

Proven ways to improve your psychological wellbeing

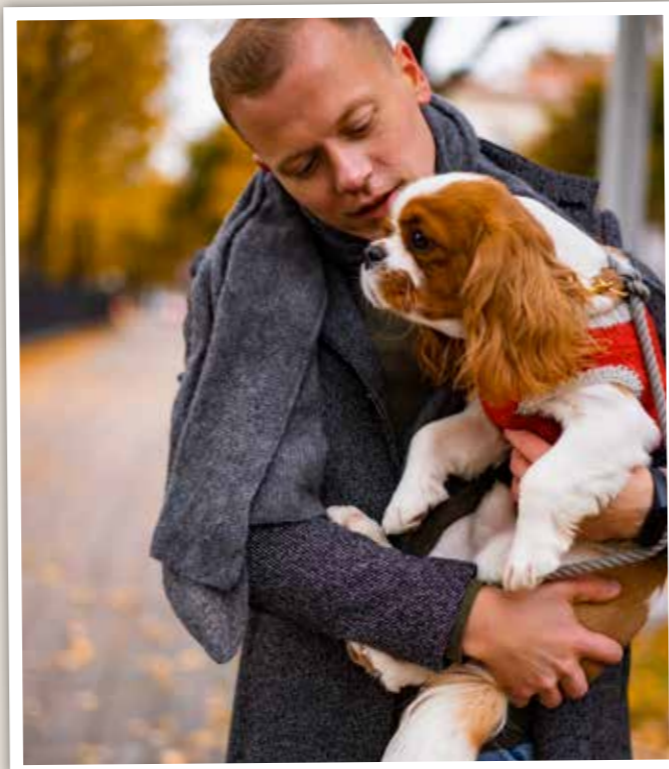
BY REGISTERED COUNSELLOR AND PSYCHOTHERAPIST SHARON HINSULL.



This year's World Mental Health Day theme focuses on the fundamental right that everyone must enjoy good mental health, irrespective of social or economic background.

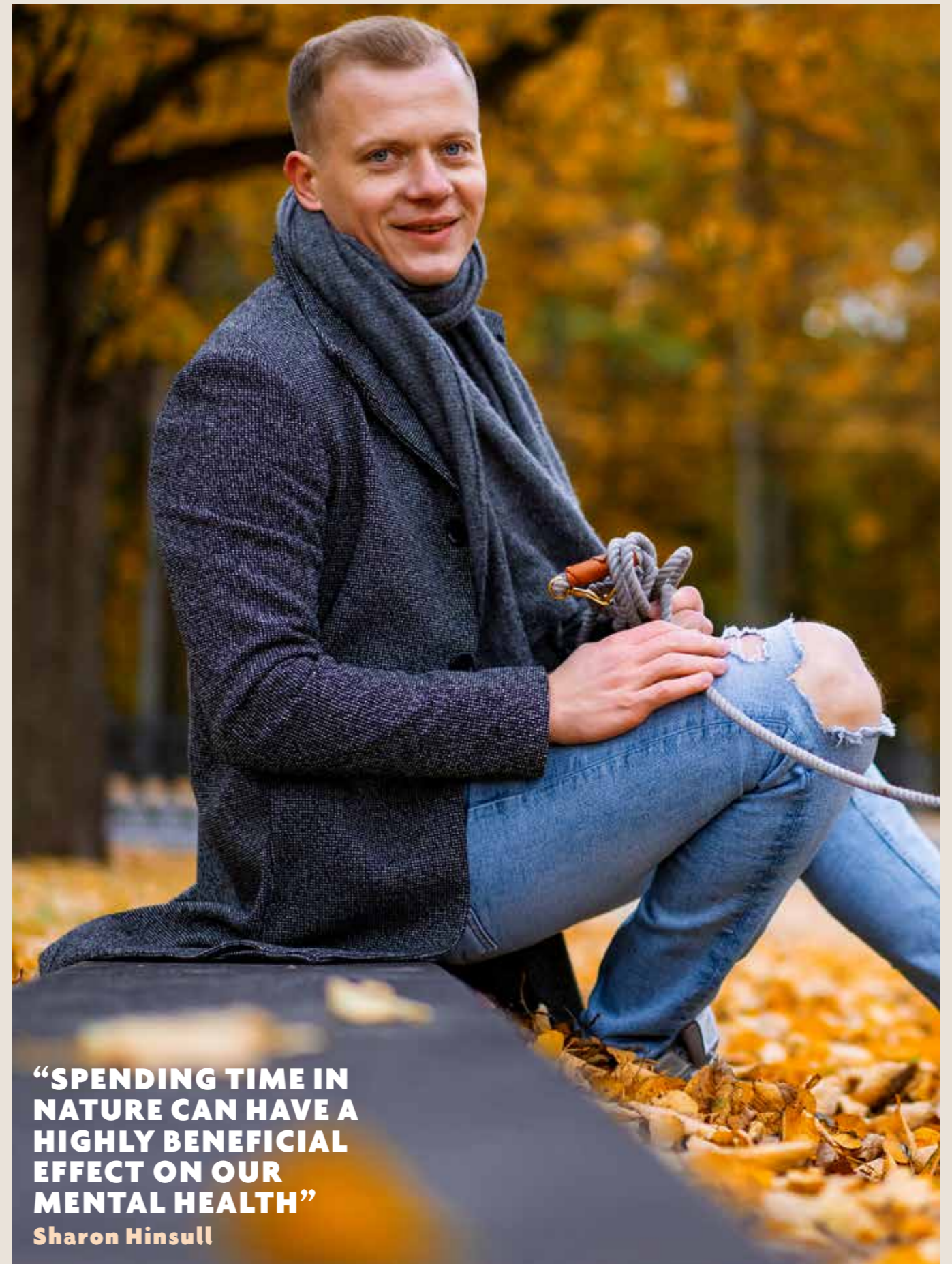
It has long been recognised that specific communities tend to be disproportionately affected by mental health problems. Inequalities arising from an individual's financial status, race, gender, age, disability, or sexuality are all recognised contributory factors that can increase the likelihood of a person developing a mental health disorder.

