your family
- biological factors: family history of mental ill-health.

Looking after your mental health

There are a number of things you can do to look after and maintain your mental health. A helpful approach can be to incorporate the 7 tips for a healthy headspace into your everyday routine. This will leave you more prepared to cope with life's challenges, and can help you work through anything you might currently be experiencing.



For more tips on looking after your mental health see our tips for a healthy headspace fact sheets.

If you're concerned about your own or a friend's mental health and wellbeing, **headspace** or your local GP are a great place to go for help. Getting support can help you keep on track in your relationships and at school, study or work. The sooner you get help the sooner things can begin to improve.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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what is healthy electronic gaming?

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can help us to connect with others, feel socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can help us to have structure and routine in our lives and provides some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

When gaming becomes a problem

Gaming, like any behaviour, can cause harm if it is taken to extreme levels.

- For a very small number of young people, gaming can have a significantly negative impact in their everyday lives.
- These problems seem to be most common for young men between the ages of 12–20 years of age, but can occur in any gamer population.

If you think that your internet use or gaming is beginning to contribute to some problems in your life, there are lots of things you can do to get back in control.

Signs of possible problems with gaming

It is not necessarily the amount of time you spend gaming that causes a problem, but when gaming takes time away from doing activities that keep you healthy and well. For example, you might find that you are spending less time than usual with people you care about. You might be doing less exercise or find that you are having trouble sleeping or getting to school or work. You might be feeling some distress or starting to feel less confident.

If you are experiencing some of these symptoms below, it might be a sign that gaming is starting to have a negative impact on your everyday life:

- feeling sad, irritable, anxious, frustrated or angry when you are not able to access digital or video games
- changing sleep patterns or sleep difficulties such as getting up too early or staying up too late to game
- being aggressive or experiencing conflict with others over gaming
- it's OK to feel frustrated at a loss or situation from time to time but gaming should be a positive experience and if it isn't this may be a sign that something is wrong
- other people expressing concern at the amount of time you spend gaming or online
- spending less time with family and friends than you normally would
- being preoccupied with gaming (spending large amounts of time thinking about the next gaming session or past sessions)
- losing track of time and a loss of control over the time you spend gaming so important things get missed, such as appointments or other commitments
- feeling physical pain or irritation, for example pain in your neck, wrists, or back, dry or red eyes
- eating meals while playing or skipping meals
- spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases
- using gaming as a way of avoiding other activities.

You might also notice other changes in your life that don't appear directly related to your gaming such as:

- loss of interest in school and other activities that you previously enjoyed
- lowered self-esteem or self confidence
- poor eating habits
- headaches/migraines
- decreased personal hygiene
- performing less well at school or work.

Related problems

People who have difficulty with gaming may also be experiencing other mental health conditions, for example, difficulty managing their mood.

Supporting yourself and getting help

Take a "health check" on your gaming and internet use. Is it a fun activity that is helping you to feel good? How is your balance with other activities that keep you healthy and well? Are you feeling more or less connected to others?

There are a lot of tips that can help with keeping your game time in balance. Time on screens can sneak up without you realising it. Here are some things that you could consider.



Leave your internet and gaming time for after your jobs are done. Treat it as a reward.



Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online and set a timer.



Set up times to "unplug".



Make mealtimes screen free.



Have other hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.



Charge your devices outside of your room or perhaps don't have them in your bedroom at all. You will reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.



Get up and move regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.



Take a sleep audit. How much are you getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.



where can I get help

If you find that your relationships, mood, school performance or work are being impacted by your continued or increased gaming use, then it might be useful to talk with someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information. You can also contact **ehespace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you wanted to talk to somebody about your internet and gaming use.



With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives.



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how to balance

screen time

(for a healthy headspace)

The internet has changed the way we work, socialise and relax, with a lot of these activities now happening online. It has added a lot of value to our lives.

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can help us connect with others, feel socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can bring structure and routine into our lives and give us some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

The research is unclear how much screen time is too much. What is clear however, is that it is important to keep a healthy balance of online and offline activities in our lives.

