

Step 2: Developing knowledge and skills

This section is for you: you do not need to discuss any of it with your employer. Reading through and completing the exercises provided here may help improve your mental health. They may also help you structure your thoughts about work.



WATCH OUT:

Although informed by evidence in psychology and health, these exercises do not take the place of clinical recommendations. They are intended to be in addition to treatment you may be offered by doctors and other healthcare professionals. Typical treatments for mental health can include medication, psychological therapy or a combination of both. These are often accessed through your GP. Find out more about mental health services in England on the [NHS website](#).



KEY FACTS:

If you are physically unwell you go to bed. But going to bed is unlikely to help improve your mental health. If you are psychologically unwell you need to do more of the things that make you feel good.

Many people feel guilty when they are off work because the things that help us get better are often the things we usually do in non-work time. But the strong recommendation is to give yourself permission to do these things without feeling guilty.

We are all different and different things work for different people. For some, a good rest is sleeping or lying quietly, for others it is going for a walk or spending time with friends. It is important that you find out what works for you – and do more of it!

Having a structure to your day while you are off work is really important to improve your health. When you don't have work to give you a daily routine, you will find it helpful to create your daily and weekly timetable or ask a friend to help you.



WHAT TO DO:

You are signed off work but how do you spend your time? Do what makes you feel well!

Routine is good for us, whether we like it or not. When you are off work, the routine is lost, and you no longer have any goals to work towards. So, the advice is to:

- Plan your day to make sure you are doing something that is good for you every day.
- Set some goals to work towards – these need to be realistic and achievable. Here is an example of how to set [realistic goals for yourself](#).
- Make sure you are looking after your basic needs – e.g. exercising, sleeping, eating healthily.
- Use the [5 Ways to Wellbeing](#) as a guide to improve your wellbeing. The exercise on this page will help you identify activities that you can do throughout the week to help your wellbeing.

- Try keeping a gratitude diary. Thinking about the things we are grateful for, large or small, can help us to re-programme our brains to notice positive things in our surroundings. This approach has been found to significantly benefit wellbeing.
- Try writing a mood diary, including noting how you feel, what you are doing, when and who you are with throughout the day. Over the week you may start to see patterns in your mood: when you are at your most positive, when you feel lowest. Once you understand your pattern you can start to find ways to help you through the day: for example, doing the most important tasks when you are at your most positive.
- Find support groups, networks and services in your local area.



EXERCISE:

[5 ways to wellbeing](#) (For more details see the [Moodzone on the HNS website](#))



EXERCISE:

[Gratitude diary](#), [mood diary](#), [mindful/reflective diary](#)



CHECKLIST:

[Other important things you can do to improve your mental health](#)