Head Start

Everyday Mental Fitness

Digital

Playbook



Before you dive in, remember...

Getting a Head Start is exactly that, a start.

It isn't a magic fix for all mental health problems, nor a substitute for expert medical advice.

If you feel that a friend or loved one is suffering due to their mental health, **speak up**.

If you are struggling, if you feel overwhelmed, at your wit's end, and like you have nowhere to turn, you're wrong. Talk to someone.

Talk to someone you trust.

Talk to a friend who knows everything about you.

Talk to someone who knows nothing about you.

Talk to your boss.

Talk to your GP.

Just talk.

There are always places to go, people to speak to and *help is always available*.



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How to use your Head Start playbook

Your Head Start playbook contains everything you need to get started improving your mental fitness right now, including:

- Information & guidance
- Insight & inspiration
- Tips, tricks, tools & more

It's best viewed in full screen mode on your computer but don't worry if you're using it on mobile or tablet, you can still access all the information and complete the exercises.

Moving through your playbook

Use the buttons (top right) to navigate through the playbook:

- Return to contents page
- Move back one page
- Move forward one page
- Jump to your Head Start Tracker
- Wherever you see this symbol, fill in the blanks

Head Start

Promoting positive mental health in the waste & recycling industry.

Foreword

Advice around mental health tends to focus on spotting the signs of crisis in others.

Working in a fast-paced environment with lots of moving parts, we often wait until we notice a change in someone, or can see that they are under pressure, before offering our support or suggesting to them where they can find help.

With *Head Start* we want to empower individuals to be more proactive about their mental fitness.

To improve it a little more every day, so that when life's challenges do come around, you're not just able to cope with them but resilient enough to face them down.

The information in this playbook isn't designed to shock you or even necessarily be new to you. And it certainly isn't the end of the story when it comes to looking after your mental health. What it does is bring together some interesting perspectives and practical tools to help you start from a strong place when dealing with life's ups and downs.

Life doesn't always leave us a lot of time to look after our mental health—that's exactly why it's so important to give yourself a *Head Start*.



Jacob Hayler
Executive Director,
ESA

Building everyday mental fitness

Having a Head Start means embracing the idea of training for life's challenges every day. So that when they inevitably do come up, you are equipped and ready to not just cope with them but to deal with them head on.

It isn't rocket science, and it isn't reinventing the wheel.

Simply put, the goal of Head Start is to help you feel more:

Resilient

To understand that change is constant, positive *and* negative.

and say to yourself...
I have come through
both before and will get
through both again.

Empowered

To take responsibility for improving *your* own mental fitness.

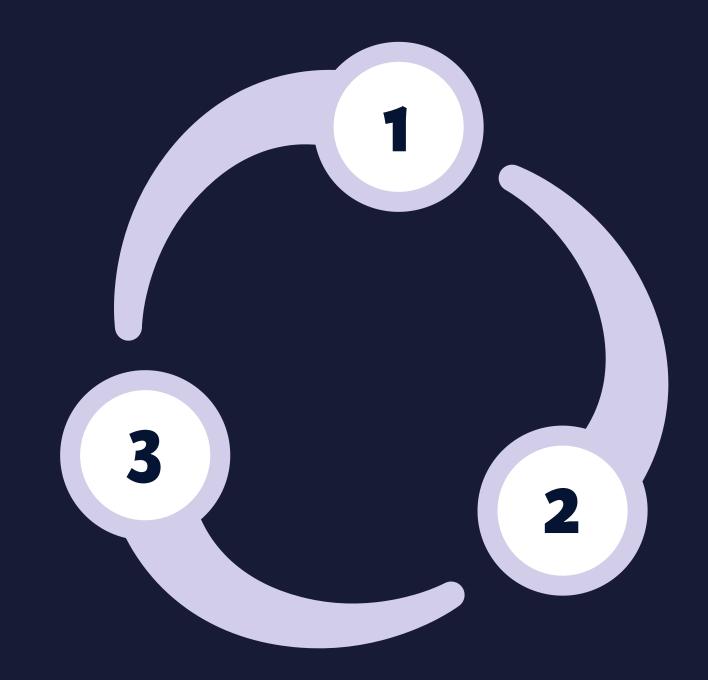
and say to yourself...
I am confident in my
capabilities and am ready
to face life's challenges.

Proactive

To make progress along the path to success every day.

and say to yourself...
I have the tools and
techniques I need to start
improving right now.

Just like working out in the gym, becoming stronger mentally comes down to following the right programme and performing the right exercises.



Head Start is built around REPs

Resilient

Empowered

Proactive

A **REP** is an exercise or technique you can perform to build your mental fitness.

Within Head Start there are **nine REPs** for you to complete **every day.** With each focused on a different aspect of positive mental wellbeing.

Some **REPs** are purely mental, some require you to move your body.

For some you might need to focus on both at the same time.

Some **REPs** might be more of a challenge for you than others, and the ones that you find easy might be more difficult for other people. But just like at the gym, the more **REPs** you perform and the more consistent you are in doing them, the easier they will get and the better you will feel.

Here's how it works



Stay on top of

life's stresses

Make a plan

Head Start onapage

Rise above waves of low mood

Catch the daylight Balance your body Start a conversation

Feel more Resilient, **Empowered** and **Proactive** with every **REP** you complete

Face up to feelings of anxiety

Identify the triggers Assert your control Breathe it out

How many **REPs** have you done today?

- 1 Lower the noise
- 2 Clear your mind
- Make a plan

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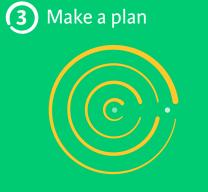
Try getting away from the crowd, flipping your phone over or taking a break from behind the wheel.

Around

1

UK workers find themselves unable to

manage stress at work.



Lay out some simple steps you can take and share the plan with someone you trust to help keep yourself accountable.

Did you know...

Feelings of stress trigger the release of cortisol in your body, giving you a vital burst of energy to deal with whatever's in front of you. 2 Clear your mind

Switch your focus to something else. Distract yourself from the moment by reading the sports section or listening to your favourite song.

Did you know...

Regular exercise has been shown to be 1.5 times more effective than medication for improving poor mental health.

Stress can affect anyone, no matter your bank balance or your job title.

There's no one single cause of stress. (Wouldn't it be fantastic if there was only one?)

Rather, stress is the name given to how your body reacts and responds to pressure.

Most of the time, your body deals with this subconsciously and does a pretty good job keeping you safe from harm.

Factors such as your upbringing, your environment and your circumstances can all influence how prone you are to experiencing stress as well as how well you cope with the feelings.

However, when there's too much stress, too much pressure, too much change etc., cracks can start to appear, and your body can struggle to protect you. If left unchecked, this stress can spill over into areas such as your mood, your performance, and your relationships, and start to impact your life negatively.

Understanding the causes of stress and getting a Head Start on them is an essential part of being proactive about your mental health. Some of the most common causes of stress across the waste and recycling industry are:

Bullying	Job security
Burnout	Loneliness
Illness/injury	Work-life balance

Do you have experience with any of these? If so, how did you deal with it?

In the right amounts, some stress can be good for you:

It can help you sharpen up your focus and concentration.

Think about how you manage and meet your targets or deadlines.

It can help you keep your commitments.

Think about why you worry when you're running late for something important.

It can help you do things you didn't know you were capable of.

