Five Ways to Wellbeing
‘Caring for you’
Good mental wellbeing is just as important as good physical wellbeing.

Just like the ‘five a day’ foods, evidence suggests there are five steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing.

Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Learn and Give. Simple things we can do in our everyday lives.

Try it for yourself - tick the boxes to choose your actions, become more positive and get the most from life. Write your action plan on the back inside of the leaflet.

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Connect

Feeling connected to other people is an important human need that helps us to cope well with life. We also benefit by developing a sense of connection with ourselves and with the world in general.

Connect to others

- Talk face-to-face or phone instead of emailing
- Speak to someone new - chat to someone at the bus-stop or the person on the check-out
- Ask how someone's weekend was and really listen when they tell you
- Give a colleague a lift to work or share the journey home with them
- Switch off the TV and spend time playing or chatting with your family
- Choose your words carefully in conversation. Show you value both your own and the other person's opinion, use phrases like "in my opinion..." or "can I check my understanding..."
- Try to avoid saying phrases like "you never" and "you always" or "you make me feel". Instead say "when you do that, I feel..."
- Use 'active listening' - summarise your understanding of what someone else has said before giving your own perspective
- Are you bearing grudges with people in your life? Consider drawing a line under a difficult situation and moving on

Further information and support for staff can be found on the Staff Benefits website www.york.nhs.uk/staffbenefits and click on the Wellbeing button.

A “Five Ways to Wellbeing” app is available free from Google Play (Android) and the Apple App Store (iOS).
Sharing gentle humour can be a great way to connect (but not at someone’s expense)

Connect by letting people know what you need, asking for help and delegating. While admitting you need help can be difficult, it is crucial for your wellbeing. Delegating is a necessary skill, it can ease the burden and it communicates to others that you value and trust them.

Carry photos of those you love and remember to take them out to connect with your feelings of love for them.

Skype someone who lives far away.

Notice how many times you and others around you negatively label or judge others, creating a ‘them and us’ mentality - try to avoid doing this for a day and notice how it feels.

Phrase feedback to others positively and constructively.

Connect with yourself

- Let music or poetry express how you are feeling - you just need to be open to connecting with the experience.
- Be compassionate with yourself by responding non-judgementally to uncomfortable feelings. Say phrases to yourself such as “it’s understandable I feel this way – things are hard right now” and “anyone could feel this way if they were in my shoes”.
- Talk about your feelings with family and friends - this is not a sign of weakness, only an opportunity to feel listened to and to develop deeper connections with others.

Give

Individuals who take a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.

- Commit to doing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period.
- Offer a cup of tea or coffee to busy colleagues.
- If you normally sit on the side-lines, make a point of volunteering to contribute to a project or task at work.
- Make eye contact and smile at people as you meet or pass them.
- With your loved ones - reach out, sit closer, hug a little longer. Tenderness and closeness helps to release oxytocin, nature’s natural pain killer.
- Talk about feelings at work - set up a reflective group with colleagues, use supervision or any other means to explore and express your feelings
- Connecting with your feelings and needs can help you to hold your boundaries and stay connected with others in healthy ways. Saying “no” when your feelings tell you this is right for you is helpful in the long-run for everyone
- Connect with your need to relax. If you’ve got a lot going on and your to-do list is never ending, it’s easy to feel like you should always be doing something. When you’re relaxing, allow yourself to enjoy it without guilt - and do whatever is truly relaxing to you, including enjoying simple pleasures

- Learn a new recipe - try baking something you haven’t baked before
- Redefine what success is - instead of making it about achieving goals, think about life as a learning journey towards what is most important and valued by us. Encouragement to learn and grow is more helpful than beating yourself up for failure to reach milestones at the precise moment you have decided they have to be met
- Learn better ways of managing your time - phones can be put on silent, emails can be checked at set times of the day, notifications can be turned off, phone calls can be scheduled
- Learn from mistakes through compassionate self-correction (future-focus, encouragement - acknowledges what has gone well) rather than through shaming self-criticism (past-focus, judging - harsh, critical)
Be Active
Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups. Exercise is essential for promoting wellbeing.

