

Mental health

A Jewish Care Interact Guide

Mental health

Living with a mental health condition isn't easy, as it can affect every aspect of your daily life. Most people who experience mental health issues are able to lead full, meaningful lives. Here at Jewish Care Interact, we provide practical information and advice to help you take care of yourself and get the most out of life.

Some people with mental health issues can recover fully from their illness. Others adapt by finding different approaches to wellbeing. Whatever your situation may be, taking good care of all aspects of your wellbeing is vital, and finding the balance between mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing is key.

Mental health issues: at home

Your home should be your refuge; it should be the place where you feel safe, relax and just be yourself, however you may be feeling. To make this a reality, we've got some simple ideas that are really easy to do.

Create a quiet space

If you want to do some relaxation exercises, meditate, read a book or just flop down into your favourite comfy chair, having a quiet space to do so is essential. You don't have to take up a whole room; just a little corner will do. Decorate it with a nice chair, some cushions, a picture or two and some tchotchkes that make you feel happy. Just create a space that embodies peace and quiet, and then relax and enjoy.

Get a good night's sleep

Having restful sleep is key to your mental and physical wellbeing. In order for your body and mind to be well rested, it is optimal to get eight hours of sleep every night. If you're taking medication, you may find that it makes you sleep too much or too little; it's vital to make sure that your sleep is both relaxing and rejuvenating. Many experts recommend that the best time to sleep is between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am.

To get started, you'll need to stick to an evening routine that helps you wind down before you head to bed.

Here are our top tips for having a good, restful sleep:

- 1. Exercise regularly.** Exercise is great for overall wellbeing, but when it comes to helping you get to sleep, regular exercise plays a vital role. If you are active five to six hours before bedtime, this raises your body's core temperature. When your temperature returns to normal a few hours later, it tells your body that it's time to sleep.
- 2. Have a light dinner.** If you can, make dinner the lightest meal of the day. There is certainly truth in the old adage, "Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dine like a pauper".
- 3. Go for a leisurely walk, do yoga relaxation exercises or take the time to stretch.** Light, relaxing exercise helps to prepare you for sleep. Doing stimulating exercise, such as playing sports or spending an hour in the gym, does not.

4. **After 8 pm, do activities that relax, rather than stimulate, your mind.** Listen to relaxing music, meditate, read inspirational books—anything that helps to settle your mind and body.
5. **Keep a journal.** If your mind is very active, you may find that keeping a night time journal helps. You may find it useful to write down your thoughts and concerns. Writing your thoughts down may stop you from playing them over in your mind when you lie down to sleep.
6. **Take a hot bath an hour to half an hour before bedtime.** You can use essential oils or bath salts to aid relaxation. If you can, keep the lights low and soak for 10 to 15 minutes. You may also find that listening to relaxing music helps.
7. **Cut down on caffeine and go herbal before bed.** If you enjoy caffeinated drinks, such as tea or coffee, see if you can cut down on these drinks throughout the day—especially in the evenings. About 15 minutes before bedtime, drink a cup of warm herbal tea. There are many different bedtime teas available from supermarkets and health food stores that you can try. You may prefer a simple chamomile or peppermint tea. Try it and see! What matters is that your tea is herbal and does not contain caffeine. If you are taking medication, some herbs, such as Valerian and St Johns Wort, may not be suitable. It is best to check with your doctor.
8. **Avoid drinking alcohol at night.** Although alcohol may make you feel drowsy, it actually makes for a restless, rather than a restful, sleep. If you're not sleeping well, it's best to avoid alcohol entirely, particularly in the evenings.
9. **Make sure your bed is set up for sleep.** Watching TV, doing work or using technology in bed? These activities do not aid restful sleep and are best kept out of the bedroom. Make sure that your bedroom is dark, quiet and cool, and your bed is comfortable. Having the right kind of mattress makes a big difference.
10. Get into bed and relax. You may find that following the tips we've provided thus far helps you to get to sleep easily. You may also find some meditation or relaxation techniques work for you.

Relaxation tips

Relaxing your body. When in bed, find a comfortable position, lie still and close your eyes. Focus on how your body feels and become aware of the different sensations. If you notice any tension in your body, focus your mind on relaxing that area. You may just want to feel the sensation of your breath as you breathe the intention to relax in and out of your body.