Think about the sense of achievement you feel after doing something difficult versus something easy.

Life's stresses are meant to test you, not destroy you

If you feel like you can't get a
Head Start no matter what you
do or what techniques you try,
don't give up. There is additional
support out there for you.

Talking therapies such as CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) have been shown to greatly improve how people manage stress and are available through the NHS. See **here** for more information.

Stress is like reality TV... Yes, everybody hates it, but it isn't going anywhere, and we all need to learn how to deal with it!

Completing these REPs can help...

Lower the noise

The waste and recycling industry is **LOUD**.

So loud that you're likely wearing PPE right now to protect yourself from it.



Being bombarded by the sound of vehicles and machinery every day is something that comes with the job.

So much so you might still be able to hear the whirring and whooshing long after you leave site and maybe even in your sleep too!

While PPE is essential for protecting your hearing, this noise can also have an impact on your mental health.

Affecting everything from how much you can concentrate to how well you can communicate.

In an environment where it isn't always possible to fully escape all the noise, there are things you can do to maintain your Head Start:

- Grab any chance you can to give your ears a break and let your mind reset.
 Even brief moments of quiet can have a significant effect on mental wellbeing and performance. In practice, this could mean going off site at lunchtime, taking your paperwork to another area of the building with less going on, or swapping the banging and clanging for some soothing music.
- It's always worth having important conversations in a quieter space.
 Better to take an extra minute to move than to raise your voice, struggle to hear what's said and risk a potential misunderstanding.

This **REP** asks you to do away with distractions.

Limiting and preventing the buildup of stress allows you to make positive progress and focus your energy on one problem at a time.

Lower the noise

Noise is more than just what you can hear.

In the context of mental health, noise means anything that influences your overall wellbeing, your thoughts and emotions and/or your personal and professional relationships... It is often split into two categories:



Internal Factors which are individual

Hunger
Exhaustion
Frustration
Pain
Concentration



External Factorswhich are circumstantial

Home life
Workload
Working patterns
Financial worries
Social media

Your body deals with noise subconsciously all the time, without you realising:

When you're driving around in the dark and your hand automatically turns the radio down? That's your body responding to stress.

When you can't find your boarding gate at the airport and you take your earphones out so you can 'see' better? Same thing.

When you hide in the bathroom for an extra three minutes before the kids notice you're gone? Definitely a stress response!

Even when you have lots of good things going on in your life, they can still bring a lot of pressure and stress with them. When the level of noise becomes too much and starts to negatively impact how you feel, the best thing you can do is to lower it.

Think about the volume of noise in your life and write down the internal and external factors you think contribute to it in the boxes above. The more specific you are about the source, the easier it will be to figure out realistic ways of helping reduce it.

Clear your mind

Being able to control unwanted thoughts can free up precious mental space.

Giving you a fresh perspective on life and helping you to make better decisions.



get things done.

When there are too many

Clearing your mind is a way of simplifying your internal process and dealing with the mental clutter holding you back. It could be as simple as:

- Doing something that requires little to no concentration (like the washing up or laundry)
- Visualising when you last felt completely relaxed (like lying on the beach with a cocktail)
- Writing your thoughts down and getting them out of your head (sometimes called journalling)
- Talking to the dog as if they can understand you before you leave for work
- Singing your favourite song before you get out the car and start your shift
- Reading the celebrity gossip column of the paper on your tea break

Top tip

A great time to clear your mind (and get an extra **REP** in at the same time) is when performing a breathing exercise (see pages 36-38.)

Centring all of your energy and attention onto something as beneficial as deep breathing is the perfect chance for your brain to let go of any unnecessary stress weighing it down.

This out of sight, out of mind moment of respite could be just what you need to regain some mental clarity and feel energised and motivated to succeed in whatever task you put your mind to next.

Clear your mind

Sometimes to recharge and come back feeling mentally refreshed, you just need to think about something else for a minute. Or, even better, nothing at all!



What are some of your favourite ways to clear your mind?

Note them down below and ask other people to share how they do it.

Performing this **REP** every day and staying in close control of what's tumbling around inside your head is a great way to gain perspective on what's important to you and at the same time be more proactive about looking after your mental health.

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With this in mind, take a moment to reflect on what you've noted down.

Do you think these methods of clearing your mind are healthy or unhealthy?

Would someone who cared about you describe them as good for you?

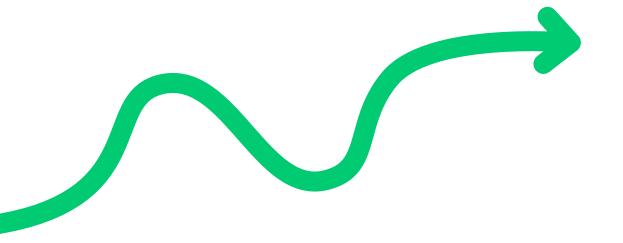
If not, think about why not.

Is there anything you could do to improve them and potentially free up even more mental space?

Make a plan

Trying to take on everything all at once is asking for trouble.

Minimising distractions and meeting life's stresses head on with a clear mind is already a giant step towards becoming more mentally resilient. Feeling empowered enough to handle whatever comes your way next, that takes a little planning.





The Stress Bucket*

This simple model can help you visualise the ways in which life's stresses can add up.

It is also great for recognising when you need to take action and what you can do to alleviate feelings of stress.

Unexpected stresses can fill the bucket quickly:

- Injury/illness
- Loss/grief
- Bills



Overwhelmed

Everyday stresses fill the bucket slowly:

- Work targets
- Time pressures
- Fatigue

Important

Feeling overwhelmed is a signal, don't ignore it. If you feel like this, it could be time to speak to your GP about getting some help.

Starting to struggle

Feeling the pressure

Managing fine

Unhealthy coping mechanisms can promise relief from stress but do little to decrease overall levels:

- Drugs and alcohol
- Overeating
- Spending money

Positive coping mechanisms:

- Balanced diet
- Hobbies/exercise
- Sleep

Head Start



Supportive relationships:

- Friends
- Family
- Colleagues

Use this space to make a plan that will reduce the level of stress in your bucket.

Overwhelmed

Starting to struggle

Feeling the pressure

Managing fine

Head Start

Some things to consider as you do:

How full is your bucket now?

What's in it?

What's filling it up?

How are you currently coping?

Is this healthy or unhealthy?



What do you need to change or do more of to make positive progress and give yourself a Head Start?

Set out the steps to success and start taking them one at a time.

With your plan in place, share it with someone you trust to keep yourself accountable and track your progress.

Completing this REP every day will do three things:

- Make your bucket bigger So you can handle more stress in a positive way
- Make you mentally stronger So you can lift this bigger bucket with less effort
- Make the load lighter So you can control your feelings using healthy coping techniques

Head Start stories

Ronnie is a supervisor who leads a small team of six other people.

With two staff off on holiday, and another who has phoned in sick for the second week in a row, it's fallen on Ronnie to pick up the slack and keep the team on target.

The heavier workload has led to longer hours and the impact of this is starting to

0

What practical things can Ronnie do to remove the distractions around them and lower the noise?

take its toll both at work and at home.

They've snapped at colleagues and family a few times for absolutely nothing. All down to frustration and the pressure they are under. They tried to apologise afterwards, but why would anyone forgive them for being so horrible for no reason?

