

Self**Care**Guide

Tips on how to improve wellbeing - written
by and for people who love video games

Take Control Of Your Mental Health





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What Is Wellbeing?

The official meaning by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is a bit of a mouthful!

According to WHO, mental wellbeing is *“the state in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”*

People tend to think about this in different ways. Here at CheckPoint, we believe that your wellbeing is something very personal to you, and is made up of lots of different factors. This might include your relationships with other people, how you feel about your job or school, and your general level of happiness and satisfaction with your life. We like to think that everybody has a wellbeing “toolbox” - their own unique collection of ways they deal with life, with the goal of having the best mental wellbeing.

Your toolbox might not be the same as someone else's, even if they are super close to you. It's made up of things that only you have. What kind of personality do you have? What are your existing strengths and weaknesses? How do you think about challenges? What stresses you out? Do you prefer to spend time alone or with other people? How do you like to relax? Where do you want to be in the future, and what are you doing to get there?

With the right tools, everyone can flourish. But some tools are more useful than others! Most people use “faulty” tools as well as good ones - like having a smoke or an alcoholic drink after a rough day. They can make things feel better in the short term, but can be unhealthy over time. Other tools are always useful, such as using mindfulness meditation to improve self awareness. And some tools vary depending on how you use them - like concentrating on work - this is a great healthy way of distracting from stress, but if it is used too much it can also be bad for you.

What's in your wellbeing toolbox?

What Can You Do With This Guide?

You Can...

- ▶ Top up your wellbeing toolbox
- ▶ Learn new ways to relax and manage stress
- ▶ Level up your resilience
- ▶ Hack your thinking patterns
- ▶ Find some great video games for mental wellness

This Guide is Not For...

- ▶ Treating mental health issues that need to be seen by a professional, like clinical anxiety, depression, etc
- ▶ Diagnosing medical and mental health problems
- ▶ Advising whether you should see a healthcare professional

If you have any concerns about your mental health, please see your GP.



How to Relax

Dedicating time to relaxation is a really important part of self care. It can reduce stress, help feelings of sadness, frustration and worry, improve fatigue, and much more. Try not to feel guilty for taking the time to relax (you can learn more about how to do this in section 4). The most common reasons people don't prioritise relaxation is they feel they are too busy, believe that they are "wasting time" or even thinking that they are being selfish. It's important to remember that you won't have the resources to be productive or helpful to others if you are too burned out or wound up yourself!

Ways to Relax

What do you find relaxing? You might not even know yet! Create a list of relaxation techniques to try out. Here's some suggestions:

- ▶ Going for a walk
- ▶ Having a bath
- ▶ Meditating
- ▶ Reading
- ▶ Watching a movie
- ▶ Playing a video game
- ▶ Chatting with friends
- ▶ Spending time with your pet (if you have one!)

Make it a Routine

If you find it hard to make the time to relax, or you often forget, you could try to look at it as an appointment you are making with yourself. This is something like going to see the dentist, or paying a bill (except a lot more enjoyable!) - things that just have to be done to oil the machine that is you.

There are lots of apps and reminders you can get for this. Or you could connect it with a daily task, like brushing your teeth. Leave a token by your toothbrush to remind you, it's time to relax. 2 minutes brushing your teeth and 3 minutes relaxing isn't going to add much to your busy day, but can make a huge difference in the long run.

Understand Your Stress

Some days you may get more from relaxation than others. Like if you have had a lot of stress, you might spend an hour relaxing, instead of your normal 10 minutes. And stress is super individual - what one person see as a walk in the park, another might find unbearable.

You probably already know what stresses you out. If not, it is easy to keep a diary at the end of every day describing what happened and whether you felt stressed after. Then you can think about how you feel stress. Is it a mental fuzziness, or a feeling of tightness in your tummy? Do your thoughts start to race, or your muscles become tense? Or all of the above? Identifying early warning signs that you are becoming stressed out is super handy - you can try to move away from the stressful situation, and use your relaxation skills to get back to baseline before it gets worse.