Following your breath. You may simply prefer to watch your breath. You can begin by taking three long, slow comfortable breaths. Breathe in deeply, following the rhythm of your breath and then breathe out slowly, making your out breath lasts longer than your in breath. Then just relax and follow the slow and easy rhythm of your breath until you fall asleep.

[Check out the Sleepio website for more helpful tips on improving your sleep.](#)

Managing money

Managing your finances when living with a mental health condition can be quite stressful. Having financial worries can add to this stress, which can take its toll on your mental wellbeing. So getting to grips with your finances and keeping it all under control is key.

Physical wellbeing

Although people talk about mental health as being separate from physical wellbeing, we are here to tell you that these are connected. Your wellbeing is about you as a whole person—your mind, your body, your feelings, your experiences and your emotions.

And so it goes that if you take care of your body, you are laying the foundation for overall wellbeing and good mental health.

Eating a healthy diet

What do you eat? How much do you eat? These things have a direct impact on wellbeing.

Lots of traditional Jewish foods are not necessarily balanced. If you want to find out more about healthy eating, check out the [NHS Choices website and go to the section on Eating a balanced diet](#).

Getting enough exercise

Being physically active and getting a good amount of exercise are great for overall wellbeing. Exercise can benefit mental health and relationships and lead to a healthier and happier life overall. Exercise reduces stress and helps your body deal with mental tension. It can increase norepinephrine, a chemical that moderates your brain's response to stress.

Exercise also increases happiness; it releases endorphins that create feelings of happiness and euphoria. Many people who have anxiety or clinical depression have experienced the benefits of exercise. Some even say that it's better than medication.

For more information, check out the [Get active for mental wellbeing section of the NHS Choices website](#).

Medication and overall wellbeing

If you're taking medication for a mental health condition, you may find that it has some unpleasant or unwanted side effects. It is important that you are aware of these side effects and that you let your GP or psychiatrist know if you're experiencing them. There may be alternative medications or treatments that will suit you better. To find out more, please visit the [Medication & side effects of the Rethink website](#).

Spirituality and mental health

Spirituality is a central part of religion, but you don't need to be religious to be spiritual. Spirituality is something we can all experience. Put simply, it is the means with which we find meaning and purpose in life.

If you're living with a mental health condition, finding meaning or a sense of purpose in life can be invaluable.

How spirituality can improve mental health

Spirituality can help you find balance, hope and healing in the most challenging times. It helps you focus on the things that matter most and encourages you to be the best person you can be in relation to yourself and others around you.

You may find that your focus on spirituality is greater when you experience extreme stress or anxiety or when you experience a loss or bereavement.

Spirituality is not otherworldly or esoteric; it's just a part of being human. Opening up to your spirituality can help you view life as a journey, where both pleasant and unpleasant experiences can help you to learn, develop and mature.

In research conducted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, they discovered that people who identified as being spiritual experienced:

- Better self-control, self-esteem and confidence;
- Faster and easier recovery;
- Better relationships with self, others and with G-d/creation/nature;
- A new sense of meaning, hope and peace of mind.

Exploring your spirituality

Many people find that spirituality is just something that they experience quite naturally in their day-to-day lives.

Other ways of experiencing spirituality may be:

- Taking part in religious festivals, such as going to synagogue on the High Holidays;
- Taking part in religious rituals, such as lighting the candles on a Friday night;
- Being outdoors and connecting with nature;
- Being kind and compassionate to other people;
- Being charitable, such as giving tzedakah;
- Spending time in meditation, contemplation, reflection or prayer;
- Reading the Tanakh, also known as the Old Testament;
- Following the disciplines of yoga, qigong or tai chi;
- Playing sports;
- Cooking;
- Appreciating the arts; and
- Maintaining relationships with friends and family.

Spiritual practices can help you to become—and be happy with—the person that you really are.

Giving your spirituality a kickstart

Spirituality is a very personal thing. Your best bet is to try a few things and find out what works for you.

