

A healthy lifestyle is important for everyone. When we look after our physical health, we feel better too – fitter, more relaxed and better able to cope with things. This is especially important when you have a mental illness. There are lots of ways of being healthy that feel good as well as doing you good.

## What healthy living means

- ④ 'Healthy living' means maintaining a healthy lifestyle and introducing habits that improve your health.
- ④ It's about enjoying yourself without risking your health. It's what you eat and drink; sleeping well and managing stress. It's about practicing safe sex, drinking alcohol responsibly and not abusing drugs. It's about being physically active and staying connected with others.
- ④ It's about being aware of any health risks related to your illness and its treatment, and working with your doctor to monitor these and then take action.
- ④ It's taking responsibility for your overall health including having regular check-ups for your eyes and teeth.
- ④ It's about feeling fitter physically, mentally and emotionally.

## Benefits of healthy living

- ④ *Feeling better mentally*  
Regular exercise can lift your mood and help you feel better.
- ④ *Saving money*  
Eating junk food, smoking, and drinking sugary drinks or alcohol are all expensive habits.
- ④ *Fewer health problems*  
Living a healthier lifestyle means a lower risk of developing many illnesses.
- ④ *Taking control of your life*  
Getting healthy helps you feel in control of your life.

## Getting healthy

A lot of what we do is driven by habit. It can be difficult to change old habits, but there are steps you can take to become healthier. An important first step is identifying less healthy habits and learning new, positive ones to replace them.

Develop positive habits – Start slowly, be flexible and build on what you already do.

- ④ Try changing just one thing at a time. See the benefits that can come from eating more wholesome food, taking up exercise or quitting smoking.
- ④ Start slowly by making small changes that are more likely to be kept up. For example, start by going for a regular walk, instead of pushing yourself to run 5km every day.
- ④ Be flexible. For example, if you decide to cut down on sugar, do it gradually over a few weeks rather than all at once. By cutting down from two teaspoons in your coffee to one-and-a-half, then one and so on, your taste buds will adapt and you're less likely to crave for the sugar.
- ④ Keep it interesting. If you go for a walk, why not try different ways through your park, or explore a new park altogether.
- ④ Choose the company you keep. Look out for others who would like to be healthier and try to plan activities with them.

Remember, increasing or adding even one new health behaviour can make a big difference to your health.

## Work around challenges

There are things you can do to manage any extra challenges related to your illness and its treatment - such as drowsiness, sugar cravings or lack of motivation. Steps you can take include:

- ④ Organise daily activities around side-effects of medication. For example, if you are drowsy in the morning, organise exercise for the afternoon.
- ④ Discuss things with your doctor – there may be another medication you can try, or ask for referral to a specialist such as a dietitian or psychologist for expert advice.

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## Staying healthy

Being healthy is about more than getting fit and feeling better, it's about staying that way too...

Bad habits can re-appear when we are bored, tired, stressed, anxious or when we feel down. Managing these feelings is very important.

Tips to help you stay motivated include:

- ④ Remind yourself why you want to be healthy.
- ④ Schedule regular check ups with your doctor to monitor your progress and for that extra push you may need to keep going.
- ④ Many people find it easier and more fun to stick with activities such as walking, swimming, cycling or shopping at a market, when they are with a friend or in a group. Join a group or see if someone you know is also interested in keeping healthy. Try setting goals together.
- ④ Look after your mental health too. If you start to feel down and like not bothering, it could be a sign that your mental health needs some extra care.
- ④ Relaxation is important. Relaxing and managing stress is an essential part of being healthy. Set aside time for ways to relax that leave you feeling good, such as listening to music or slow breathing.
- ④ Reward yourself. Feel good about developing healthier habits by rewarding yourself with something nice.
- ④ Overcome slip-ups. It's natural at times to feel like giving up and going back to old habits. If you slip-up, be realistic and start again.
- ④ Learn from your slip-ups. Be positive about them – they can help you in the long run. Thinking about why they happened will help you learn to avoid them in future.

## Working with your doctor

### *Find a GP you are comfortable with*

Seeing the same GP each time means you can work together to manage your health and organise check-ups as needed. Book ahead to make sure you can see the same person or if you'd like a longer appointment.

### *Visit your GP regularly*

Lots of health problems can be detected early or avoided if you have regular check ups. Ask your GP for a regular health screen and to explain the results to you. This should include weight, waist and blood pressure measures, as well as blood tests for fats and sugars.

## Check it out

Wondering if something is wrong; a bump, an ache, an increase in your weight? Ask your doctor to check it out. If there is something that needs treatment, then it's best to know sooner rather than later.

## Come prepared

It's hard to remember everything you need to tell the doctor, so take along some notes. Don't forget to tell about any family history of illnesses such as diabetes or heart disease, as well as all the medicines, including over the counter products, that you take.

Some people find it helpful if a trusted friend or relative comes along with them as well.

## Shared Care

Sometimes people see a GP and psychiatrist as well as other health professionals. It's important to let everyone know what's happening to reduce the risk of doubling up on tests or medication for example.

## Finding Support

Everyone needs support at times. Having someone to encourage you can make all the difference in keeping up healthy habits.

Talk with your friends, family, mental health program, case worker or call the SANE Helpline for information, advice and referral.

## How do I get more information?

### ④ *SANE Helpline*

Call the SANE Helpline for information and advice. Phone 1800 18 SANE (7263) or email [helpline@sane.org](mailto:helpline@sane.org)  
Helpline Advisors – Monday-Friday, 9 am-5 pm est  
Request Info Pack – 24 hours or call back

### ④ *[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)*

Visit the SANE website for information, details of publications and access to SANE Helpline Online.

### ④ *SANE Guide to Healthy Living*

A comprehensive guide to healthy living for people with a mental illness. The Guide provides information and tips on a healthier lifestyle and where to find support. Contact the SANE Helpline or visit [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org) for more details and to order.

- ④ *Your local GP* or other medical doctor you have found easy to talk to and understands mental illness – for information, assessment, referral and support. The doctor can also tell you about any specialist services, which are available to help with specific issues, such as weight management or improving fitness.