Common internal causes of stress:

- ▶ Chronic worry
- ▶ Pessimism
- ▶ Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility
- ▶ Negative self-talk
- ▶ Unrealistic expectations
- ▶ Perfectionism
- ▶ All-or-nothing attitude

When You Need to Calm Down Fast

Sometimes you'll become overwhelmed, or feel very heightened level of stress. Some people get feelings of panic and anxiety in certain situations. At the time, it can feel like there is absolutely nothing that will make that feeling of distress go away. It can even feel tempting to indulge in it, to allow yourself to feel over emotional and not fight it, but this can actually be damaging for you and those around you. Here's some ways you can reset the balance. They may take some practise or may need to be done multiple times to feel effective but eventually you'll get there!



» Controlled Breathing

Count to 4 on the way in, and 7 on the way out.

Try **ReachOut Breathe** or **Flowy** - these are apps that can help you get your breathing back to a normal rate in times of distress, tension or panic. Alternatively, why not do a guided breathing exercise from YouTube?

» Mindfulness Meditation

We recommend **HeadSpace**, **Smiling Mind**, and **Stop, Breathe and Think**. Or, look up some on YouTube! There's heaps!



» 5-Things Game

Name five things you can see, hear, feel, and so on. This gives your brain something very specific to focus on and helps distract from the distressing feelings.

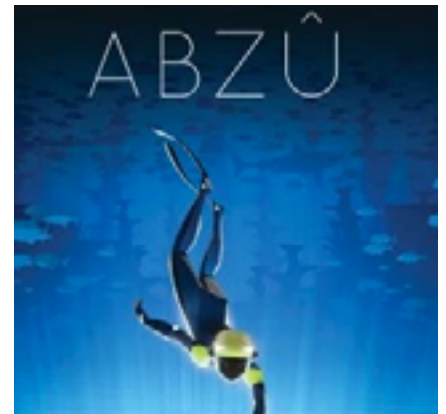
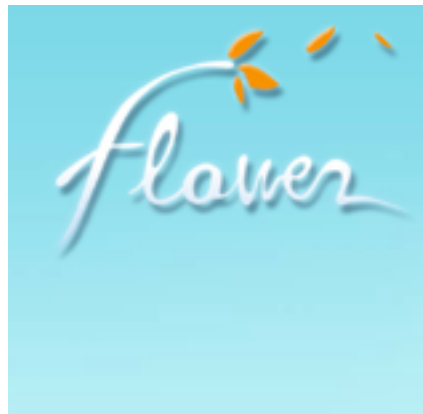
» Progressive Muscle Relaxation

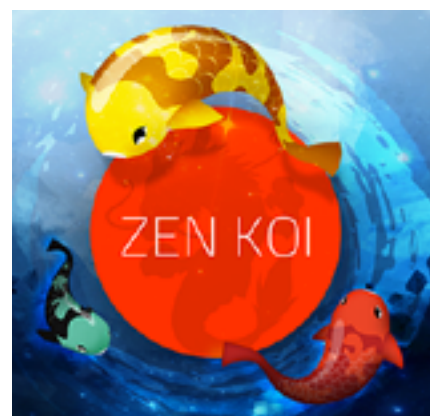
Focus on the muscles in your toes. Tense them tightly for 5 seconds, and then slowly relax them. Next, move to the muscles of the calf, and do the same thing. Carry on up the body until you've used every muscle. This can quickly relieve stress and tension in a physical and emotional way.



Games for Relaxation

Video games have the potential to be very relaxing indeed! Some are designed this way, and with others, it is a coincidental part of the experience. Here are some of our favourite games for relaxation:





Building Resilience

Resilience is your ability to deal with life when it isn't necessarily going your way. Some call it your inner strength. It can vary from day to day - on Monday you felt like you could take on the world, but by Wednesday you just want to crawl under the covers again! This is totally normal, and some people have more resilience than others at baseline.

We like to think of it like a jar filling up with water. If you have a very small jar, you will need to work hard to keep it from overflowing, by tipping out a bit of water very regularly. If your jar is huge and you can take a lot of stress before it starts making a mess on the kitchen table. Eventually, though, it will fill up, and so it's important for everybody to learn these skills.

How can you increase resilience?

Coping mechanisms are the ways we deal with negative emotions in order to deal with them and help them pass by.