To get you started, it may be helpful to establish a regular routine. You can try:

- Having a regular quiet time every day for reflection, meditation, contemplation or prayer;
- Setting some time aside every day to read spiritual or religious books or materials;
- Joining a study or discussion group at your synagogue or community centre;
- Attending synagogue on Shabbat; and
- Meeting up with friends who share the same spiritual aspirations.

[Finally, to request information about--or support for--mental health and the Jewish community, contact Jami.](#)

Mental health issues: at work

In the UK, [Jobcentre Plus is the main provider of support for disabled people looking for work.](#)

Looking for work

Within each Jobcentre is a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA), who can help you:

- Find a job;
- Find job-related training;
- Find disability friendly employers; and
- Refer you to a work psychologist, if appropriate.

Your DEA can also advise on programmes to help you get into work, which include Work Choice and Specialist Employability Support.

Work Choice

Work Choice is a service that is tailored to meet your needs. It helps you find a job, and it offers support when you start work. It includes:

- Training and help in developing your skills;
- Support in building your confidence; and
- Interview coaching.

Specialist Employability Support

Specialist Employability Support provides mentoring and training to disabled people who do not qualify for other government schemes like Work Choice. To receive Specialist Employability Support, you must have a disability or health condition, be unemployed and of working age.

Depending on your needs, two types of support are available:

- Short-term support and training which typically lasts for around three months; and
- Long-term help usually lasting for 12 months.

You are allowed to choose the organisation that supports you, whether it is your local Jobcentre Plus or a specialist disability employment agency.

[Check out the Specialist Employability Support section of GOV.UK to find out more about the scheme.](#)

Two Ticks: Positive about disability

Two Ticks is a programme run by Jobcentre Plus that supports employers who wish to employ disabled people. Your DEA can advise you about employers who support the Two Ticks programme.

Employers who meet the criteria of the programme are able to display the Two Ticks symbol on their job advertisements.

Employers participating in the programme must commit to:

- Interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and to consider them on their abilities;
- Discuss with disabled employees, at any time but at least once a year, how to develop and use their abilities;
- Make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment;
- Take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work; and
- Review these commitments every year and assess what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress and future plans.

Employment support for people with mental health conditions

Mind offers employment support services for people with mental health issues who want to find work. As Mind is a network of local Minds, each area will provide slightly different services depending on local needs.

Rethink provide employment services and training for people with severe mental health issues. To find out more, please visit the [Employment and training section of the Rethink website.](#)

Disability rights in employment

The Equality Act 2010 protects disabled people from being discriminated against in the workplace. It is illegal for employers to discriminate against you because you have a mental health condition. The Act covers disabled people looking for work, as well as those already in work.

For more information about employment and disability discrimination, please check out the [Disability discrimination section on the ACAS website.](#)

Disclosing your disability

You do not have to disclose your disability in advance to prospective employers. Some people prefer to do so, others don't. It is your choice.

To find out more, please visit the [Telling my manager: talking about mental health problems at work section of the Time to change website.](#)

Support in the workplace

When you are in work, your employer needs to make whatever 'reasonable adjustments' are

necessary to ensure that you are on par with your non-disabled peers in the workplace. These may include;

- The purchase of equipment;
- Making changes to your working environment;
- Adjusting your working hours; and
- Purchasing special equipment.

Access to Work

Access to Work is a grant programme run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that supports disabled people to;

- Start working;
- Stay in work; and
- Become self-employed or start a business.

Grants are tailored to meet individual needs, are not means tested, don't need to be paid back and don't impact other benefits.

Access to Work grants provide funds towards the costs of a support worker, equipment or travel to work. Grants are for support that is over and above employers' legal requirements to make reasonable adjustments.

Support if you lose your job

If you lose your job or are about to lose your job, your disability should not be a factor.

Redundancy

Before your employer considers redundancy, they should go through a consultation process and take reasonable steps to include you.

Your employer cannot select you for redundancy simply because you are disabled. They must go through a fair and balanced process that does not put you at a disadvantage because of your disability.

To find out more, please visit the [Redundancy section of the GOV.UK website](#).

Retirement

In the same way that employers cannot select you for redundancy due to your disability, they are unable to ask you to retire before you are legally required to do so.