The days feel like a constant uphill



How could Ronnie benefit from stepping back and clearing their mind? Think about resilience and making better decisions.

struggle and the nights aren't much better.
One crisis after another with no end in sight. As soon as one problem gets dealt with, another two come to take its place.

Obviously, things can't go on like this forever, but they don't know what to do or even where to start.



Imagine you are on Ronnie's team. What impact will making a plan have on the mental wellbeing of Ronnie, the team, and you?

1. Why is a Head Start so important?

- a. It makes your life easier
- b. It prepares you for what the future might bring
- c. It shows other people how tough you are

2. Which of these best describes what it means to be mentally resilient?

- a. I can handle anything, nothing phases me
- b. Stop the world, I want to get off
- c. I have come through times like this before and know I can get through them again

3. How can you empower yourself to stay on top of life's stresses?

- a. By putting in the effort every day to improve
- b. By going looking for trouble
- c. By using chocolate as a coping mechanism

4. You can be proactive about your mental health by...

- a. Learning new techniques to become mentally fitter each day
- b. Isolating yourself from sources of stress
- c. Seeking approval from others

Guidance for managers

Managers play a key role when it comes to supporting people and helping them stay on top of stress at work.

With a lot on your plate as it is, you naturally want to get the best from your team. But that means doing the best you can for them, too.

Stress is not the enemy. In many cases, it can make teams sharper and stronger. But we all have different limits as to how much we can take. Understanding these limits can help you guide your team through stressful periods at work.

Remember...

Don't put pressure on yourself to try and solve every problem that your team members share with you.

A duty of care does not mean a duty to fix everything.

Keep up the check-ins: During busy times, it may seem best to let everyone get their heads down and power through, but this could actually increase feelings of stress amongst the team. Making sure your people know you're right there with them could be as simple as prioritising quick check-ins throughout the day. If you're responsible for lone workers or remote staff, this is extra important.

Encourage and empower: It's not always easy to speak up, especially if people feel like their concerns are being overlooked. If you're supporting your team and taking time to engage regularly in open conversations, they're much more likely to come to you for help when they need it.

Champion work life balance: A lack of downtime is a sure-fire way to keep stress levels high. Encouraging your team to log off on time and take their annual leave is an easy way to offload some stress and promote a healthy work life balance.

Never make assumptions: What's going on at work is often just the tip of the iceberg for many people. Don't let your to-do list stop you from seeing the big picture. Showing your people compassion and never assuming you know the full story is key to discovering how they work best.

2 in 5 employees reported experiencing poor mental health symptoms related to work in the last year

Face UD to feelings of anxiety



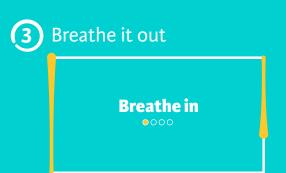


Breathe it out



Did you know...

'Nomophobia' – the fear of being without your phone – affects 42% of British adults. **Rising smartphone** addiction has been directly linked to mental health issues, particularly amongst young people.



Your breath is one of the most powerful tools you have. A few deep, conscious breaths can positively affect both your physical body and state of mind.

10%

Employees are reporting an increase in pressure at work, and yet only 10% are seeking support for their mental health.



Hone in on something that you can control and take action from there. One positive step, however small, has the power to stop an anxious spiral in its tracks.

Natural environments

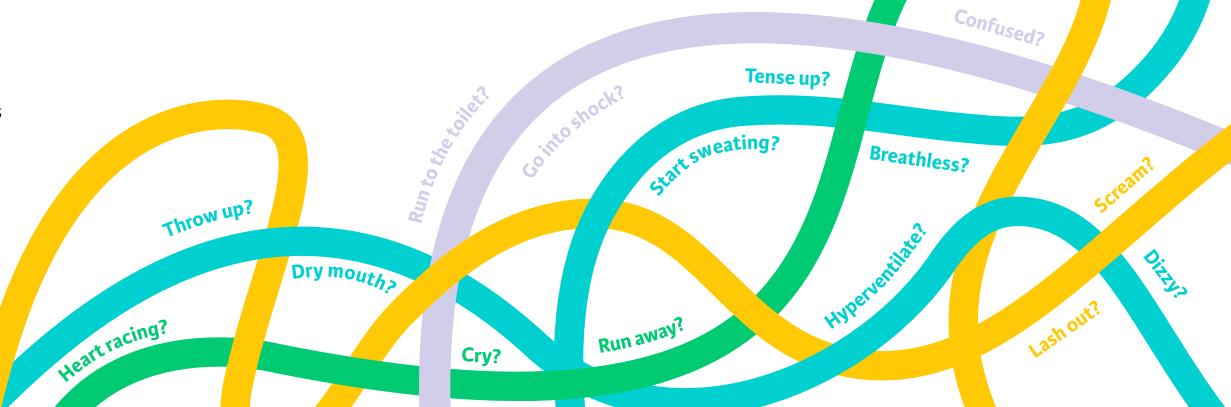
are proven to help us feel calmer. Taking in views which contain trees, flowers or water can reduce feelings of anger, anxiety and pain in just three minutes.

Feeling anxious is a **psychological** issue with often very **physiological** symptoms.

Anxiety is a normal reaction intended to protect you from danger. It's your body's natural way of pushing you to take evasive action in a given situation.

If you've never experienced the feeling before, try and imagine what it would feel like if your **fight, flight AND freeze** reflexes all kicked in **at the same time!**

What would you do? How would you feel? How would you react?



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All of these effects (and more) are potential signs of anxiety and demonstrate how an emotional feeling in your mind can affect you physically.

Anxiety can present in different ways, with different names and different levels of severity. Some you might recognise are:

Generalised anxiety

Panic attacks

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Phobias

According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), feelings of anxiety...

Are not permanent

Individuals who suffer DO get better and STAY better.

Can be greatly improved

When people can make their OWN DECISIONS about treatment and recovery.

Performing these **REPs** every day will help you to build your mental fitness and face up to feelings of anxiety, before they become too acute to manage.

Important

Anyone can experience feelings of anxiety, but when the feeling becomes:

- more severe
- longer lasting
- damaging to your work or relationships

These are signs of a potential anxiety disorder and it could be time to seek help from your GP or anther support service.

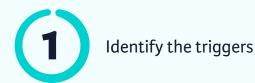
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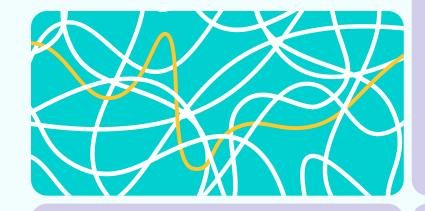
Identify the triggers

You don't have to be standing on top of a skyscraper giving a speech while holding a spider to feel anxious.

Many things within your personal and professional life can contribute to the feeling. Here are just a few examples







Your Environment

Constant clutter or untidiness
Crowded or confined spaces
Temperature - too hot or too cold
Excessive noise levels
Traffic

Your Circumstances

Heavy workload

Long or irregular hours

Financial problems

Chronic illness (for you or your family)

Loneliness (living alone or lone working)

Your Relationships

Grief and loss
Past trauma
Divorce or separation
Bullying and harassment
Job security

Take a moment to consider what your triggers are, both at home and at work. Once you've identified them, write them in the boxes (left), in a notebook, or even just on a post-it.

