

First aid for your mind



Be prepared for times of worry by creating your own tool kit to help with stress and sensory overload

Whether it's a slathering on aloe vera for burn or carrying some plasters for breaking in those new sandals, most adults know some basic physical first aid – but what about mini mental health emergencies? Now, more than ever, we are feeling the stresses of everyday life and sometimes these anxieties pop up at unexpected moments. Pack some essentials into your very own mental health first-aid kit, so that you're always prepped and ready to soothe frazzled nerves and ease feelings of panic.

Mini mantras

Source a couple of quotes that mean something special to you and refer back to them when you're feeling anxious. Alternatively, ask someone you love to write a few positive sentences about you and keep them stored somewhere – the back of a notebook or as a note on your phone – or record them as voice notes. Repeat these affirmations 15 times a day or until the message starts to sink in.

Write it down

Something as simple as a pen and paper can help focus your mind and provide an outlet for overwhelming thoughts. Make a list of the tasks that are stressing you out or jot down how you're feeling. 'A journal is a safe place for you to be as honest as you need to be without worrying what the effect on others might be,' explains Zoë Aston, therapist, mental health consultant and author of *Your Mental Health Workout*. 'Commit to a practice of writing without judgment and be mindful of what effect it has on your understanding of yourself.'

Nourish your mind

Where your body leads, your mind will follow – eat well and keep up a regular exercise routine. Add a piece of fruit or a tasty cereal bar to your kit, along with Bach Rescue Soothing Pastilles, £5.99. These can help relieve stress and give you a lift, even when you're out and about.

Keep it cool

Focus on one sense to quell panicky flutters. Run a bath, then pick a scent from the Superdrug Habitual Pure Essential Oil range, add four to six drops to 20ml of carrier oil, then swirl into the water. Or if you feel hot and bothered, place a Kool 'N' Soothe Gel Sheet, £3.49, on your forehead: it can help ease stress headaches too.

Escape to your happy place

Spend some time curating a playlist of mood-boosting songs – it can be as uncool as you like (hello Disney medley). Downloading and saving a few episodes of your go-to comfort TV show or favourite childhood movie can also offer a chance to escape and calm. 'Connecting with a film that brought you joy in the past helps us to reconnect with our inner child and their needs,' explains psychotherapist Tasha Bailey (@realtalk.therapist). 'It brings us comfort and a sense of predictability when we're feeling vulnerable and anxious.'

Feel good

A friendly touch or a hug from a loved one releases oxytocin in our brains, which increases feel-good sensations while decreasing fear and anxiety responses. Give yourself a boost by rubbing on some hand cream and then move your thumbs round your palms in slow circles, easing tension out of each knuckle. Try Sunday Rain Day Bliss Hand Cream, £4. Once you've finished, cup your hands over your nose and inhale the invigorating, fruity scent for even more mood-boosting benefits.

Talk it out

Ultimately, the most important thing to have in your kit is the number of someone you can talk to about how you are feeling. 'We all have our anxieties, fears and stressors as restrictions are easing – re-socialising, re-connecting, going back to the office etc,' explains Zoë. 'Whether it's an exacerbated fear of loneliness, a feeling of overwhelm or anxieties about health and social events, everyone has something going on. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you're the only one. Connect with yourself and at least one other person each day to help you figure out what you want and need.'