To find out about planning for your retirement, please visit the [Retirement section of the GOV.UK website](#).

Dismissal

Your employer is unable to dismiss you for reasons related to your disability.

To find out more about being dismissed from your job, please visit the [Dismissal section of the GOV.UK website](#).

Mental health issues: technology

Staying safe, being secure and protecting your privacy online is complicated for anyone. If you're living with a mental health condition, then you should be extra careful when interacting with people and services online.

Safety first

Most people will not try to take advantage of you or your mental health condition, but for the few unscrupulous types you might try to do so, we've put together a bit of advice.

Keeping things private

If you are using websites, apps or other services that display any information about you (such as Facebook), take a good look at the privacy settings before using the service. Many websites disclose all manner of personal information by default, so make sure your settings disclose what you want and protect what you don't want to disclose.

Don't react in haste

If someone says something to you online, in an email or in a text that you don't like, don't react rashly. Take yourself out of the situation and do whatever works best to calm yourself down. Close your eyes, take a few breaths, have a cup of tea, stick your headphones on and listen to your favourite music—whatever you need to take yourself out of the situation. Go back to it when you're ready and see if you can respond with compassion rather than anger or agitation. Or it may be best not to respond at all.

Walk away from distressing content

If you find yourself reading, listening to or watching anything that you find distressing or disturbing, simply move on. If anything online makes you feel uncomfortable, find something else to read, listen to or watch. The Internet is vast, and there will always be something that you can enjoy. There's no point wasting your time on things you don't.

If something has really disturbed you, come off the computer entirely and connect with the people or things that make you feel better.

People say all sorts of things online

Many people hide behind their computer screens and say all sorts of things online that they wouldn't dare say in the real world. If you think someone is being a jerk, leave it alone. Generally, telling them that they are being a jerk will not stop them from doing so and will only serve to annoy you.

Computers don't have emotions

Sometimes, when people are trying to be funny, to express their feelings or emotions, or when English is not their first language, they can get things quite wrong online. It's sometimes difficult to express certain feelings and emotions when using a computer, so make sure you don't jump to conclusions; give yourself room for misunderstandings.

The same goes for when you are trying to express how you feel. Make sure that what you say is clear and straightforward.

Report abuse immediately

If you are on a website and people are being abusive towards you or other people, then report it immediately. Most social and forum websites have places where you are able to report any abuse or harassment.

Digital tools for people with mental health issues

Technology is certainly finding its place in supporting people with mental health issues. Here are some tools that we think may be of help

Online forums

If you want to communicate with others outside of the Jewish community, then [check out the Big White Wall](#).

Self-assessment tools

If you are concerned that you have a mental health issue and want to find out more, or you just want to find out more about your current condition, NHS Choices have some great mental health self-assessment tools on their website.

Mental health apps

If you've got a smartphone, then there's probably an app for you. There are plenty of apps available to help with managing your mental wellbeing in all aspects of your daily life, and many of them are free.

Mental health issues: out and about

To keep your mental health in good shape, getting out and about, socialising with friends and family and participating in a wide range of activities can be really helpful. By being socially active and spending time with people, you may stop yourself from experiencing the feelings of loneliness and isolation that are common amongst people with mental health issues.

Travel

Travelling with a mental health condition may require careful and creative problem solving. Lack of understanding is just one of the barriers we face, so this guide has been designed to provide clear

direction for before, after and during travel to ensure a trouble-free trip.

Flying (and why planning isn't optional)

As airlines disability facilities and services vary widely, it is worth doing some research before you decide which airline to use. Here are a few pointers to bear in mind when travelling by air.

- On booking your flight, remember to notify the airline that you are disabled, particularly if you require special assistance.
- If you prefer an aisle seat, remember to book it in advance to make life easier.
- At least 48 hours before your flight departs, make sure you contact the airline asking for special assistance, should you need it.
- At flight check-in, be sure to tell the ticket agent that you requested special assistance. In doing this, you will receive extra help at security, miss long queues (there have to be some perks!) and will receive assistance at the gate.

[For more information, check out the GOV.UK page for Transport if you're disabled, and see the section that covers planes.](#)

Travelling by train

Rail travel is now one of the most accessible means of transport for anyone with a disability. With the right information, planning and know-how, travelling by train can be hassle free.