Some of your triggers might have a relatively easy fix:

- If mess gives you stress, try and keep the place spotless
- If you tense up at the thought of going to the supermarket, maybe order your shopping online instead
- If you hate hedgehogs, try your best to avoid pri... you get the idea

If that's the case, great. Don't wait for the feeling to build up, be proactive and make the changes you need to make to protect yourself in the long run.

Other triggers, however, can of course be much bigger, and much more difficult to manage. And that's OK. Things like past trauma or financial problems aren't going to just heal completely or disappear overnight because you call them out. But just because they are big problems worthy of worrying about doesn't mean that you need to feel powerless against them...

What this **REP** is meant to do is help you understand and reflect on how the world around you is impacting how you feel.

Getting into the habit of pinpointing the things which bring on feelings of anxiety is the first step to facing up to them and getting a Head Start.

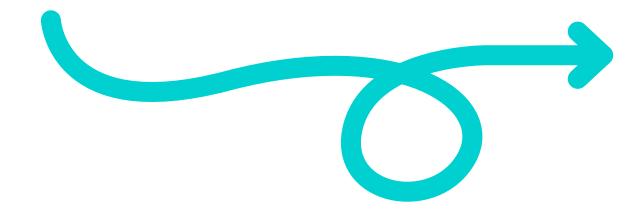
Top tip

Calling your triggers out loud can often help you to calm down in the moment. Try it. Just be careful where and when you do, or it might slide into road rage!

Assert your control

There will always be big problems to solve, and little problems will always grow up to become big problems.

That's why it's so important to control what you can, when you can, and try your best to let go of the rest.





Things you can't control

Things you definitely can control

What's happened in the past

Whether you are proactive or reactive

What other people think

Whether your words are positive or negative

What other people say

Whether you work quickly or safely

What the weather's going to be

Whether you talk about yourself kindly or unkindly

What traffic will be like

Whether you ask for help or not

Big or small, for better or worse, things will change.

When they do, be resilient enough to ask yourself:

What can I do to make life better right now?

It doesn't have to be a big thing; you don't need to bring about world peace. It's actually better if you start small with something simple.

That way you can string a few wins together and build momentum.

For example, you could put together a series of little wins during a busy, stressful period by deciding:

- I won't check my phone 'til lunchtime
- I will focus on the task in front of me
- I'll go outside and catch the daylight
- Ticking off another **REP** in the process

Top tip

One of the best ways of taking control when you can feel things starting to get on top of you is to help someone else. Nothing makes you forget about your own problems like fixing someone else's!

Give yourself some credit.

Dealing with feelings of anxiety in a healthy way isn't always easy. Especially with so many unhealthy ways out there promising a quick fix (alcohol, overeating, blaming yourself etc.).

So, when you do manage to assert your control and change a negative situation into a positive one, make sure you take the time to recognise what you did and how you did it. Keeping a record of your achievements (who cares how small?) will only inspire you to make bigger and better ones going forward.



Your last three positive changes:

This **REP** is a sneaky one.

The more often you perform it and notice the impact that making small, positive, conscious decisions has on not just your life, but the lives of those around you too, the happier and healthier you will feel.

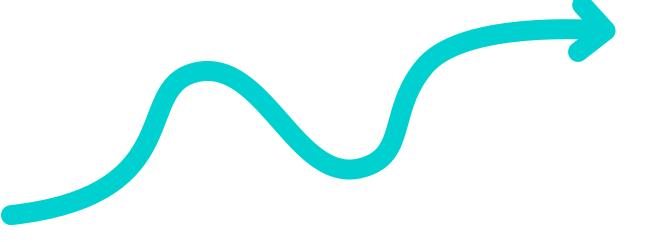
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Once you realise that you always have power in the moment and that no matter how bad things may get there is always an opportunity to change things for the better, you will want to do it again and again and again.

Breathe it out

Controlling your breath is like using a cheat code against feelings of anxiety.

Knowing how to get oxygen into and carbon dioxide out of your body quickly and effectively has huge physical AND mental health benefits. Here are just a handful of each



3 Breathe it out

Physical health benefits

Lower heart rate

Lower blood pressure

Increased energy

Improved digestion

Better sleep

Better posture

Mental health benefits

Increased focus & concentration

Increased alertness & mindfulness

Improved decision making

Greater stress tolerance

Higher self-esteem

Better mood

Quick guide to breathing exercises

There are lots of different breathing exercises out there to try. Some you might find are easier or work better than others and some might do absolutely nothing for you.

The three on the next page are some of the most popular and range in difficulty from pretty easy, to slightly trickier, to full focus required.

It's important to remember though, just because you can do the 'hardest one' doesn't guarantee you will feel any better. It's all about trial and error and finding the exercise that works best for you!

Before you jump straight into trying them, follow these simple steps to set yourself up:

Make yourself comfortable

Sit in a comfy chair or, even better, lie down. The aim is to keep your spine straight and the rest of your body as relaxed as you can. Arms should be on your lap or by your side.

Start slowly

If you've never done it before or you can't hold your breath for very long, don't worry. It's much more important that you stay relaxed and in control than hit the count target. The more you practice, the better you will get.

Don't give up too early

If you try them all once and don't instantly feel calmer, completely in control of your life and sleep like a log for eight hours straight after, don't lose faith. It doesn't quite work like that. Stick with each one for a week or two before moving on to another exercise if you feel no difference at all.

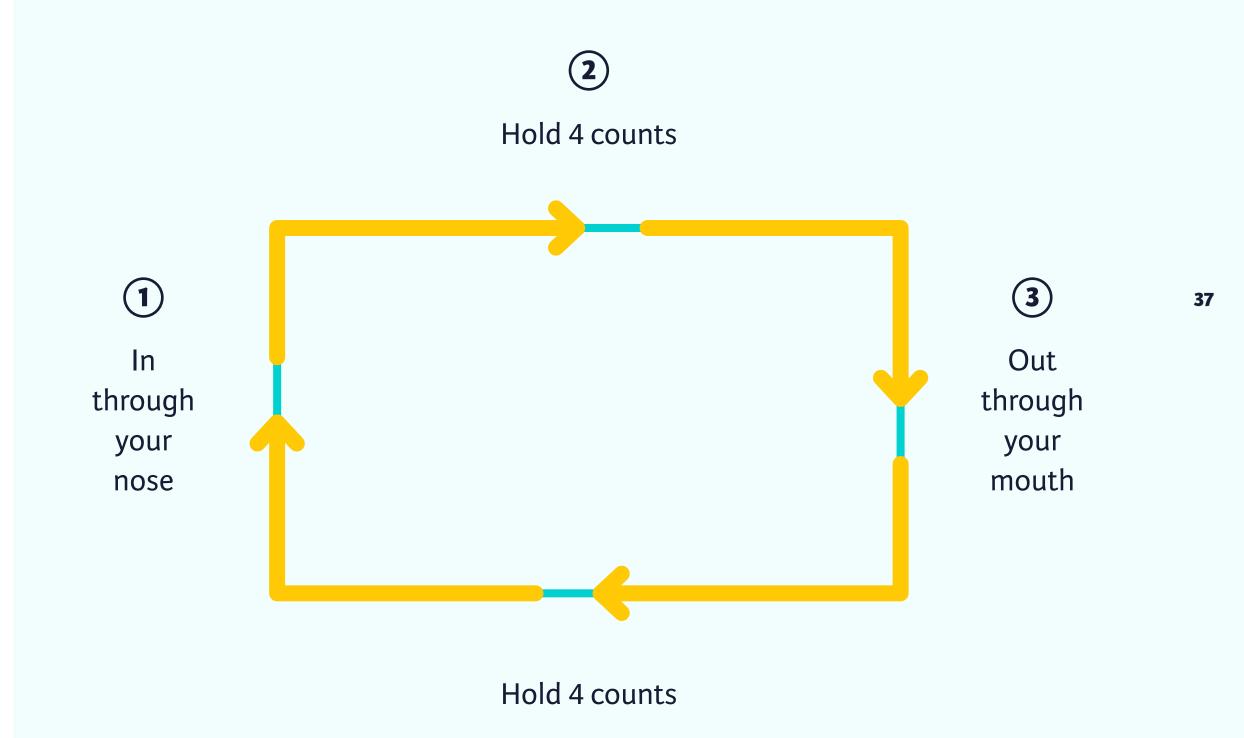


Exercise 1:

Beginner

Box breathing

Restores your body's natural rhythm and can help overcome feelings of anxiety, worry and anger.