In its recent 'Tackling Inequalities' report, the Mental Health Foundation set out to highlight some of the ways in which social and economic inequalities contribute to mental health problems in



the UK today. In conclusion, the study found that, despite recent progress in addressing stigma and raising awareness around mental health issues, there remains a lot more to be done to reduce the incidence of psychological distress within some of the more marginalised sections of society.

As part of its ongoing mission to promote public awareness of how we can all take steps to better manage our psychological wellbeing, the Mental Health Foundation has produced the following list of evidence-based tips for developing a more mentally resilient way of living.



“SPENDING TIME IN NATURE CAN HAVE A HIGHLY BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH”

Sharon Hinsull

“IT CAN BE TEMPTING TO TURN TO DRINK”

Sharon Hinsull



GET CLOSER TO NATURE

Studies have found that spending time in nature can have a highly beneficial effect on our mental health. Some say nature helps them feel calmer, more hopeful and less alone. Going for a walk in the local park can often be enough to help lift our spirits and clear our heads when we fall into a downward spiral of low mood or overthinking.

LEARN TO UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE YOUR FEELINGS

Sometimes, emotions can lie deeply buried, to the point where we might not even recognise what feelings we are dealing with. Knowing when we feel upset is one thing, but what are the underlying emotions involved? Is it that we might be feeling anger, hurt, sadness, fear, shame or loneliness? Identifying the exact nature of the emotion being experienced can go a long way towards learning how to better deal with difficult or distressing situations.



TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST FOR SUPPORT

It can take a lot of courage to open up to someone about how we are feeling, especially if we are normally in the habit of bottling things up. However, sharing our inner fears and concerns with a person we trust can often provide significant relief to how we feel and help us see things from a more positive and helpful perspective.

“REMEMBER NOT TO BEAT YOURSELF UP”

Sharon Hinsull

BE AWARE OF USING DRUGS/ALCOHOL TO COPE WITH DIFFICULT FEELINGS

When we struggle with complicated feelings, such as sadness, fear or shame, it can be tempting to turn to drink or drugs to help block out the pain. If you think you might be using drugs or alcohol to self-medicate in this way, it's important to remember not to beat yourself up about it. Whilst any substance use needs to be very carefully monitored and reduced as much as possible, from a mental health perspective, it's every bit as important to be kind and compassionate towards yourself at the same time.

TRY TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MONEY AND GET HELP WITH DEBT PROBLEMS

In the current cost of living crisis, money problems can be challenging to avoid. Fears about being able to pay the bills and cover the cost of bare day-to-day essentials can be enough to generate a great deal of anxiety for those responsible for providing for their dependents.

If you are currently struggling financially, it can be helpful to talk about the situation with an expert at a charity offering free money advice. Organisations such as National Debtline, Stepchange and Turn2Us can provide valuable guidance on money-related issues. The government's Money Helper website is another helpful source of information and support.

