



## FamilyLifeConnect

# Sleep, exercise and healthy eating

When your mood is low, you may experience a range of changes in how you feel physically. These might include difficulty getting to sleep, continually waking, or waking in the early hours of the morning. Or you might find that you're sleeping much more than usual. You might also find that you experience low energy levels and a loss of enjoyment in usual activities.

Maintaining your health and wellbeing is about looking after your physical, mental and spiritual health needs. To work towards lifting your mood and improving how you feel physically, it's important to:

- **get a good night's sleep**
- **do some form of exercise each day, even if it's only a short walk**
- **maintain a healthy diet.**

There are practical things you can do to lessen the impact that low mood takes on your physical health

### Sleep

- **Try not to nap during the day** as it means you'll probably struggle to get to sleep at night. If you feel like you need to rest during the day, sit (don't lie) down and try some of the relaxation techniques discussed in the *Relaxation techniques* worksheet.
- **Establish a comforting sleep routine about an hour before bed.** Try having a bath, making a drink with warm milk (no caffeine), reading something easy such as a magazine, and heating up a water bottle or wheat pack. Carry out your routine each night.
- **Try to go to bed at around the same time each night and wake in the morning at the same time.**
- **Limit technology and the focus on stresses of the day in the hour or so before you go to bed.** Turn off your phone, computer and TV. Make sure your room is dark. If you are distracted by noise, get yourself some ear plugs.
- **Try to do some form of physical exercise every day.** This has the double benefit of producing 'happy' endorphins and making you feel tired at the end of the day.
- **Try not to worry if you can't get to sleep.** If this is happening to you, give yourself 20 minutes – if you haven't fallen asleep by then, get out of bed, go into another room and do something such as reading or deep breathing until you start to feel sleepy again.
- **If a lot of thoughts are disrupting your sleep, keep a worry diary or paper and pen beside your bed.** Write your thoughts down and tell yourself that you'll deal with them tomorrow in your worry time the next day. See the *Managing your worries* worksheet for more on this.
- **Have a few relaxation techniques that you can turn to if you are finding it difficult to sleep.** For example, visualise a calm place or experience, practise slow deep breathing, tense and relax each muscle group in your body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, or listen to guided meditation or calming recorded background noises.



## Exercise

- **Start small.** Some activity is better than none.
- **Some form of exercise should be part of your daily schedule.** Apart from maintaining a healthy body, it will release 'feel good' chemicals in your brain, decrease stress and tiredness, improve your sleep, provide you with a natural energy boost, give you a sense of achievement and get you out of the house connecting with others. What's not to like about that!
- **Try to incorporate exercise into your daily life so that it doesn't really feel like exercise.** Or choose something that gets you active and which you enjoy (or at least won't dread). For example, consider walking or riding to the train station or school/work instead of driving your car. You could get out in the garden, mow the lawn, walk your dog, play a game with your kids, dance, go hiking or do some housework.
- **Choose a time of day that works best for you.** Try not to exercise too late in the evening as you may find it difficult to fall asleep.
- **If you find it difficult to motivate yourself, ask a friend or family member to join you in an activity.** Lock in the time, date and place. Having someone to exercise with can provide the motivation you need.
- **Gradually build up physical activity** each day so that ideally you are doing about 30-60 minutes per day. If you haven't exercised regularly for some time, make sure your goals are achievable. Perhaps aiming for 20 minutes a week to begin with might be more realistic.

## Healthy eating

- **If you're not up to cooking, try to buy healthy food that doesn't require a lot of preparation,** such as fruit, vegetables, yoghurt or salads.
- **Try to avoid junk food,** even if it is a quick and easy meal – it might fill the hole temporarily but this type of food can often make us feel worse in the long term.
- **If you find you are overeating unhealthy food, limit buying this type of food** so it's not there to tempt you when you are having a bad day.
- **Accept help from friends and family if they have offered to cook you a meal.**
- **Eat smaller portions more regularly.** You need to keep your energy levels up while you're improving your mood, so eat smaller meals more regularly if you don't feel like a main meal at the moment.
- **Be kind to yourself.** It's normal to struggle with a lack of energy and motivation when your mood is low but each day is a new beginning –start afresh tomorrow.



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lives for stronger  
communities*

The **FamilyLifeConnect** service is funded by the South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network.

The information in this document is general advice only. The advice within it may therefore not apply to your circumstances and is not intended to replace the advice of a healthcare professional.

### FamilyLifeConnect

**FamilyLifeConnect** is a free service that puts people living in the Greater Dandenong community in touch with mentors. They can support your wellbeing and help you achieve your goals.

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 **Book an appointment online  
at [www.familylife.com.au/familylifeconnect](http://www.familylife.com.au/familylifeconnect)**