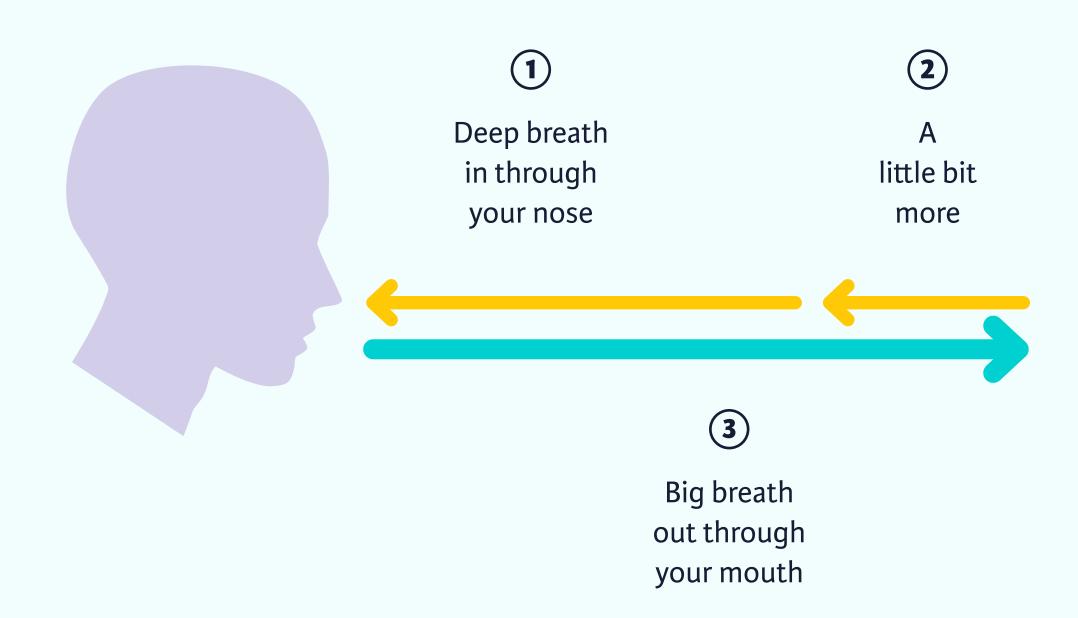


Exercise 2:

Intermediate

Physiological sigh

Great for offloading lots of CO₂ and bringing stress levels down quickly.



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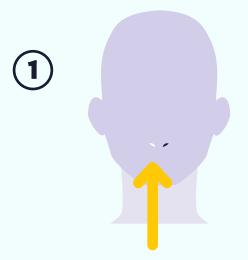


Exercise 3:

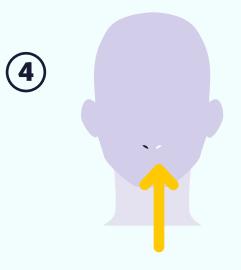
Advanced

Alternate breathing

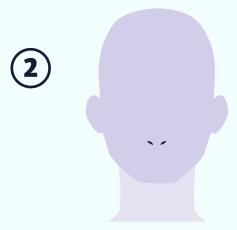
Lowers blood pressure and heart rate while at the same time increasing alertness.



Close your right nostril with your index finger, inhale through your left nostril.

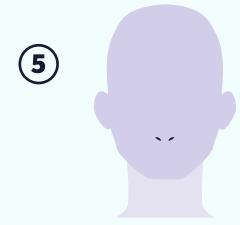


Close your left nostril with your thumb, inhale through your right nostril.

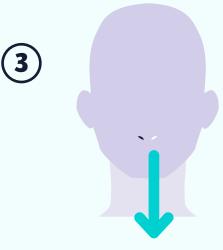


Still closing your right nostril, close your left nostril with your thumb.

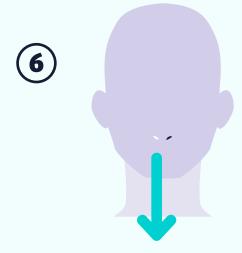
Hold breath for a few beats.



Still closing your left nostril, close your right nostril with your index finger. Hold breath for a few beats.



Open your right nostril and exhale. Hold for a few beats.



Open your left nostril and exhale. Hold for a few beats. Repeat process.

Head Start stories

Eddie is due to return to work after a reasonably long time off due to an operation.

They've worked hard on their recovery and feel capable of going back to work physically but, as the day approaches, they start to feel more and more apprehensive about it in their mind. They've heard from some of their colleagues that a lot has changed since they've been away, and the latest messages on the group chat might as well be written in Klingon because they've no idea what it all means.

Their old manager, who knew all about their circumstances and was great,

has now moved and the new one has mentioned that their role in the team will be slightly different when they go back.

Eddie really enjoys their work and wants to be excited and confident about going back but they can't seem to shake the feeling of worry that everything has passed them by.



What steps can Eddie take to be proactive and face up to these feelings of anxiety?



How might building up their mental fitness in the lead up to their return help them feel more empowered and in control?



Why is it important to support Eddie as they return, and what things could you do to make the change as easy as possible for them?

1. What is the best way to get a Head Start on positive mental health?

- a. Dealing with stuff as it happens
- b. Building your everyday mental fitness
- c. Ignoring your emotions completely

2. Resilience is all about...

- a. Recovering quickly from hardship
- b. Going through the motions
- c. Avoiding drama

3. How can you empower yourself to face up to feelings of anxiety?

- a. By putting on a brave face
- b. By shifting the blame onto others
- c. By taking personal responsibility for your mental health

4. When it comes to mental fitness, being proactive means...

- a. Searching for problems to fix
- b. Taking action whenever you feel anxious
- c. Making positive progress every day

Guidance for managers

Feelings of anxiety affect people in different ways and can reveal (or hide) themselves in a whole range of physical and psychological symptoms.

As a manager, showing that you recognise this can help your people face up to these feelings and get a Head Start.

You don't have to understand exactly what someone is experiencing to be able to support them through it. Simply giving people time and space to explain their feelings, uninterrupted, helps build trust.

Work like a human, not a robot: It can be easy to let the work itself overshadow the needs of the people doing it. It's important to remember that we all have off days and need extra support at times. Make sure you're taking time to look past the numbers, targets and deadlines, and look out for your team's wellbeing.

