

Mental Health

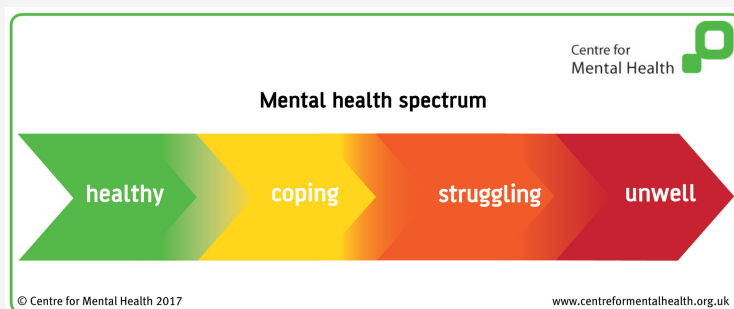
WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines **mental health as:** “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.

This focus on mental health as a state of wellbeing helps separate its definition from that of mental health conditions which it is often confused with. In this way mental health is about **wellness** rather than **illness**.

However, we understand mental health isn't always that simple. It is dynamic in nature, constantly fluctuating in line with changes in our emotional and physical state. As such, it can be helpful to consider mental health as a spectrum.

MENTAL HEALTH AS A SPECTRUM



Throughout our lives, we will all experience a mixture of positions on this spectrum. Whilst not everyone will fall neatly into the four categories they can be generalised as:

Healthy: enjoying mostly good mental health.

Coping: facing significant risks to mental health but not currently in difficulty e.g. coping with loss, financial difficulty, or relationship problems.

Struggling: dealing with major life challenges and at high risk of becoming unwell e.g. experiencing a major trauma or ongoing high levels of adversity.

Unwell: experiencing poor mental health, such as being given a diagnosis of mental illness that is currently causing significant distress and impairment.

It is possible for a person living with a mental health diagnosis to be at any point on the spectrum.

WHY IT MATTERS

There has been a distinct increase and prevalence of psychological stress in young people.

In partnership with Black Dog Institute, Mission Australia released a report in August 2021 focusing on psychological distress in young people (Brennan et al., 2021).

The report found that in 2020 more than one quarter of young people met the criteria for experiencing psychological distress – an increase of 8% since 2012.

Enhance your mental wellbeing

Exercise

Exercise releases chemicals like serotonin and endorphins; the neurotransmitters involved in regulating and improving mood.



The Australian Department of Health recommends young people (5 to 17 years) accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.

Eat Well

Nutrition is extremely important for overall health and development with significant influence on energy and focus levels. Young adults need to eat a wide variety of nutritious foods from the 5 food groups every day.

According to **The Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADG)** this includes **at least** 5 serves of vegetables, 2 serves of fruit and plenty of water.



Get good sleep

The mental benefits of sleep include improved creativity and problem solving; reduced likelihood of depression and other mental disorders; and even increased life expectancy.



The Australian Department of Health recommends:

9 to 11 hours of sleep per night for those aged 5–13 years and 8 to 10 hours per night for those aged 14–17 years.

Other things that can contribute to positive mental health:

Building positive relationships



Opening up to others for support



Breathe



Meditation

Setting goals



Practicing gratitude