Not all screen time is the same. Screens and devices have become essential for us to do our work, and can be excellent learning devices. We can use them to connect with others, get support, master new skills, relax and have fun. Some online activities help us learn and be productive, whilst others provide downtime and enjoyment. However, there are other online activities that are less productive or maybe unhealthy, for example distressing violent games or if the content you are watching is not making you feel good. So not all screen time is equally valuable.

Signs that your screen time is becoming unhealthy

It is important to think about the impact that your screen time is having on your life in each of these areas below.

- **Exercise:** Research has linked screen time with an increased amount of sedentary behaviour in children and teens, and we know that being active is good for our physical and mental health. Are you still making time to move? Play sport or be more active?
- **Sleep:** is VERY important. If you are gaming when you would normally be sleeping you might need to turn off a little earlier or move your device out of your bedroom. Most young people need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep per night to be at their best, both physically and mentally.
- **Social time:** Being connected to others helps us feel good. We can connect with others online but it is important to see people we care about too. Are you making time to regularly meet up with friends and family?
- **Variety of activities:** are you keeping up with your school tasks and work? Are you doing a variety of other activities that you enjoy like reading, music or other hobbies? Do you make time to stop and eat well? Don't let other activities slip off the radar, they are important for you too.
- **Conflict, irritability and stress:** if you are getting into conflict with others about your gaming or are feeling irritable, sad or tense when you game or can't game, it might be time to think about the balance of screen time in your day.
- **Money:** are you spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases? This can become a problem for some people too.

Supporting yourself and getting help

The amount of time you spend on your screen can sneak up without you realising it. What can you do if your screen time has gotten out of balance?



Get other activities done first before you relax online. For example do some exercise, get your homework and chores done, walk the dog and spend time with your family before turning on your device. Treat it as a reward.



Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online, then set a timer to help you stay within that time limit.



Schedule in some 'no screen times' during your day. Set up times to 'unplug'.



Make mealtimes screen free.



Make sure you have offline hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.



Exercise while you game, by getting up and moving regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.



Work out how much sleep you are getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.



Charge your devices outside of your room or perhaps don't have them in your bedroom at all. It will reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.

If you find that your relationships, mood, school performance or work are being impacted by your continued or increased gaming use, then it might be useful to talk with someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information. You can also contact **headspace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you wanted to talk to somebody about your internet and gaming use.



With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives.



Where can I get help

If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au), your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.



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understanding gaming

A guide for family and friends

- The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you better understand your young person's gaming and internet use and how you can support them to maintain a healthy balance in their lives.
- Most young people spend time online and gaming, and they are usually positive pastimes. However, a very small number of young people can experience problems in their daily lives as a result of their gaming and internet use.
- Over engagement in gaming can also be a symptom that other things in a young person's life might not be going so well.
- It can often be hard for parents to know the difference between healthy and unhealthy internet use and to understand when a problematic pattern of use might be emerging.
- Parents need to look after themselves and know where to get information and support when they need it too.

Healthy gaming

Games are an integral part of human behaviour. It is normal and healthy for young people to engage in play as a part of their daily lives, including playing games online.

Online communities are providing more opportunities to feel socially connected and gaming can help young people feel a sense of belonging. At healthy levels, gaming can increase self-esteem and social acceptance. It can also provide an opportunity for a structured daily routine and can be a fun and relaxing activity.

However, any behaviour, when taken to extreme, can have a negative impact on a young person's everyday life.

When should I be concerned about my young person's gaming?

Gaming can have both positive and negative outcomes, like most activities. If you're concerned about a young person's gaming, it's important to consider a variety of factors.

This guide can help you understand more about your young person's mental health and how to connect with them about their gaming use, so that together you can make more informed choices to support their wellbeing.

What are the warning signs that a young person might be experiencing mental health issues?

Whilst too much gaming or internet use may be an indicator that something isn't quite right, there are usually other signs that a young person might be experiencing a mental health issue. Often it can be hard to know the difference between normal behaviour, such as occasional moodiness and irritability, and an emerging mental health issue.