Focus on the positives: Anxious people can find criticism hard to take. It may trigger a spiral of negative self talk and worry, so being sensitive to this will help frame how you give feedback. When constructive criticism is called for, be aware of your tone, body language and timing.

Stick to a routine: Find out what works best for the team and do your best to keep to a plan. For example, having meetings at the same time of day, rather than ad hoc, can help people stay organised and in control.

Communicate clearly: Being clear with your people on what you want them to do, and when, is important for managing feelings of anxiety, for you and for them. Knowing how much information to share in advance and what to hold back on until it's ready will help reduce both negative overthinking and nasty surprises.



Remember...

You don't have to have all the answers yourself. Make sure you're prepared with resources on hand that you can point people towards where appropriate.

Just 13% of people feel able to disclose a mental health issue to their line manager

Rise above waves of low mod



2 Balance your body

3 Start a conversation

(1) Catch the daylight

Getting outside whatever the weather is a proven mood booster, and it's free!

90%

The gut is thought to produce around **90%** of the **serotonin** found in your body.



Did you know...

Studies link sleep deficiency with greater difficulty controlling emotions and coping with change.

2 Balance your body



Get up and move, stretch out your muscles, and put sleep first. Try to get as close to 7 hours as you can.

Did you know...

Studies have found that **87%** of people who own a pet find it helps their mental health.

Everyone has the right to feel upset when bad things happen. Giving yourself a Head Start comes down to how you prepare and how you respond.

Being fed up might sound like something you should be able to shrug off easily, but the feeling can be more powerful than you think. Low mood can have a negative impact on many aspects of your everyday life, including:

How you feel mentally...

Grumpy, guilty, angry, unhappy, helpless, hopeless

How you feel physically...

No energy for anything, tired but can't sleep, aches and pains all the time for no reason

How you think about yourself and others...

Self-awareness, self-criticism, self-doubt, blaming, shaming, negative framing

The way you behave...

Staying away from people, snapping at your colleagues, shedding a few tears, drinking too many beers

How many of these effects do you recognise in yourself?

What about in those around you?

All of them can be linked to feelings of low mood.

The good news is that there are things you can start doing today that will make a positive difference to how you feel.

Complete these **REPs** to improve your everyday mental fitness and prepare for those times when the waves start to build, and your mood starts to sink...

Knowing when low mood could be hiding something more serious

Going through some sad times or feeling a bit down every now and then is not the same as being depressed. While there are many forms of depression, each with different symptoms and causes, broadly speaking someone who is depressed will experience at least two of these symptoms for most of the day for at least two weeks:

- An unusually sad mood that does not go away
- A loss of interest in activities which used to bring joy
- A lack of energy and increased tiredness

If this sounds like it could be you, you should contact your GP straight away and ask for a mental health assessment.

For more details, including more of the signs and symptoms to look out for when it comes to depression, click **here**.

Catch the daylight

It's in your nature to feel better in nature.

Spending more time outdoors is an easy yet effective way of improving overall mental health and building resilience.



Absorbing more natural light is known to increase vitamin D production, regulate your internal clock, lead to deeper and better sleep, reduce levels of stress hormone, boost decision making, problem solving, cognitive performance and much more.

And all it takes to achieve these amazing results is a few simple swaps every day...

At work

Open the windows and blinds: flood your workspace with as much natural light as possible to give yourself a power up during the day. A great time to try this is whenever you feel stuck on a tricky task or problem.

Go outside at break times: as little as a few minutes a few times a day can make a big difference to your mood. If you can, try and find a tree to stand beside for better air quality.

Always wear protection: if you work outside, like many in the waste industry do, that's great, you already have a Head Start, but be careful. Wear a hat or sunglasses to protect your eyes from glare and sunscreen to protect your skin from burning. Remember, this **REP** is all about taking advantage of the benefits of sunshine, not the downsides.

At home

Wake up in the light, not in the night: keep the curtains closed while you sleep to block out artificial light from things like streetlamps and cars. Pull them wide open as soon as you wake up to let the sunlight energise and motivate you to start the day.

Spend more time in the garden: an hour cutting the grass or pulling out a few weeds can help your brain release more serotonin, the 'feel-good' chemical.

Get some green exercise: do your walking, running, cycling or circuits in the brightness and colour of the park rather than the darkness and grey of the gym. Studies have shown that 'grounding' yourself in nature by walking barefoot outdoors can also improve circulation and reduce inflammation - just watch where you step!



Take a minute to be mindful...

Being conscious of the environment around you can help you to become more focused in the moment, more grounded overall, and more confident about your place in the world.

Here's a quick mindfulness exercise you can do the next time you're outside working or walking (and yes, it even works through the clouds!).

Ask yourself:
What are three
things you can see?

What are two things
you can hear?

What one thing are
you grateful for?

Note what you see, hear and feel grateful for above and see how your observations change over time.



Think back to what you did last week, at work and at home

What opportunities did you have to do something outdoors instead of indoors? Write them down below and make the promise to yourself to catch the daylight the next time you have the chance.

1

2

3

This **REP** highlights the positive ways in which nature and the environment affect your health and wellbeing. Why not take what you learn and let the world help you get a Head Start?



Balance your body

Keeping active is a powerful tool to help overcome waves of low mood.

But you don't need to be out climbing mountains and running marathons every weekend to develop a better relationship between your physical and mental health.



Making some honest observations about your lifestyle, along with some simple changes, can help you lift your spirits and feel better about yourself.

Don't overthink it...

Sitting down too much? Get up and get moving

Get off the bus a stop early and walk the rest of the way

Park further away from the entrance to get your legs going before your shift

Walk up as many flights as you can before you get in the lift

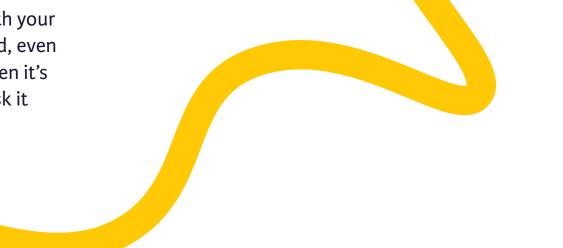
On your feet all day? Remember the rest of you

Keep your body and brain well hydrated

Stretch out the muscles you're not using to stay flexible and strong (paying special attention to your shoulders and lower back)

Lift with your legs, never with your back - even when you're tired, even when they're sore, even when it's something light, don't risk it

They might not have you challenging Sir Mo Farah for a gold medal, but making small choices like these every day can help get blood pumping around your body and release some mood-boosting endorphins.



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Balance your body

Think to the future...

What are some things you can do with your body today that you'd love to still be able to do with it after you retire?

- Five good push ups?
- Touch your toes?
- Get up off the toilet without using your arms?
- The Moonwalk?!

Whatever it is, if you can do it today, and again tomorrow, and again the next day, and make checking that you can still do it an everyday habit, then there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to do it forever. It's not important how 'easy' or 'hard' it is, it's all about consistency and what matters to you.



Write your goals in the box and check back regularly to see if you can still do them!

The Sleepy Truth...

Long story short. If you aren't getting at least SEVEN hours of sleep every night, you simply are not getting enough.

Poor sleep is a leading cause of many mental health issues, from mild to severe.

Start making sleep the last thing you give up when things get tough instead of the first and watch how quickly your mood improves.

Did you know?

The idea of completing '10,000 steps a day' comes from a marketing campaign for the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo?

