

Edinburgh Leisure – No health without good mental health

by Audrey McKinven of Edinburgh Leisure

One in four of us will be affected by a mental health condition.

Why is it that while most of us feel quite confident talking to family and friends about our physical aches and pains, we are not so comfortable to talk about our mental health?



World Mental Health Day, on 10 October 2018, is an opportunity to talk about mental health and raise awareness around what can be done to look after it.

Everyone has mental health and it is important to highlight the difference between mental health and a mental health condition. Mental health is our ability to enjoy life and cope with its challenges. Our mental health influences how we feel

about ourselves and others, and how we respond to the things that happen to us.

Just as our physical health can change over time so can our mental health. There are many things that can be done to support good mental health. The New Economic Foundation identifies these five tips to improve wellbeing.

Connect

Staying in touch with family and friends can help us feel valued, and in turn make us happier and more secure.

Take Notice

Interact with the world around you. Taking time to be aware of what is going on around you and reflecting on your experiences can help you understand what matters to you. Another way of doing this is to practice mindfulness, a therapeutic technique where you focus your awareness on the present moment.

Keep Learning

Learning enhances self-esteem and confidence. It can also be a great way to meet new people. Try something new, take up an old hobby or setting yourself a challenge that you will enjoy achieving.

Give

Giving can be very rewarding and can enhance feelings of self-worth. It may involve doing something nice for a friend or stranger or volunteering your time for a charity.

Be Active

Being active isn't just good for our physical health, it's also proven to have a positive effect on our mental health and wellbeing. Physical activity doesn't just mean going to the gym, it could include going for a walk or run, doing some gardening or dancing; any movement that raises your heart rate and, preferably, something you enjoy.

These activities help us maintain good mental health and they can also improve mental health conditions, such as depression. It is estimated that 23% of people living with a diagnosable

mental health condition are not receiving the help they need. In some cases, this is because they are not aware that they are living with a mental health condition.

The first thing people living with an undiagnosed mental health condition might notice is a change to their physical health. It may be reoccurring headaches, an upset stomach, or a rapid heart rate. Living with a mental health problem can make it difficult to relax and switch-off. Lack of sleep is another common side-effect. This can have a negative impact on how a person feels and how well they cope with everyday stresses.

Physical activity can help relieve stress as it relaxes the muscles and alleviates tension in the body. It also increases the level of endorphins and serotonin, the natural feel-good chemicals in the body, which contribute to wellbeing and happiness. Physical activity can also be a great way to meet people and have fun.

Edinburgh Leisure, a charity dedicated to creating opportunities for local people to live active healthy lives, understands the positive impact physical activity can have on mental health and the difference it can make to people living with a mental health condition such as depression, stress or anxiety.

Through funding from Edinburgh's Health and Social Care Partnership, Edinburgh Leisure delivers a physical activity programme, Healthy Active Minds, which uses physical activity to help improve mental health. Last year, the programme supported 625 people across Edinburgh to improve their mental health through physical activity.

"Healthy Active Minds has been life-changing and life-enabling; being active has lowered my anxiety levels and lifted my spirits. Meeting new people no longer scares me and I actually look forward to social interaction – what a turnaround." (Graeme, 57years)

Edinburgh Leisure welcomes referrals from any mental health professional working with an individual with a diagnosed mild

to moderate mental health condition. Once referred, individuals will meet with a Healthy Active Minds instructor for an initial consultation where goals, motivation and support requirements are discussed to enable them to become physically active. Participants will also receive subsidised access to Edinburgh Leisure's gym, swim and fitness classes.

Being physically active is one of the best things that can be done for our physical and mental health. So, let's talk about our mental health and look after it by fitting regular activity into our daily lives and walk, run, dance or swim our way to better health and wellbeing.

For more information on Healthy Active Minds please contact Edinburgh Leisure Active Communities team on 0131 458 2260 or email: active@edinburghleisure.co.uk

Audrey McKinven is Health Development Officer (Mental Health) at Edinburgh Leisure

Mental health 'descriptors' – Language can impact how people living with mental health conditions feel about themselves and how they are treated and considered by others. We would request that you avoid using phrases like sufferer, victim or affliction to help combat negative associations. Using appropriate language is respectful, supportive and non-discriminatory. The term 'person living with a mental health condition' acknowledges that the mental health condition is not the defining aspect in a person's life.