

The '5 Ways To Wellbeing' is a health literacy improvement campaign that targets everyone in our community. 5 Ways To Wellbeing explains 5 types of behaviours or everyday things people can do (and ideally should do) to help ourselves to stay emotionally, socially, spiritually and psychologically healthy.

Evidence for 5 Ways To Wellbeing, draws on some of the best available international research about mental capital and mental wellbeing through life for the UK government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing, published in 2008 by the New Economics Foundation. It synthesised research from 400 international scientists and explored the challenges for improving mental wellbeing of the whole population.

In 2012 North West Area Mental Health Service, a part of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, together with local organisations reviewed this evidence in the Australian context and local supporting research evidence.

A taste of the evidence

The evidence shows:

- happier people can add 7.5 years to their life, and
- that each of the 5 Ways has been shown to improve personal sense of wellbeing across the life span & regardless of starting point in mental health.
- The higher the level of wellbeing the more likely a person is to be in work or full-time education.

Connect

- Friendship is one of the highest positive correlations with self-rated happiness.ⁱ
- People with stronger social relationships have a 50% increased likelihood of survival from conditions such as coronary vascular disease and cancer.ⁱⁱ
- The magnitude of having good social relationships is comparable with quitting smoking, and it exceeds many well-known risk factors for mortality (e.g. obesity, physical inactivity).ⁱⁱⁱ
- The most significant difference between those with mental ill health and those without is social participation.^{iv}

Keep Learning

- Adult learning has been correlated with positive effects on well-being, reports of life satisfaction, optimism and efficacy.^v
- The opportunity to engage in work or educational activities helps lift older people out of depression.^{vi}
- There's a synergy between wellbeing and keeping an active brain. Older people who report higher levels of wellbeing also have better cognitive function.^{vii}

Be Active

- Regular physical activity results in a greater sense of wellbeing, stress reduction and lower rates of anxiety. It also protects against depression.^{viii}
- Mental wellbeing in later life can be altered by exercise and physical activity, even amongst frail elders.^{ix}
- In older people, long term regular physical activity is associated with significantly better cognitive function and less cognitive decline.^x
- Even low-impact physical activity such as stretching, toning and yoga increases psychological wellbeing.^{xi}

Be Aware

- Being in a state of mindfulness predicts positive mental wellbeing. ^{xii}
- Being trained (for 8-12 weeks) to be aware of sensations, thoughts and feelings has been shown to enhance well-being for several years. ^{xiii}
- Mindfulness training is a promising intervention for treating anxiety and mood problems. For example, a study of cancer sufferers found that mindfulness resulted in a 65% improvement on mood and 35% reduction in stress symptoms. ^{xiv}

Help Others

- Supporting others is shown to be associated with reduced mortality rates. ^{xv}
- Committing an act of kindness once a week for 6 weeks is associated with an increase in well-being, compared to control groups. ^{xvi}
- Volunteering is associated with positive wellbeing and more meaning in life, and in older people it acts as a preventative agent against cognitive decline. ^{xvii}

ⁱ Cited: Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855

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ⁱⁱⁱ Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T., Layton, B. (2010) Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review, *PLoS medicine*, Volume 7, Issue 7

^{iv} Source: National surveys of psychiatric morbidity in adults aged 16-64, Cited Foresight Challenge report 2008

^v Feinstein L, Vorhaus J, Sabates R (2008) Learning through life challenge report (London: Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008) p20, and Feinstein L and Hammond C (2004) 'The contribution of adult learning to health and social capital' *Oxford Review of Education* 30: 199-221

^{vi} Kirkwood T, Bond J, May C, McKeith I, The M (2008) Mental capital through life Challenge Report (London Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008

^{vii} (Foresight Final Project Report 2008 pg 62)

^{viii} Sources: (a) Biddle JH, Ekkekakis P (2005) 'Physically active lifestyles and wellbeing', cited in Biddle S, Mutrie N, (2010) *Psychology of Physical Activity: Determinants, Well-being, and Interventions*, London" Routledge

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^{xiii} Huppert F (2008) Psychological well-being: evidence regarding its causes and its consequences (London: Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project 2008)

^{xiv} Ibid

^{xv} Huppert F (2008) Psychological well-being: evidence regarding its causes and its consequences (London: Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project 2008)

^{xvi} Lyubomirsky S, Sheldon KM, Schkade D (2005) 'Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change' *Review of General Psychology* 9: 111-131

^{xvii} Fisher B (2011) Community Development in Health: A Literature Review www.healthempowermentgroupd.org.uk and Greenfield EA, Marks NF (2004) 'Formal volunteering as a protective factor for older adults's psychological well-being', *Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 59B: 258-264