



**Don't
keep it to
yourself**

Men's Health Hints and Tips





Men's mental health

As part of Simplyhealth's 'Everyman's Health Matters' campaign, we're looking at the factors which effect men both physically and mentally, as well as providing information and support.

As a man, when it comes to your mental and physical health, you have choices. You can choose to exercise your emotions and face up to conversations about your health. These choices are a positive force for a healthy future - not just as an act of self-care, but as a selfless move. As you open up to those who've got your back, you become a healthier and happier partner, father, brother, friend, colleague and teammate.

And that same core of inner strength can help you choose a healthy lifestyle regardless of background, experience, opportunity or ethnicity. Exercise is a great way to boost our mental and physical wellbeing.

We believe you can take control of your future health by choosing activity for your body to boost your emotional wellbeing. This resource focuses on the benefits of men's participation in sport, alongside how to support and manage emotional hazards associated with group activity.

Through our campaign, we are supporting every man's health through a variety of voices. We want men to feel reinforced to make the right choices and to build physical and mental resilience for a healthier tomorrow.



What is good mental health?

Good mental health means being able to feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions. It's just like physical health – everybody has it and we need to take care of it.

When you have good mental health, you can:

- make the most of your potential
- cope with life
- play a full part in your family, workplace, community and among friends

Mental health doesn't always stay the same. Sometimes you can bounce back from a setback and other times you may be weighed down for a long time.

Your mental health can change as circumstances change and it can vary during different stages of your life. For men, it can sometimes present as anger rather than sadness.



The stigma around men's mental health

Every day men are faced with out-dated gender expectations. Needing to be 'strong', 'in control' and the 'bread-winner' makes it really tough to shout out and ask for help.

The upshot can be that men tune out their emotions and turn a blind eye to physical symptoms. And when mental or physical health warnings get buried, deeper problems can emerge. Men are more likely to use potentially harmful coping methods such as drugs or alcohol and less likely to reach out for support.



Men's mental health statisticsⁱ

- Men account for just over **three out of four** suicides (**76%**) and it is the biggest cause of death for men under 35
- **12.5%** of men in the UK are suffering from one of the common **mental health disorders**
- Men are nearly **three times more likely** than women to become alcohol dependent and more likely to use (and die from) illegal drugs
- Men are **less likely** to access psychological therapies than women - only **36%** of referrals to IAPT (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) are men
- Nearly **half of men** have struggled with their mental wellbeing because of how their body looksⁱⁱ



Physical activity as a coping method

One-off physical activity has a huge potential to enhance wellbeing. A short burst of 10 minutes brisk walking increases mental alertness, energy and a positive mood.ⁱⁱⁱ

Regular physical activity can provide a sense of freedom from negative thoughts which in turn relieves the often overwhelming everyday pressures of stress and anxiety.

Physical activity can prevent emotional issues developing in the first place and improves the quality of life for men who already experience mental health problems. Research shows that highly active individuals tend to have lower stress rates compared to those who are less active.^{iv}

Whether at grass roots or elite level, sport involves camaraderie, teamwork and supporting others through hard times. All these are beneficial to mental health and wellbeing and create a valuable sense of belonging. Sport is also a great way for teenage boys to offload emotional turmoil or anxiety as their minds and bodies develop. The social connections gained improve confidence and inner strength.

Self-esteem is a key indicator of our mental wellbeing and ability to cope with stress and can be improved through exercise and being involved with sport. Men gain a sense of pride, teamwork, lifelong friendship, joy and passion from engaging in different sports. More than ever before, physical activity has a vital role to play in eliminating the sense of social isolation experienced by many during pandemic lockdowns.





Overcoming men's mental health hazards

Whilst there are multiple activities that can benefit men's mental health, there are also potential hazards to negotiate.

In every male community, it's vital to engage people in conversations around mental health and encourage kind cultures where healthy minds are met with open ones.

Men need to be equipped with the skills to support themselves and those around them.

Creating positive community cultures

Physical activity has a great role to play in keeping men happy and healthy, and clubs and sport facilities can play a critical role in communities. But the culture needs to be kind, safe and empowering to ensure that boys and men can build habits for a healthier life.

