What signs suggest I should be concerned about my mental health?

When it comes to mental health, there is no standard to measure what "normal" looks like but poor mental health can negatively affect your:

- Relationships with family and others
- Interest in activities, social settings, and other situations
- Energy levels
- Ability to engage in the asylum process

Research suggests that exposure to traumatic events frequently experienced by Migrants, Refugees and Asylum seekers contribute to poor mental health. These events also include stress after migrating to a new country.

If you don't feel like yourself for an extended period of time (3 weeks or more), this may be a sign that you should focus on your mental health.

The following signs are typically good indicators of a possible mental health concern:

1. **Changes in yourself?**
    - **Low energy.** Feelings of fatigue, where it's hard to find motivation to do regular activities, including getting out of bed, are commonly associated with people struggling with their mental health.

    - **Frequent changes in mood, emotional outbursts, or irritability.** Experiencing intense moods (e.g. irritation, anger, feeling frustrated or tearful) that swing from one extreme to the other could be a sign that you're finding it hard to regulate your thoughts and feelings and a broader mental health concern.

    - **Feeling worthless or guilty.** Depressive thoughts where you are constantly criticising or blaming yourself, such as "I'm worthless" or "It's my fault", are possible signs of poor mental health, such as depression.

2. **Changes in functioning?**
    - **Disrupted sleep.** Lasting changes to sleep patterns, including poor sleep, trouble falling or staying asleep as well as frequent oversleeping, can be signs of poor mental health.

- **Changes in appetite or weight.** If you notice dramatic changes in your weight or appetite over a short period of time it could be a warning sign of a mental health concern.

- **Worsening physical symptoms.** Mental health disorders can bring on physical side effects, which include rapid heart rates, dizziness, gastrointestinal symptoms, sweating and headaches. Usually if physical symptoms come on with no other medical cause, this could be a sign of a mental health concern.

- **Substance abuse.** Using substances such as alcohol and drugs to cope can be a sign of a mental health issue. Overusing and becoming dependent on substances can also contribute to poor mental health.

3. **Changes in relationships with others and how you relate to the world?**

   - **Interacting unusually.** If those closest to you comment on your behaviour, describing it as uncharacteristic or unusual over an extended period of time and you don't feel a noticeable change, this can be a sign of a mental health concern.

   - **Feeling withdrawn.** Withdrawing from regular activities that you enjoy and isolating yourself from others can indicate a mental health issue.

   - **Loss of joy.** It's normal to have bad days and experience disappointment and sadness in life especially after traumatic events such as being forced to leave your home. However, if these negative feelings dominate your day-to-day life, especially when you do activities that you love, this could be a sign that your mental health is suffering and out of balance.

   - **Taking unnecessary risks.** You may notice yourself deliberately taking more risks e.g. crossing a road when it's unsafe to do so. This type of behaviour may mean you want to hurt or kill yourself and a good indicator that you need to get urgent help.

What can I do to improve and take care of my mental health?