Feeling down, tense, angry, anxious or moody are all normal emotions, but when these feelings persist for long periods (some weeks) of time, and if they begin to interfere with daily life, they may be cause for concern.

Keep an eye out for significant changes in your young person that last longer than you might expect (at least a few weeks), such as:

- being less interested and involved in activities they would normally enjoy
- changes in appetite or sleeping patterns
- being easily irritated or angry
- their performance at school, TAFE, university or work is not as good as it once was
- involving themselves in risky behaviour they would usually avoid, such as taking drugs or drinking too much alcohol
- difficulties with concentration or motivation
- seeming unusually stressed or worried, or feeling down or crying for no apparent reason
- expressing negative, distressing or out-of-character thoughts.

Good mental health allows people to deal with the changes and challenges life throws at them and live their lives in a positive and meaningful way. You can help your young person think about the balance they have in their daily life and increase their participation in activities that support their wellbeing. Just like physical fitness, mental fitness takes regular effort too.

You can read our fact sheet on "What is healthy gaming" for more information on the signs of troublesome gaming or internet use. For ideas on how to support the mental health of your young person, visit our "Tips for a healthy headspace for family and friends".

How long should I let my young person play video games for?

Currently we don't have definitive evidence about how long young people should engage in playing games. As a rule, if a behaviour is having a negative impact on the young person's life then it's a problem. The Australian Physical Activity & Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (published by the Australian Department of Health) suggest that screen time should be limited to no more than two hours per day for 12-17 year olds. This generally doesn't include purposeful screen time (activities that are interactive like work or school and in some cases gaming).

It's also important to consider whether gaming or internet use is impacting on other areas of a young person's life. Healthy behaviour relates to a young person engaging in a variety of activities and contexts (such as family time, friend time, alone time, and inside and outside activities). There are also certain activities that support a young person's health and wellbeing, such as exercise and good quality sleep.

If the length of a young person's gaming or internet use is stopping them from consistently engaging in a variety of other activities, affecting their sleep, hygiene or healthy eating, or being used as a way of avoiding necessary tasks (like school work or studying), it may be a problem.

Leading by example and setting boundaries as a family

Young people model their behaviours by observing the adults in their life, so setting an example with your own screen time is a good place to start. Talk with your young person about the importance of “screen-free time” (including gaming) and negotiate times when screen time is and isn’t appropriate.

As a general rule the following are good boundaries to set around screen time:



Limit screens in bedrooms and turn them off for at least one hour before bedtime, as the light and stimulation from screens can disrupt falling asleep and sleeping well. Instead encourage activities like reading, journaling or drawing at these times. If reading on e-devices make sure ‘night modes’ are available and used.



Get up and move regularly. Doing simple stretches can really help with back neck and wrist issues. Think about your setup.



Limit screens at meal times and when eating. This allows us to be more mindful eaters and encourages valuable family time



Screen time should not prevent a young person from participating in activities they need and want to do. If gaming, internet use or screen time are impacting on these activities, consider scheduling in time for them prior to gaming.

I'm a parent trying to understand gaming and my young person's gaming use. What can I do to support my young person?

It can be intimidating and confusing trying to understand your young person’s gaming and online experiences. Sometimes these can feel distant and disconnected from a parent’s world. Importantly, you don’t have to be an expert or even play the game, however, to help build and maintain a connection. Respecting the interest the young person has, and trying to understand what it is the young person gets from the experience will go a long way.

As a parent or carer it can be helpful to share some screen time with your young person, or to spend time understanding what they are experiencing online and when gaming.

Take some time to understand the gaming experience:

- the reasons your young person likes the game
- what they get from the experience
- do they see difficulties in the way the game is played
- what they do when the game doesn’t go well.
- who they are playing with and the kinds of interactions they have.

And the structure of the game:

- the rules
- the playing environment (and whether it is online or offline)
- the nature of the game
- the language/terminology used in the game
- the format (teams or solo, pausable or real time etc...).