When the culture in any male dominated community treats mental and physical wellbeing equally, it breaks down traditional barriers and encourages those involved to address their emotions in wider aspects of their lives.

Gratitude should be nurtured as part of a community to ensure that the men feel valued and those who run the community are able to take a moment to feel thankful for their own ability to contribute.

Whilst fun and banter often plays a large part in male culture, it can mask what is really happening. The underlying values need to be strong enough to recognise when this is the case and act accordingly.



Ensuring mental health awareness

Men involved in community activities are not expected to be mental health experts, but they are often faced with a variety of wellbeing issues which require support.

Friends, parents, partners, volunteers and colleagues all need to understand how to spot signs of poor mental health in others.

This can be promoted through more conversations and awareness when individuals show signs of:

- Mood changes
- Sleep disturbance
- Becoming withdrawn
- Changes in eating or drinking
- Struggling to focus

A photograph of three young men sitting together and smiling. The man in the foreground is wearing a black cap and a plaid shirt, looking towards the camera. The man behind him is wearing a light-colored patterned shirt and is pointing towards the camera. The man on the right is wearing a blue denim shirt and is giving a thumbs up. A large dark blue curved shape is on the left side of the image, containing the text.

Talking about mental health

There's a distinct taboo around men's mental health. When men come together in any environment and they tune into their own and other's emotions, it's not just building the groundwork for a sense of self-worth, but it shows a respect and accountability for others in their world. Every word spoken today will make it easier for the next generation of boys to talk about their health - in body and mind.

Men overseeing community groups and clubs have a key role to play by checking-in with participants on mental or emotional feelings. Everyone can make it accepted behaviour to always be available to talk. Sometimes just having a conversation about mental health can help.



Certain language and behaviours can help men start conversations about their mental health which contributes in a positive way to community environments:

- Conversation starters such as:
“How are you?...How are you really?”
“How are you sleeping?” “How are you feeling...is everything OK with you?”
“On a scale of 1-10 how are you doing?” are helpful ways to encourage openness
- Listen carefully to what someone tries to tell you
- Don’t try to diagnose or try to second guess their feelings
- Set time aside with no distractions
- Let them share as little or as much as they want to
- Keep questions open-ended
- Talk about self-care
- Offer help in seeking professional support

Opening up about suicide

Where there's a concern about boys or men having suicidal thoughts, it's important to feel empowered to talk.

Asking someone directly about suicide gives them permission to tell you how they feel and lets them know they are not a burden.

The acronym WAIT can be helpful:

- **Watch out**
Look out for signs of distress and uncharacteristic behaviour
- **Ask**
“Are you having suicidal thoughts?” which makes it less likely and could be a life-saver
- **It will pass**
Provide reassurance that these thoughts will pass with time
- **Talk to others**
Encourage them to seek help and signpost



Signposting where to go next

Understanding the next steps for men or boys who may need professional support with their emotional and mental wellbeing is an essential part of being involved in any community environment.

Being able to recognise the signs of someone who maybe struggling is the starting point. This maybe followed by a conversation, coffee or message online. Taking time to check-in and listen is significant and may make all the difference to someone's emotional health and wellbeing.



Mental Health Foundation

Offering information on mental health, problems, self-help and how to get more help
[mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

The Samaritans

A free 24 hour helpline offering support and a listening ear whenever it's needed
[samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

Childline

A free, confidential service for children to talk about anything
[childline.org.uk](https://www.childline.org.uk)

Young Minds

Charity promoting positive mental health in children and young people
[youngminds.org.uk](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)

UK Coaching

Guidance on how coaches can promote good mental health
[ukcoaching.org](https://www.ukcoaching.org)



Sources

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- ^{II.} CALM. 'Body Talks: Let's talk about male body image. www.thecalmzone.net/2021/04/male-body-image/
- ^{III.} Mental Health Foundation. How to look after your mental health using exercise guide. [Online]. 2021. Available from: mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to...exercise.pdf
- ^{IV.} Mental Health Foundation. How to look after your mental health using exercise. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to...exercise.pdf