Here are a few ideas
- Take the stairs, not the lift
- Go for a walk at lunchtime - or have a short 5 or 10 minute walk at any time to break up the day and recharge
- Get off the bus one stop earlier than usual and walk the final part of your journey
- Go for a swim, jog, run or bike ride
- Dance to music you enjoy or join a dance class
- Do yoga, tai chi or pilates classes
- Play tennis or just hit a tennis ball against a wall

Connect with the wider world
- Connect with the wider world. In the morning before you get up, spend two minutes imagining yourself filling up with kindness and wisdom. Imagine sending feelings of compassion and kindness to all the people you are closest to, then to the others around you no matter how you feel about them, then to everyone across the world
- Connect with flow of life - go outside and look up at the stars or the clouds. Look around you at the birds, insects, plants, people and animals. Looking beyond ourselves to the “bigger picture” and the flow of life on Earth can help us feel deeply connected

Keep Learning
Continued learning through life enhances our self-esteem, helps us to meet and interact with others and to have a more active life. Looking outward, being curious, being open to new experiences and giving things a try are all associated with wellbeing.

You may want to try some of the following ideas:
- Find out something about your colleagues
- Sign up for a class
- Read the news or a book
- Do a crossword or Sudoku
- Research something you've always wondered about
- Learn a new word
- Find an inspirational poem or prayer (try a search on the internet) that resonates with you and learn it so you can say it back to yourself - for example “If” by Rudyard Kipling or the “Serenity Prayer”
- Walk or play with your dog/pet or borrow someone else's dog to walk
- Do some gardening
- Behavioural activation is a recognised treatment for depression - activity is one of the best therapies if you are feeling low or unmotivated
- Try setting a schedule for yourself, set yourself small achievable targets for activity (including physical exercise, household tasks and social activities) and give yourself credit for any activity you manage to do
- Have walking meetings
- Do some 'easy exercise', like stretching, before you leave for work in the morning
- Take care of your posture - sit upright with your shoulders back
- Try progressive muscular relaxation - tensing and relaxing muscles to reduce stress (find more information on the internet)

- Have a break from focusing on negatives - take notice of what you appreciate about each day. Try keeping an appreciation journal. Before bed note down three things that you have appreciated today - even something small like having a warm and comfortable bed
- Focus on a happy memory - somewhere beautiful that you visited, a memorable event with family and friends
- Try a three minute breathing space - draw your attention to your breath. Notice how your abdomen rises and falls like a balloon inflating and deflating. When your mind wanders, just gently guide your focus back to your breath. This can help to calm you and return you to the present
- When you are feeling sad or upset, treat yourself kindly. Find simple ways to soothe yourself. Even very small gestures such as placing a reassuring hand on your opposite arm can help
- Tame your 'inner critic' - your inner voice that judges and criticises and may even call you names. Notice it and focus on self-encouragement instead
- Have a 'clear the clutter' day - notice what really matters and only keep things that are truly useful, beautiful or meaningful
- Sit quietly and listen to yourself - connect with how you are feeling and what is on your mind. If you feel like crying, cry - let it pass over you like a wave - try to understand yourself rather than criticising your feelings
- Do mindful stretches and mindful walking
- Keeping active requires healthy, balanced and tasty food so we have more energy through steady blood sugar levels. Buy some dried fruit and nuts for snacks between meals. Make time to really taste and enjoy your food.

- Exercise is not just good for the body, but mind too. Use it as exclusive 'me' time.

- Practice having 'mindful moments' each day. Bring your full attention to what you are experiencing in the here-and-now, for example when washing your hands, brushing hair or cleaning your teeth. Focus on each of your five senses in turn - sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell.

- Take a different route on your journey to or from work and really notice what you can see, hear and smell. Try slowing down and put your phone away so you can take time to look around and enjoy the moment rather than worrying about the day ahead.

- Visit a new place for lunch and notice what you appreciate about it.

- Get up early. Take a deep breath and get out of bed. Open the window and greet the day - 'taste the weather' even if it is rainy or windy.

- Notice when your mind is 'time travelling' - when you are worrying about the future and dwelling on the past - then bring your attention back to the present moment by noticing what you are experiencing right now.

- Take a 'helicopter' view. If a conversation or interaction is bothering you, imagine you were above this scene watching the conversation. By taking a different perspective, it can help to see that something you think is extremely important (for example what did they think of me) is probably of far less importance to others.

- Shift your perspective - if something is bothering you, ask yourself what will this moment will mean to you in one hour, one week, one month, one year?

**Take Notice**

Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can help you stay present, to see the bigger picture, and to help you to connect with yourself and others. It is similar to something called 'mindfulness'. This can help you to enhance your self-understanding and allow you to make positive choices based on your own values and motivations.