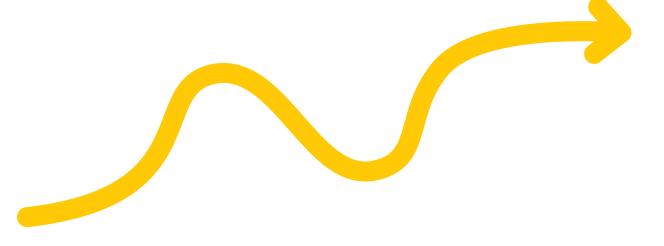
A company selling pedometers came up with this 'magic' number after realising that the Japanese symbol for ten thousand looked like a person walking! (See for yourself above.)

What research shows is that it's actually less about how many steps you take, and more about the effort you put into each one. So, the next time you find yourself going for a stroll, try upping the pace every 10 minutes to get your heart and lungs working as well as your legs.

Start a conversation

A problem shared is a problem halved, and a problem halved is a Head Start.

Becoming better at talking and listening to other people leads to deeper, more fulfilling relationships.





Talking takes practice

Communicating how you feel and what's on your mind isn't always easy. Where do you start? Who do you tell? What do you say? Here are some tips you can use to get a Head Start on your everyday interactions with colleagues, friends and family.

Lighten up

Conversations that benefit your mental health don't always have to be 'heavy' or try and 'fix' something that's wrong.

Sharing some good news, something you find interesting or something that made you laugh is enough to spread positivity.

Ask open questions

Sometimes, all it takes for someone to feel comfortable enough to talk is for you to open the door.

Instead of asking closed questions like 'are you all right?' or 'did you have your tea, Dave?', consider asking something which gives the conversation room to grow like 'How do you feel about this?' or 'What do you think about that?'

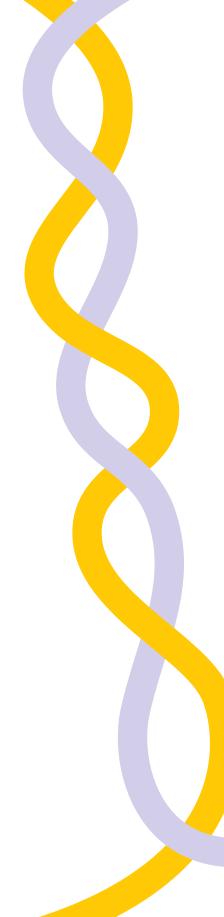
Allow space for the answer to come back and encourage the other person to give more than a one-word answer like 'yes', 'no', 'fine', 'OK', 'sausages', etc.

Active listening

This just means being fully engaged in the conversations you are having.

A simple way you can practice this skill is to listen, check and repeat. For example, if a colleague says that they are feeling a bit off, you should:

- listen, by letting them finish what they
 have to say without interrupting
- check that you fully understand their situation by asking some open questions (see left)
- repeat the key points back to them in your own words to show that you care and want to help



Being able to air and share your feelings is a great way to manage low mood and stress before they get too big.

The more proactive you are in seeking out healthy conversations, the better you will become at having them.

And the better you become at having them, the bigger the positive effect on your mental health, your relationships and your ability to cope when things change.

Don't be stuck for something to say

Use the space below to write down some conversation starters for the people in your life. Think about the challenges they're facing, the things they have to be proud of, and the ways in which you can help them to become more resilient, empowered and proactive through your words and support.

54

Colleagues

Friends

Family

By completing this **REP** and increasing not just the quantity of your conversations but the quality of them too, you can build stronger connections and foster healthier relationships with those around you.

Head Start stories

Pat has been working collections for years, and in that time, they've seen many crews come and go.

When they started, they felt as if they were made of elastic, full of energy and enthusiasm. Now, they feel like they're made of stone, full of aches, pains and paracetamol.

They don't buy any of this 'mental health stuff' and just put feeling low down to the fact that it's still winter. The cold weather and dark mornings have this effect every year.

Lately, they've been struggling to get enough sleep and have been using alcohol most nights to switch off. This has led to them turning up late a few times and not looking as clean and tidy as they used to. Pat used to feel like a role model on the team, someone that others, especially the younger folk, looked up to. Recently though, they can't shake the feeling that they're just getting too old and can't keep up.

They wonder how long they have left in them.



How might getting a Head Start on their mental health benefit Pat? Think about the future and what might happen...



What things can they do to improve their physical health so that they might start to feel happier and healthier?



What are the warning signs of withdrawal in Pat's story? What can you do to help give them a Head Start and feel included?

1. Having a Head Start prepares you for...

- a. Everything and anything that gets thrown at you
- b. Life's inevitable ups and downs
- c. Dealing with the people that annoy you

2. Someone who is resilient can...

- a. Control their emotions better than others
- b. Block out the bad stuff
- c. Respond to challenges in a positive way

3. How can you empower yourself to rise above waves of low mood?

- a. By holding on tight until the feeling passes
- b. By going with the flow and seeing where you wash up
- c. By being ready for the feeling and working through it

4. The best way to be proactive about your mental health is to...

- a. Do everything you can, every day, no matter what
- b. Do what you can, whenever you can, but push yourself to become better
- c. Do what you want to do, when you feel like doing it

Guidance for managers

Good managers don't try to be therapists. But they do show compassion, empathy and humanity to their people.

Having a supervisor who is consistent and approachable can significantly help someone who is experiencing waves of low mood. There's no 'one size fits all' approach, so make some time to chat 1-2-1 and find out from the individual

how you can support them best, whether that be reviewing workload, or making reasonable adjustments to their shift pattern.

Opening up will be harder for some than others, so letting people know that your door is always open is a good way to reassure them that you're ready to listen whenever they're ready to talk.

Remember...

Supporting people with their mental health can take its toll on you too. While helping others, make sure to maintain your own Head Start by completing your REPS and talking to your own manager if you need to.

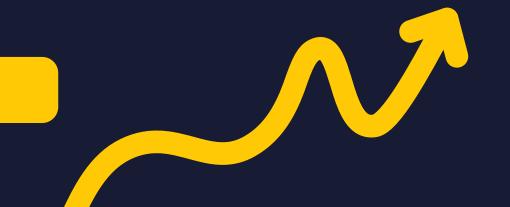
Look after yourself: One of the most powerful ways you can help your people to get a Head Start is to lead by example. If you're talking about doing your REPs and prioritising time to take breaks, your team are more likely to follow your lead.

Help them to make a plan: Often, people experiencing low mood find it hard to set goals and stick to them. So this is something practical you can help them with. Spending time together to set clear and achievable objectives can help redefine their sense of direction and purpose at work.

Be a visible leader: If you're not working alongside your team physically, make a point of getting together with them (even virtually) as much as you can. This will help strengthen relationships and make it easier for you to spot changes in someone's mood.

Listen carefully: Active listening means giving the speaker your undivided attention. Remember that up to 70% of communication is non-verbal - you'll get much more from a conversation if you're fully invested in it.

1/3 of managers feel out of their depth supporting people with mental health concerns



Websites

Mental Health at Work mentalhealthatwork.org.uk

Mind mind.org.uk

Heads Together headstogether.org.uk

Every Mind Matters nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/

Videos

I had a black dog – his name was depression: building resilience

Time to change

Talking about mental health

Useful articles

10 signs that you're stressed

How to build your resilience to emotional stress

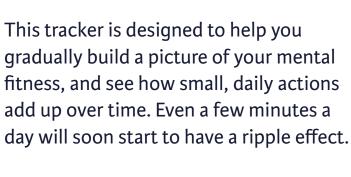
How to manage emotional eating

World mental health day



Head Start tracker

So, it's time to put it all into practice!