Positive Reinterpretation

This is a posh way of saying, "Look at the situation in a different way". It's kind of like when someone gets bad news, and they say, "Well - every cloud has a silver lining". It means that even though the news was bad, there is always some good to find in it (much like the silver sunlight peeking out from behind a raincloud).

Next time you find yourself grumbling about something or upset that a situation didn't go your way - take a step back and instead of thinking about what went wrong, write down three things that are good about what has happened. It's a powerful way of changing your mood and helping you to be a more optimistic person.

Support

Human are very social as a species. We have thrived because of our ability to

work together, to form families and to look after each other in times of danger. It isn't any different for social or psychological difficulties. In fact, seeking the advice of a friend or loved one can improve your mood and also strengthen the relationship.

Humour

Humour is actually an evidence-based therapeutic technique! It's a healthy and mature way of reframing a situation to make it much easier to handle. This coping mechanism helps to change the way you think about your circumstances, and also makes you a more pleasant person to be around (within reason). That's not to say that everything has to be hilarious - but it certainly has a time and place. In fact, laughing releases happy chemicals that can aid in stress relief and recovery.



Physical Activity

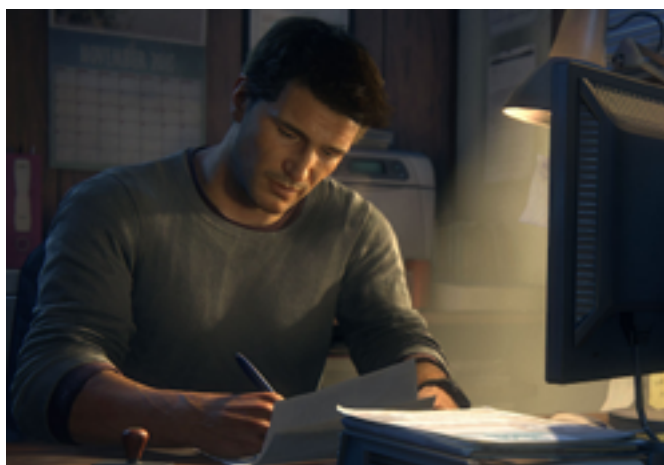
When you exercise, your body releases chemicals into your bloodstream that cause you to feel good. This can act as a way of relieving stress, as well as a way to stay healthy!

The word “exercise” puts a lot of people off, but it doesn’t have to be going to the gym. Why not play Pokemon GO at your local park? Download an app that teaches Yoga? Or even get up and show your friends who’s got the moves on Just Dance?

Thought Hacking

The weird thing about thoughts is that they can lie to you. It sounds bizarre: they’re your thoughts, so you should be able to trust them. But that isn’t always the case. Sometimes your thoughts can tell you you are overweight when you aren’t, or that you’re not as clever as you are. Sometimes your thoughts can turn you against other people, or can respond defensively. The good news is, once you learn about the different types of thought, you can hack them.

We’ve published a free guide all about this - it’s called the 3 Step Thinking Hack Pack and it’s available right now.



Gratitude Journal

Take the time at the end of every day to jot down three positive things. They could be what you were grateful for, your personal achievements, nice things people said, funny events or even that you saw a cute doggo on your facebook feed. This is another quick and easy way to feel more optimistic, and mold your outlook so it is positive. You don’t even need to go and buy a journal - there are plenty of apps that will send you push notifications to remind you.

Be Your Own Cheerleader

Give me a Y! Give me an O! Give me a U! What does it spell...?!

Okay, feel free to insert your own name here as appropriate. Again, this one might sound pretty out there to the uninitiated, but being your own cheerleader is a powerful skill. Cheerleaders support their team without fail, even when the team is losing. You can start by trying to go easy on yourself, and don't punish yourself for minor things. Your internal cheerleader offers complete and utter support. Say little phrases to yourself, "You got this!" or "Let's go and have fun with this!"

Self-Acceptance

Sometimes it's okay to be good enough. You don't have to be perfect, or the best, or the fittest, or the most beautiful. Take some time to appreciate who you are and what you do have, instead of thinking about what could be different (particularly if it's something you have no power to change!)