To start off, it is useful to identify the barriers that might affect your journey and then consider if you require passenger assistance. If you do, you should book at least 24 hours prior to your journey.

If you are unsure which train company you need, take a look at the National Rail's list of Stations and Destinations and then [visit the National Rail Service page for Information for disabled passengers and passenger assistance.](#) Alternatively, you can call National Rail Enquiries on 0345 748 4950.

To book passenger assistance, simply navigate to the Support and Information section on the contact page of the train company you have selected. Once there, scroll down to Assisted Travel to retrieve the relevant contact details. When you're on the phone to them, be sure to outline your requirements clearly.

[If you would rather contact the rail company online, visit the Disabled Persons Railcard website](#) and look for the "Book Assistance for Future Journey" button on the page.

Taking the bus

The bus business is experiencing a boom these days, perhaps due to attractive fares and schedules. You may be eligible for a free bus pass—check with your local council to find out. For further details on this scheme, [visit the GOV.UK site and go to the section on Transport if you're disabled, where you'll find details on cars, buses and coaches.](#)

How do I apply for a bus pass? Simply contact your local council to find out who issues disabled bus passes. To apply for a disabled person's bus pass you first need to identify the appropriate local authority. Go to the [Directgov site and follow the steps on how to apply for a disabled person's bus pass](#). This service is only available in England.

Getting on and off. Bus companies are legally obliged to make sure disabled people can get on and off buses in safety and travel in reasonable comfort. [Visit Citizens Advice to find out the Rights of disabled passengers using buses and coaches](#).

In the very near future, all public transport buses will have to meet specific disability standards set by the government. As we wait patiently for this special day, we will have to make do with the current provisions.

Using public transport in London

Getting around in London by car is one thing, but using public transport is another. The good news is that there are many resources to help you tame the Tube and beat the buses.

Transport for London

In addition to all of the traditional services offered through the Transport for London (TfL) website, there is an entire section [devoted to transport accessibility](#). For instance, did you know you could request staff assistance at all Tube, TfL Rail, Overground stations, boats, the Emirates Air Line and Victoria Coach Stations? You can get assistance from drivers on trams and buses (on DLR trains, look for a Passenger Service Agent).

[TfL also offers a travel support card that you can download](#) and use in order to let people know what assistance you may need. And for information on fares, visit the [60+ London Oystercard section of the TfL website](#).

Transport for All

[Transport for All \(TfA\)](#) is an organisation that is working to make it just as easy for you to travel on public transport as it is for anyone else. Formerly Dial-A-Ride and Taxicard users (DaRT), TfA is a great place to find how public transport is becoming more accessible to everyone, and it covers:

- Underground
- Buses
- Trains
- DLR
- Tramlink
- Riverboats
- The Emirate Airline (Cable Car)
- Airports

TfA also has information on getting travel training or mentoring and tracking down items that have been lost on London's transport system.

In terms of door to door services, TfA can help you research the following:

- Dial-a-Ride
- Capital Call
- Community transport
- Patient transport
- Taxicard
- Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle

The organisation can also help you explore the following concessionary services:

- Blue Badge
- Freedom Pass
- Disabled and Older Persons Railcard
- National Express Coachcard
- 60+ Oystercard

Freedom Pass

To find out specifically about Freedom Passes, visit the [London Councils Freedom Pass website](#).

Entertainment and cultural activities

Whether it's going to concerts, the cinema, art galleries, the theatre, museums, comedy clubs or anything else, being entertained is just good fun.

This isn't to say that you can escape your problems, but immersing yourself in something that allows you to let go and enjoy yourself is good for your wellbeing.

Sports and leisure

If you're keen on sports, whether you want to get stuck in and participate or you just want to cheer on from the sidelines, either can be helpful to support mental wellbeing.

Physical activity is a great support for mental wellbeing on top of being a great way to get fit. Playing team sports also helps build relationships with other people based on a common interest.

Wining and dining

As food plays such an important part in Jewish life, meeting up with friends or family for a quick nosh or a slap up meal is just what we do. If you're living with a mental health condition, you need to pay close attention to what you eat and drink, as this can have a real impact on your moods and your overall wellbeing.