There is plenty of evidence that you can start to feel a little better if you make small changes to your daily activities. Activities help to distract us from other worries, bad memories, and negative thoughts, as well as increase energy levels with activities like exercise, increasing the release of "feel good" chemicals in our brain.
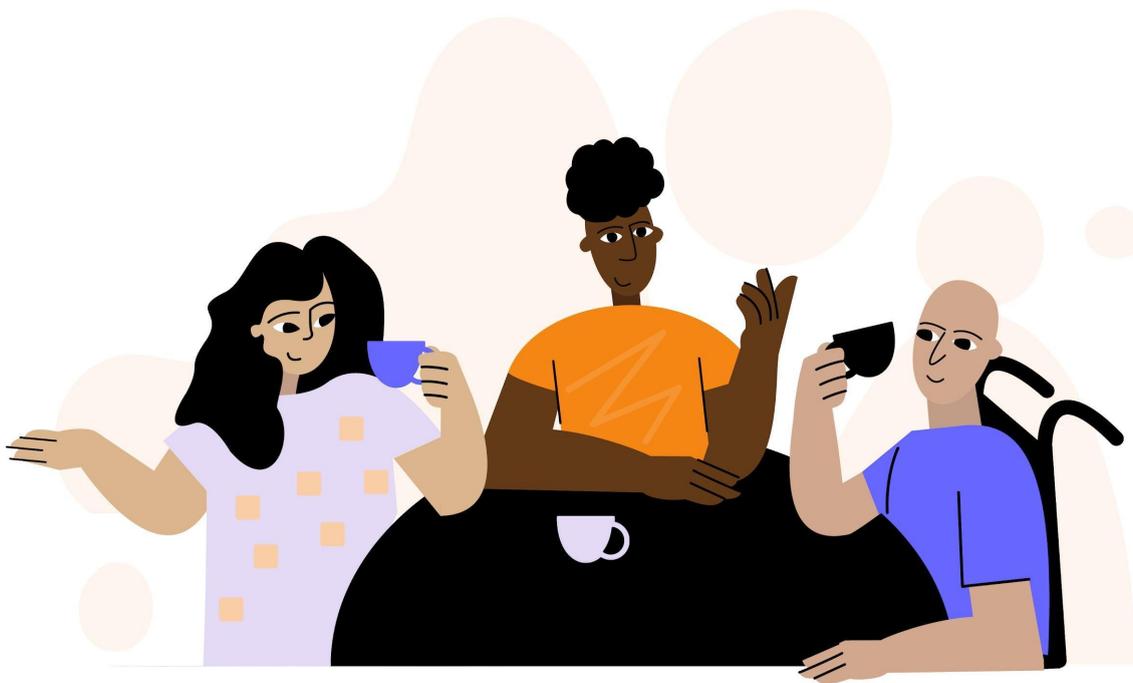
Some of the best steps to improve and take care of your mental health well-being are:

- **Connect and speak with other people.** If you're worried about your mental health, talk to someone you trust and consider expanding

your social circle. Positive, trusted relationships are important for mental wellbeing and can help provide emotional support, build a sense of belonging and self-worth. If you're unsure of who to approach, talk to your GP or one of the [mental health charities](#), they will be able to listen and direct you to services that can help.

- **Be physically active.** Being active is not only a great way to improve and maintain your physical health and fitness but also has lots of benefits for your mental health which include, raising your self-esteem, helping you set and achieve goals and increasing the chemicals in your brain to positively change your mood. There are free resources for getting active [here](#)

- **Prioritise sleep.** Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep per night, with no screen time 30 minutes before going to bed. If you've had poor sleep for some time, be aware that it may take a little while to shift. It's important to be patient and not expect immediate results.

- **Eat balanced meals and hydrate often.** Eating balanced meals that consist of nutritious whole foods and regularly drinking water are healthy habits which support positive mental health. If you're struggling to access food, please reach out to your [local foodbank](#)for support and for recipe ideas of balanced meals on a budget it can be found on the internet, for example, [cooking on a bootstrap](#).

- **Pay attention to the present moment.** Focus on your surroundings using your senses (smell, vision, hearing, touch, and taste), to connect to the present moment and break negative associations with thoughts, flashbacks, or nightmares. for more information on reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience, click here.

- **Use your values to reconnect with activities you enjoy**. Identify and engage in activities that align with your core values. Reflect on activities that make you feel positive and help motivate you to stay active. There are lots of resources which provide mindfulness exercises to support with this as well as guided audios and videos

- **Learn new skills and/or give to others.** Learning new skills and volunteering have powerful benefits for our mental health and can support with boosting self-confidence, building a sense of purpose, and connecting with others. When learning new skills, it's important to set small, manageable goals to build a sense of achievement. Don't attempt too much too soon to avoid it becoming overwhelming. Some examples include learning English, attending computer classes at a local library, or volunteering at a local park or charity shop.

- **Avoid excessive use of drugs and alcohol**
  Taking care of our mental health requires us to train our brain to develop healthy habits (outlined above) over time. It is important to

maintain these habits in our day-to-day lives so they become part of our routine and help us manage our mental health, in just the same way that continued exercise helps us maintain our physical health. If this is an issue, please visit [the guide and support resources for addiction and dependency](#).

For more guidance on how to support and take care of your mental health, please refer to the [NHS website](#) or [Mind](#).