

Caring for our mental health



Australian Muslim Women's
Centre for Human Rights

Mental health and the mind-body connection

Our bodies are very skilled at telling us when something isn't right. Physical health and mental health are tied together through the mind-body connection. When we are feeling emotionally or mentally unwell – stressed, sad, anxious – these emotions and mental stresses can appear as physical pain in our bodies. Physical health and mental health are not only equally important, they're connected.

Mental health is an important part of all people's wellbeing and happiness, and having good mental health has an impact on our whole body and mind. Hence, taking care of our mental health will support our physical health, just as taking care of our physical health will support our mental health.

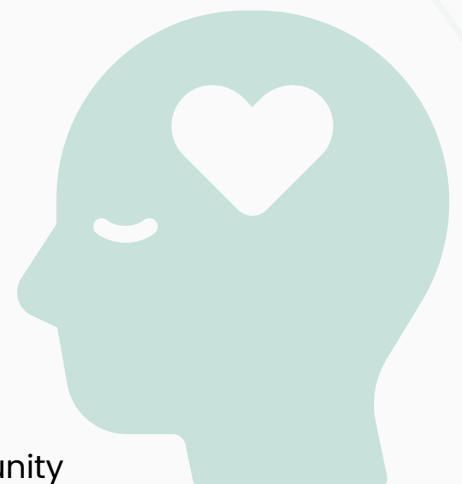
When to check your mental health

It's a lot easier to seek help for physical health than it is for mental health. This is because physical pain and health issues are often seen as "real", while mental health struggles are "in your head". Unfortunately, there is a lot of stigma and taboo around mental health. But experiencing mental health struggles is a natural part of the human experience, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Life can throw us unexpected challenges that deeply impact our well-being. Some experiences that can impact your mental health include:

- Grief related to the loss of a loved one
- Major life transitions including moving to a new country, starting a new school or job, or becoming a parent
- Financial hardship and poverty
- Racism, discrimination, and bullying
- Difficulties in settling into a new country
- Caring responsibilities that feel overwhelming
- Family violence
- War and conflict
- Your own or a loved one's substance use
- Pressures and expectations from your family and community

Mental health

is a state of mental wellbeing that allows people to cope with life's common stresses, build relationships and social connections, contribute to their communities, and achieve goals.



The above experiences are a lot for anyone to deal with, and there's no right or wrong way to respond to them. For many people, the stress and change that these difficulties bring can lead to mental health issues, which can show up through symptoms like:

- Issues with your sleep – wanting to sleep all the time, or not being able to fall asleep
- Wishing you could shut the world out and withdraw yourself from it
- Anxiety and agitation when you hear certain sounds or noises
- Loneliness and disconnection from loved ones
- Not feeling hungry or a lack of desire to eat, or eating too much
- Believing that you don't matter, or that you're a burden
- Having racing thoughts
- Consistent neck or back aches without any known ailments



These are just some signs that you could be struggling with your mental health. Sometimes there can seem like there's no time to look after our own health, or that we will be letting people down if we tell them that we're struggling.

It's normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes, but it's important to know that there is help out there, you can feel better, and there are a lot of ways that you can support your mental health.

Ways and where to get help

Some ways that you can support good mental health include:

- **Building a strong social network and connection with family** – who is your community and who do you trust? Come together and support one another by talking openly about mental health. This can break down stigma and taboos, and you'll be surprised by how many people share similar experiences.
- **Find something that you enjoy doing and set aside time to do it** – do you have a hobby? Is there an activity that brings you joy and helps you feel relaxed? If you can, make sure you set aside time for yourself to spend on doing the things that make you happy.
- **Look after your body and listen to what it needs** – your body needs to be taken care of for your mind to function well. Eat food that's healthy and makes you feel good. Find an exercise routine that you enjoy and move your body. Get a good amount of sleep each night and make sure to take a break when you need it.

It's always best to check in with a professional to see whether they can offer you any help. You can access professional mental health support through seeing your GP (General Practitioner) to develop a Mental Health Plan. When you visit your GP, make sure that you:

- Are open and honest about your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour.
- Tell your doctor about your general health and mental health history, symptoms, and any medication you are taking.
- Tell them about whether you're experiencing any physical pain. It's important to figure out whether any pain is related to a mental health issue, or whether the cause might be a physical illness or ailment.
- Speak to your doctor about any privacy concerns you have.
- Ask your doctor questions about your treatment and medication to make sure you understand everything.
- Talk to your doctor about any cultural or religious beliefs that may affect your treatment.



Where to access professional support

You can also contact the below services for free and confidential professional support:

- Mind Australia Victoria | Mental health support line | Ph: 1300 286 463
- Banyule community Health | LIFT: Stepped Care Model for Mental health | Ph: (03) 9450 2000
- Foundation House | A specialist refugee trauma agency supporting survivors of torture and other traumatic events. | Ph: (03) 9389 8900
- NEAMI National | Find local services for mental health, homelessness, and suicide prevention support here: <https://www.neaminational.org.au>
- Headspace | Find local mental health providers for young people here: <https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/>

If you're having thoughts of suicide or injuring yourself, please don't keep these thoughts to yourself. Contact Lifeline (13 11 14) for free and confidential support.