Drinking alcohol is a normal part of British culture, and Jewish people living in Britain are no different. Alcohol, however, can have a significant impact on mood and mental health, whether you're living with a mental health condition or not. For both your physical and mental wellbeing, our advice is to drink sensibly and be aware of how alcohol affects you.

To find out more, have a look at the [Alcohol and mental health section of the Drinkaware website](#).

Mental health issues: grants and benefits

As mental illness is classed as a disability, you may be entitled to certain state benefits. Take a look at the following, which may be suitable if you have mental health issues:

[Disability Rights UK](#). Visit this site for an eligibility checklist and information on what you can claim.

[GOV.UK: Student Finance](#). This page's section on disabled students has guidance for those with mental health conditions.

[Grants Expert](#). This article on Family Action Grants provides an overview of grants that can help you to support your family financially—or even get back into education.

[Turn2us](#). This is a national charity that helps find welfare benefits, charitable grants and support services for people with financial hardship. It includes a benefits calculator and grants search tool along with a detailed list of benefits that may apply to your situation.

Mental health issues: emotions and relationships

Living with a mental health condition can have a serious impact on how you feel about yourself and how you relate to others. Your relationship with yourself and your inner world of feelings, emotions and thoughts is not separate from your relationships with other people. As human beings, we are all interconnected and interdependent, and that feeling of connection with other human beings plays an important role in our overall wellbeing and happiness.

Emotional wellbeing

Being aware of the different emotional states that you experience and taking care of your emotional wellbeing is key to maintaining good mental health.

Your emotions and feelings are available to you all of the time and can be used as a quick check to let you and others know how you are doing. To do this, it helps to have the skill of self-awareness. If you have it, that's great, but if not, you may want to try out some mindfulness techniques.

To find out more, have a look at the [Mindfulness and mental wellbeing section of the NHS Choices website](#).

[The Be Mindful website also has some helpful resources](#).

For some general tips on emotional wellbeing for people with mental health issues, check out the [Improving Emotional Health section of the Helpguide website](#).

Talking about your feelings

It sounds simple, but it's not always that easy. Not everyone is comfortable talking about their feelings, but doing so can be a great way to keep your mental health in check.

If you think that talking about your feelings is a sign of weakness, it's just not so. It's quite the opposite. By talking about your feelings you are taking charge of your wellbeing, and that is a sign of strength, not weakness.

You may prefer to talk to people you know well, such as family and friends. You could go a little further afield and talk to someone in your community, such as those who offer support services at your synagogue or your Rabbi. For people in London, In2Great is a new group that invites people to come together for fun and entertainment in a relaxed social setting. Call 0208 458 2223 to find out more.

Rather than a group setting, you may prefer to speak to a professional, such as a counsellor or therapist. It is, of course, your choice. What matters is that you find a way to be open about and express your feelings in a safe and secure environment.

If you would rather find emotional support tailored specifically for Jewish people, contact [Jewish Care Direct](#) at 0208 922 2222. The Jewish Helpline can also assist you. That number is 0800 652 9249.

[For general emotional support any time of day or night, the Samaritans are there to help.](#)

Relationships with friends, family and colleagues

Central to maintaining good relationships with friends, family and colleagues are trust, acceptance and the ability to ask for help. These may seem like quite a tall order, but they will help to keep you feeling safe and secure.

It is up to you whether or not you disclose your mental health condition (and if you do, to what extent). If you are concerned about disclosing your mental illness, the [Coming out about mental illness article on the WebMD website](#) makes interesting reading.

If you have disclosed your mental illness and you feel that you can trust those around you, then you're in a really good position.

Good relationships with other people begin with self-acceptance. This applies to all people but is particularly important if you have a mental health condition. If you're not okay with yourself, then it may be difficult for other people to really understand you. On this foundation of self-acceptance, it's also quite important for you to find your way to be okay with asking for help. Your friends, family or colleagues probably don't have ESP, so they won't know you need help unless you ask for it.

Remember, this is an illness like any other. It's not your fault, and if you're open about it, you will

most likely find people to be pretty accepting.