Ask your young person to explain the rules and have them demonstrate the game. You can also get them to show you an online playthrough or stream, or even watch an esports match together. This will help you identify any concerns and have constructive conversations with your young person about their gaming use.

How to have a conversation if you are concerned

Raising sensitive issues with young people can be challenging but there are things you can do to make it easier for everyone. It’s important that young people feel comfortable and supported to talk about what’s impacting their health and wellbeing. You can encourage them by:

- managing your own feelings. Often young people are worried about their parents being upset, anxious, overwhelmed, shocked, angry, blaming, etc.
- letting them know at the start of the conversation that you intend to be calm and supportive no matter what they say
- being available without being intrusive
- spending regular time with them – even doing one activity a week together can help to keep the lines of communication open
- showing that you are interested in what’s happening in their life and trying not to focus on things that you think may be a problem.

There is no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health with a young person. It can be helpful to:

- let them know that you love them. They may not always admit it but this is likely to be very important to them
- keep trying (without nagging – it can be a tricky balance) to keep communication open with your young person. Sometimes a bit of perseverance goes a long way.
- if a young person knows you are coming from a caring place and that you are trying to be genuinely helpful, it allows for more engaging conversations
- take their feelings seriously – show empathy, listen carefully and don’t judge. Let them know you understand that they enjoy their gaming and internet use. It can be more useful at times to say nothing than to jump in with answers or solutions
- think about a good time and place to talk about sensitive subjects. For example, would they find it easier to talk while driving or going for a walk? Would they prefer to be out of the house with no interruptions? Would they prefer to have someone else there for support? It is always better to have these conversations when people are not distressed or rushed, but are feeling calm and safe
- let them know that you are concerned in a non-confrontational way
- remind them that talking about a problem can help
- acknowledge that opening up about personal thoughts and feelings can be hard and sometimes scary
- reassure them that you will be there for them and ask what they need from you (they might not know what they need)
- tell them that you are glad they are talking to you.

It can be helpful to begin with general and open-ended questions such as the examples below.

- 'How is [e.g., school/sport/gaming] going?'
- 'How are you getting on with [e.g., your friends/your siblings]?'
- 'How are you feeling about [e.g., studying/exams]?'

To focus on more specific thoughts and feelings, try using 'I/you' statements such as:

- 'I'm happy to talk or listen and see if I can help'
- 'I'm here for you, and we can work it out together.'
- 'It's OK if you don't want to talk to me, you could talk to [trusted/known adult]. I will keep letting you know I love you and that I'm here for you.'

Remember, a supportive family can make a big difference to how well a young person copes with challenges in their lives. If you would like more support or information you can go to headspace.org.au or contact a support service.

Looking after yourself is important too

When you look after yourself you have greater patience and can offer a more considered approach to supporting your young person. It is important to remember your own needs and know where to get information and support when you need it.

Here are some ways you can look after your own health and wellbeing:



Remind yourself that there is no such thing as a perfect parent, we each try to do our best everyday



You don't have to play or be an expert in gaming but learning a bit about this will help you connect and relate to your young person. There are lots of video 'walk throughs' and 'how to's' that can help with this



Eat well and drink plenty of water



Get a good night's sleep



Make time every day to do something you enjoy (this might even be gaming with your family and friends)



Ask for help or support for yourself from family and friends, or your GP or counsellor.

One of the most effective ways to support a healthy headspace is to model healthy behaviours yourself.

You can also take a look at our family and friends section on the headspace website: headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/ or our eheadspace group chats at [ehheadspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au) for more information.

What useful services are there?

As well as headspace centres and eheadspace, there are other services that can help:

- parent helplines (in every State and Territory of Australia) – Google 'Parentline' along with your State or Territory
- Relationships Australia: relationships.org.au/
- family relationships services: familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRC/Pages/default.aspx
- local family support services.

If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace.org.au, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information. 5 February 2020

how to manage

sleep and gaming

for a healthy headspace

Sleep is important for our physical and mental health. Although it varies from person to person, if you're aged between 12–17 years, you should be aiming for 8 to 10 hours sleep per night and 18–25 year olds should try to get 7 to 9 hours.