Used consistently, it will identify trends you've maybe not noticed before, help you keep perspective through the tougher days, and act as a point of reference for you to look back on as you build your mental fitness bit by bit.

Quite simply...

the more you put in, the more you'll get out of it.



How to use...

In the blue section, input the number of **REPs** you complete each day (1 **REP** = 1 point and so on). 10 is the maximum daily score you can reach – 9 points for a full house of **REPs**, plus a **bonus point** thrown in for sheer commitment!

There's space for jotting down a short reflection each week, perhaps if a particular REP stuck out or something significant happened that you want to capture.



Make sure to consider how completing your daily REPs makes you feel.

The yellow section is where to note how resilient, empowered and proactive you've been each week, giving yourself a score out of 10. If after a few weeks your personal score is consistently low, despite doing all your **REPs**, this may be the time to talk to someone.



How it all adds up...

At the end of each month, your total **REPs** and personal scores will automatically be added together. This is your Head Start score - the number to either beat or maintain for the following month!



If you notice a lot of ups and downs - don't panic. This is totally normal and doesn't mean that you're not progressing. When it comes to mental fitness, some weeks will be easier, and others will feel like marathons.

Your scores are entirely personal to you but could prove a great talking point if you felt like sharing your experience with a colleague or friend.

Remember to keep saving your progress as you go. At the end of the calendar year, save a local copy before you hit the 'Restart' button.

Head Start tracker

This tool is designed to help you keep a note of how many **REPs** you're getting in, and how you're feeling about them, so that each month you can build on what you've done before.

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Really didn't fancy it but went to Sheila's wedding anyway, ended up a great night that set me up for the week. **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Had a good chat with the new apprentice the other day, managed to help him with something too. Really **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

Head Start tracker

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DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Started making a to-do list for the following day before I leave work each night. It's definitely made it easier to switch off from work on my commute home. **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

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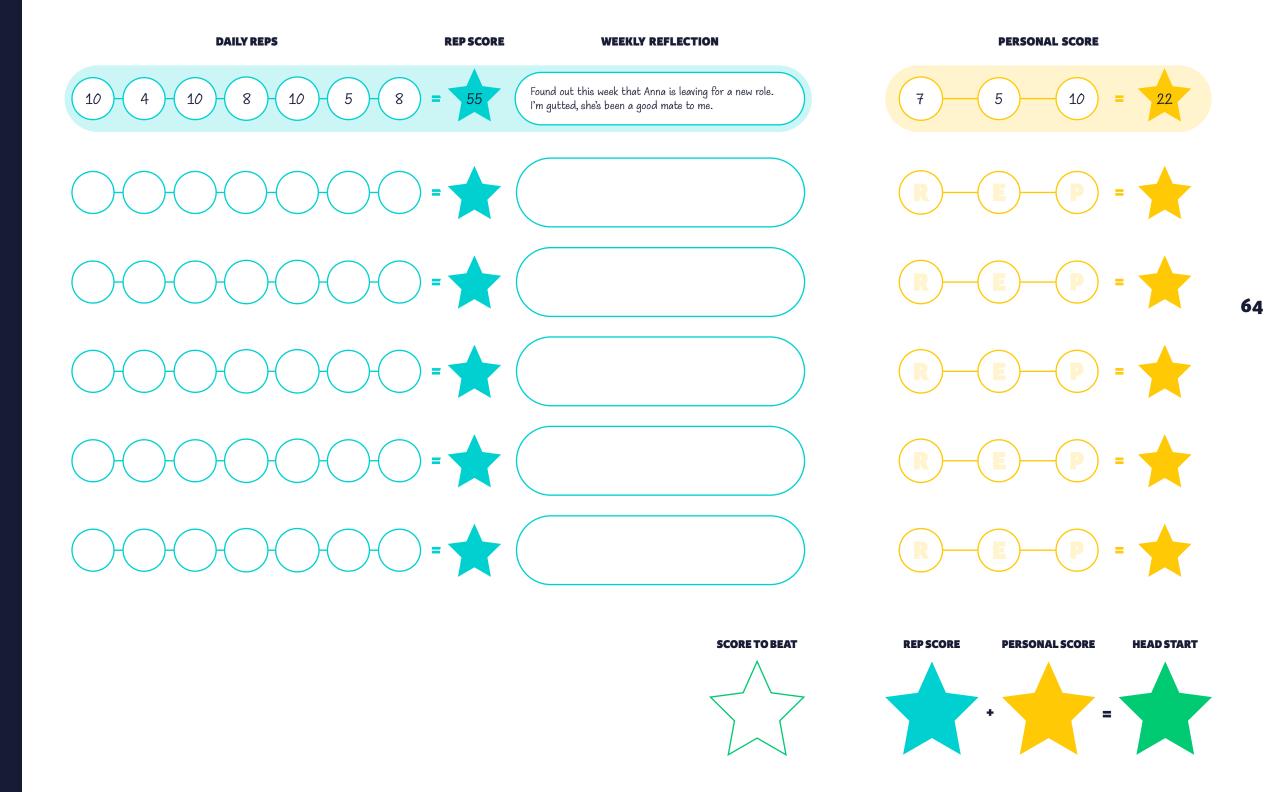
DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE I've become aware of how often I eat lunch at my desk, not giving myself a proper break from the computer. **SCORE TO BEAT REP SCORE** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START**

Head Start tracker

This tool is designed to help you keep a note of how many **REPs** you're getting in, and how you're feeling about them, so that each month you can build on what you've done before.

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DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE The roadworks have made me late twice this week, I've noticed the knock-on effect it's had on my stress levels for the rest of the day. **SCORE TO BEAT REP SCORE** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START**

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE The office has been so noisy lately, so I booked a meeting room a couple of times this week to get my **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Been doing some simple stretches throughout the day - surprised me how easy they've been to fit in. Nothing fancy, but my back's feeling better for it. **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

Head Start tracker

This tool is designed to help you keep a note of how many **REPs** you're getting in, and how you're feeling about them, so that each month you can build on what you've done before.

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If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Managed to leave early enough to see my daughter's match, it was great to be able to be there for her. **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Work's been super busy, with loads piling up, but thinking about what I can actually control has helped me feel less overwhelmed. **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

Head Start tracker

This tool is designed to help you keep a note of how many **REPs** you're getting in, and how you're feeling about them, so that each month you can build on what you've done before.

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE Finally got back to tennis this week after my op recovery. Forgot how good it was for switching off after a long **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

Head Start tracker

This tool is designed to help you keep a note of how many **REPs** you're getting in, and how you're feeling about them, so that each month you can build on what you've done before.

It's important to note that this is not homework, or another chore to add to your list. It's a proactive guide to building your everyday mental fitness.

If you miss filling out a few days, a week or so here or there, or even a couple of months, that's okay. You can always open it back up and get started again.

DAILY REPS REP SCORE WEEKLY REFLECTION PERSONAL SCORE My sleep's been dreadful lately, and I didn't even notice how late I was staying up watching TV. **SCORE TO BEAT** PERSONAL SCORE **HEAD START REP SCORE**

Head Start

Everyday Mental Fitness