GET MORE FROM YOUR SLEEP

Anyone who has ever struggled with their sleep will know what a negative impact tiredness can have on our minds, bodies and overall ability to cope with the demands of day-to-day life. For all of us, there will inevitably be times when sleeping becomes difficult, perhaps because of raised stress levels or the environment we live in. When someone struggles with their mental health, one of the first things to suffer is their sleep pattern. If you find yourself struggling with your sleep, it might be helpful to think about making a few simple changes, such as:

- Developing a relaxing bedtime routine to help you start winding down before you go to sleep.
- Avoiding TV and mobile screens, alcohol and caffeine before bed. This will help you fall asleep and stay asleep. You could also avoid vigorous exercise before bed.
- Going to bed and getting up at around the same time every day, including weekends.



BE KIND AND HELP CREATE A BETTER WORLD

Research has shown that being kind to others helps lift our mood, strengthen our social bonds and enables us to cope better with stress. Acts of kindness come in many forms, from the smallest gestures of basic courtesy to the active giving of one’s time or money for the benefit of others. Sometimes, the most straightforward social interactions, such as smiling or exchanging a few friendly words, can go a long way in brightening our own and someone else’s day.

KEEP MOVING

Alongside our physical fitness, exercise can help prevent mental health problems. As well as releasing “feel good” hormones that reduce stress and anger, exercise also helps us feel better about ourselves and can often improve our sleep habits. If we involve other people in our exercise routine, such as being part of a regular class, group or team, the added sense of social connection can further boost our mental wellbeing.

EAT HEALTHY FOOD

The link between diet and mood has long been scientifically established. Whilst sugary drinks and snacks may give us a temporary “high” or a sense of comfort, they can soon leave us feeling energetically depleted and potentially quite jittery or anxious. Too much consumption of caffeine-filled beverages such as coffee, tea, cola and energy drinks is also known to have a similar effect. Eating a balanced diet containing plenty of fruit and vegetables is essential for physical and mental health.



BE CURIOUS AND OPEN-MINDED TO NEW EXPERIENCES

It is very easy to get stuck in a rut occasionally. Gravitating towards the regular, familiar and predictable routine of our day-to-day life might perhaps feel safe and comfortable for many of us. Still, it doesn’t necessarily serve to benefit our overall mental and emotional wellbeing. Being open to trying new experiences or doing things differently can help to make life feel more stimulating and rewarding. Even simple adjustments to our daily routine are often enough to kick-start the habit of introducing more meaningful and positive changes into our lives.

PLAN THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Life can sometimes feel very challenging, to the point where we might struggle to envisage anything better happening for

ourselves in the future. Even the smallest of pleasures can provide moments of much-needed relief. So, it’s essential to incorporate as many pleasant experiences as possible into your weekly or monthly schedule. Having something to look forward to beyond the struggle of the working week is essential in maintaining a sense of hope for the future, and planning for such activities can be as important as enjoying the experience itself.

Whilst simple in principle, some of these suggestions can go a very long way in helping to lift mood and improve overall mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. No matter how busy or distracted we might find ourselves, it’s essential to remember that everyone has the right to experience good mental health, regardless of socio-economic status or background. ❖

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HEALTH



No Panic
nopanice.org.uk

No panic offers support and recovery services for people with anxiety, including a dedicated hotline.

National Debtline
nationaldebtline.org

National Debtline provides free advice and resources to help people deal with their debts. Guidance is available over the phone, online and via webchat.

Turn2Us
turn2us.org.uk

Turn2U is a national charity that helps people in financial hardship access welfare benefits, charitable grants and support services. It includes a free helpline for those who may find it challenging to go online: 0808 802 2000.

Stepchange
stepchange.org

As well as providing a full debt help service, Stepchange offers extra support to vulnerable people, including those with mental health issues, such as help completing forms or benefits checks.



ORGANISATIONS OF SUPPORT

Mind
mind.org.uk

Mind has 125 local service centres based across the UK, providing support and information for anyone struggling with their mental health.

CALM
thecalmzone.net

Calm is the Campaign Against Living Miserably for men aged 15 to 35. The organisation runs a free, confidential and anonymous helpline and a web chat service, offering help, advice and information to anyone struggling or in crisis.

Men's Health Forum
menshealthforum.org.uk

Men's Health Forum provides round-the-clock stress support for men by text, chat and email.

Anxiety UK
anxietyuk.org.uk

Anxiety UK is a national charity offering specialist therapy and support services to people experiencing anxiety symptoms.

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