Gaming and internet use can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can connect us with others, help us feel more socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can bring structure and routine into our lives as well as provide some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun, which is all good for our mental health.

However for some people, gaming and screen time can get in the way of having a good night's sleep, which can lead to other problems.

What happens if we don't get enough sleep?

Trouble sleeping sets the stage for many problems. When we are not getting enough sleep it is harder to manage the stress in our lives, to keep anxiety in check and it can impact our mood. We will have less energy, be more irritable and even have poorer physical health.

Sleep gives us time for our brain to process all that we have done and learned during the day, so it's important for our development and concentration too.

If you are online when you would normally be sleeping, it may be time to start reducing your screen use. Not only does too much screen time take away precious sleep, but using technology before bedtime makes it harder to fall asleep, and can also reduce the quality of sleep, which can make us feel sleepier the next day.

Looking at screens before bedtime has a stimulating effect on our minds, because of the light reflecting from the device, (often a blue coloured light). It can encourage our minds to stay alert, which can interrupt our natural body clocks and make it harder to fall asleep.

Supporting yourself and where to get help

Good sleep habits take consistent practice. It can be tough when your sleep isn't great to get back on track, but there are things you can do to enjoy gaming and continue to get a good night's sleep, don't be disheartened if it takes a while it's worth keeping at it.



Turn off video games, screens and social media at least one hour before you go to bed. Set a bedtime for your device! Maybe have a bath, watch a movie, or read a book instead. Try a mindfulness exercise if you are having trouble winding down.



Lower the brightness on your phone and computer screens at night. Some phones have a night mode which is one way to do this.



Don't charge your devices in your room overnight. It can be tempting to keep playing when we should be asleep. Use an old fashioned alarm clock instead of your smart phone.



Try to have a regular amount of sleep each night. An extra hour, every now and then, is fine – but any more can confuse your body clock. If you need more sleep, go to bed a little earlier is better than sleeping in a bit later. In fact setting a regular wake up time and sticking to it is a good way to reset our body clocks.



Try not to nap through the day as this makes it hard to get your sleep wake cycle back into rhythm.



Get some daylight and exercise through the day, but don't exercise right before bed, it can keep you awake.



Leave sometime to try a relaxation, meditation or mindfulness exercise.



Try to stay away from caffeine, cola, energy drinks, tea and even chocolate for a few hours before you go to sleep. Maybe try herbal tea instead.



Where can I get help?

If you think gaming or your internet use is getting in the way of a good night's sleep you can talk to someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, friend or family member. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information about sleep. You can also contact **ehespace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you would like to talk to somebody about your internet use or sleep.



The good news is that with some strategies and the right support, most people are able to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives, without it interrupting their sleep.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au), your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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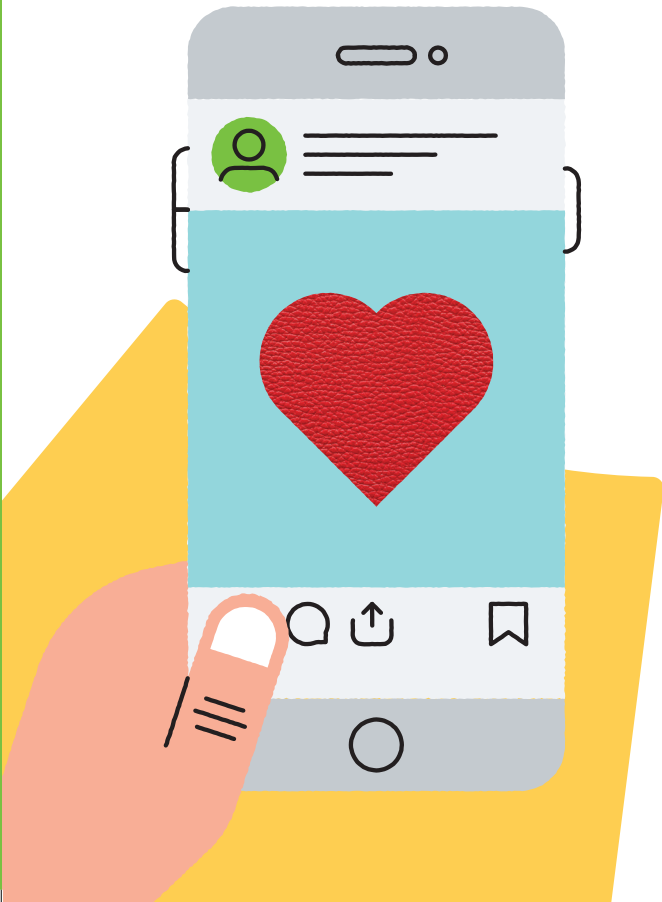
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headspace