Problem Solving

Finding healthy solutions to challenges that you face is a real skill. Depending on the issue you may need to vary how you approach the situation. When done successfully, and with practise, it makes things feel much easier whenever you come across something unfortunate or difficult. There are also some key considerations which should be part of the process - to ensure solving this problem doesn't create a different one, and making sure no one else is going to suffer as a result of your problem solving technique. **ReachOut Australia** have an awesome problem-solving checklist you can try if this is something that feels tough for you.

Games to Help You Cope

These are games that are regularly mentioned to us as being of benefit to people for a variety of reasons.



Mass Effect / Dragon Age

Bioware games consistently come up whenever we survey gamers. For some people, it's the rich narrative, and for others, it's the many facets of the characters they get to explore. Often the player gets to spend some time in another world and comes back to their own with a more healthy mind set, able to take on the challenges of life.



Minecraft

We particularly recommend creative mode, and to play with friends. Minecraft has a simple interface that rewards the player's hard work with tangible results. Let loose your creativity, or play for the story. Perhaps you want to recreate a real world structure. Anything is possible here, and the level of freedom can be very empowering for many people.



Dark Souls/Demon's Souls

An odd one to consider good for wellbeing, but every time we ask this is what you say you like! The most common reasons are the incredibly rewarding moments after a tough battle, and the unspoken relationship between the game and the player. The game wants you to win, and gives you the tools to do that. This can teach you emotional regulation along the way.



Stardew Valley

Take simple tasks and repeat them day after day to reap (literally) the rewards. Explore relationships with others and even start a family. Care for your pets and farm animals. Or challenge your strength in battle. Stardew Valley is a wonderful experience for anybody.

League of Legends

The most common reason people enjoy League of Legends is the sense of community that it fosters. Many players have met close friends using MOBAs, MMORPGs and new online FPS's like Overwatch.

A Guide to Coping Mechanisms as Described by Game Characters

Want to learn more about different coping mechanisms?

We've published a great article which explores all sorts of different strategies - some good, and some bad - based on Freud's original psychological defences. To make it more relatable our team of psychology experts applied each one to a game character so you can see it in action. Take a look and see how your favourite hero thinks!

What Next?

This guide is a quick introduction to self-care, but of course is not comprehensive. There is always more to learn and ways to improve.

CheckPoint Resources

▶ **GamerMates**

Find likeminded people to play games with, chat, and be part of a supportive community.

checkpoint.org.au/gamermates

▶ **The CheckPoint Series**

Tackling mental health issues using the power of video games. Features information, advice and interviews with games industry pros.

checkpointseries.com

▶ **Publications**

Like this one! Also check out our 3-Step Thinking Hack Pack and more.

checkpoint.org.au/downloads

▶ **About Mental Health**

Heaps of general information about a wide variety of mental health issues written by actual doctors.

checkpoint.org.au/mentalhealth

▶ **Mental Health Workshops**

e-Learning, videos, and all sorts of online resources to improve your mental health.

checkpoint.org.au/workshops

Why not check out some of the awesome resources below by our mental health allies?

ReachOut

▶ **NextStep**

A quick and simple algorithm to advise your options if you don't know where to turn next or how to get help.

<https://au.reachout.com/mental-fitness#nextstep>

▶ **Toolbox**

A collection of apps for wellbeing and mental health.

<https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps>

▶ **Problem Solver**

A step by step guide on how to approach and resolve every day challenges.

<https://au.reachout.com/articles/a-step-by-step-guide-to-problem-solving>

MindHealthConnect

▶ **Guided Search Tool**

Not sure how you're feeling? The guided search tool works it out and sends you in the right direction.

<https://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au/guided-search/feelings>

BeyondBlue

▶ **The Checkin**

Talk to a friend about their mental health.

<https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/thecheckin>

▶ **Relaxation Exercises**

What it says on the tin!

<https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/keeping-well/relaxation-exercises>



About The Author

Dr Jennifer Hazel is a fully qualified medical doctor who has practised in both the UK and Australia. She spent several years working in the Emergency Department before specialising in Psychiatry. Jennifer is a passionate advocate for the use of game technology in the therapeutic setting. To this end, she founded CheckPoint, a nonprofit organisation to connect mental health care with video game technology, where she contributes to clinical research and works with both games industry and clinical professionals to provide education, consultation and resources.

CheckPoint's Self Care Guide

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