National Youth Mental Health Foundation

what is ehheadspace?



headspace supports young people aged 12 to 25 years who are going through a tough time.

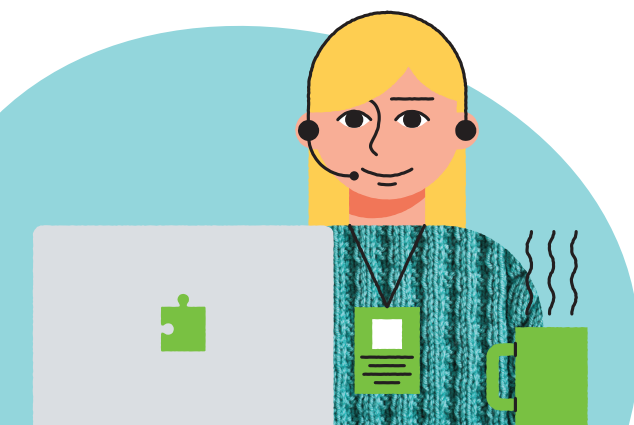
We provide eheadspace for young people who might be too far from a centre, might not feel comfortable with face-to-face support - or just prefer this way of chatting.

It's a safe place and it's free*. You might use eheadspace if you need advice, if you're feeling isolated or worried, are unsure of what help you need or just want to talk things through. We want you to get the help you need sooner rather than later.

Who is eheadspace?

At eheadspace, we are experienced youth mental health professionals – psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses and occupational therapists. We help by listening, talking things through, giving you information and offering other support options to help you. You can also get support from our family and friend specialists.

eheadspace web chat and telephone support is available 7 days a week, 9am – 1am Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), but you can email anytime.





How do I register?

Head to **eheadspace.org.au** to get started. The same information will be asked if you contact by phone (**1800 650 890**) but don't worry, you won't need to provide a full name, we just ask for an email address.

What information do you need?

The more information you feel comfortable providing us, the more we can help. Some helpful information to share would be how you've been feeling, if you've had any mental health issues before, whether you are already using a support service and if you have any concerns or don't understand any part of the session. Feel free to let us know what you want from us and what can we help with.

Different ways to chat

We'll always do our best to get to everyone, but at times eheadspace can get really busy. If you can't access web chat when you log on, another option may be to send an email or contact us on **1800 650 890**. You can even email us to book a time to chat.

Group chats are another way for you to ask professionals some questions in a anonymous online environment. These sessions are held online once a month, each based on a specific topic. If you are unable to attend on the night, you can go into the headspace website and view past chats online.

Head to [eheadspace.org.au](https://www.eheadspace.org.au) to discover tools and articles you may find helpful.

*All eheadspace online services are free but if you call **1800 650 890** from a mobile phone normal call charges apply.



You can access eheadspace anywhere in Australia via:

Web chat at eheadspace.org.au

Calling us on **1800 650 890**

Emailing us by visiting eheadspace.org.au

eheadspace web chat and telephone support is available 7 days a week, 9am – 1am Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), but you can email anytime.



Is it an emergency?

If you are in an emergency situation or need immediate assistance, contact mental health services or emergency services on **000**. If you need to speak to someone urgently, call Kids HelpLine **1800 55 1800** or Lifeline **13 11 14**.