

Good mental health helps us to more fully enjoy and appreciate the people and environment around us. We respond better to the stresses and challenges of daily life; we can be more creative, use our abilities to the fullest and make the most of opportunities when our mental health is strong.

To build and maintain your mental health there are three things you can do:

### Act

- Strive to keep yourself as active as possible, physically, socially and mentally — walk, swim, read...

### Belong

- Connect to your community — join a group, chat to a neighbour, meet a friend...

### Commit

- Look to the future and have a go — take a challenge, get involved, volunteer...

### Activity and exercise has many psychological benefits

- It can help reduce anxiety. People who exercise report feeling less stressed or nervous.
- Physical exercise helps to counteract the withdrawal, inactivity and feelings of hopelessness that are a feature of depression.
- Moods such as tension, fatigue and anger are all positively affected by exercise.
- Exercising can improve the way you perceive your physical condition, athletic abilities and body image.
- Exercise can bring you into contact with other people.

### Mental fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a mentally healthy state

- A realistic attitude gives us a sense of perspective and flexibility, and the resilience we need to endure shocks, hardship and change that are part of everyone's life.
- Self-esteem and confidence comes from focusing on the qualities we have that makes us a good friend, a valued colleague, a loving parent or family member.
- Emotional support with family and friends builds support networks through which we receive help and, in turn help others.
- Mental activities such as reading a book, solving crosswords or playing a musical instrument can improve our mental agility and promotes our overall wellness.

# Simple ways to practice your ABCs<sup>1</sup>

## Act

### Exercise

Regular physical activity improves psychological well-being and can reduce depression and anxiety.

### Enjoy hobbies

Taking up a hobby brings balance to your life by allowing you do something you enjoy and it also keeps your brain active.

### Treat yourself well

Cook yourself a good meal, have a bubble bath, see a movie, call a friend or relative you haven't called for ages, sit on a park bench and take in your surroundings.

## Belong

### Invite

Ask someone new to come along.

### Share a laugh

Life often gets too serious, so when you hear or see something that makes you smile or laugh share it with someone you know.

### Do one thing at a time

For example when you are out for a walk or spending time with friends, turn off your mobile phone and stop making that mental 'to do list'.

## Commit

### 'Collect' positive emotional moments

Recall times when you have experienced pleasure, comfort, tenderness, confidence, or other positive emotions.

### Learn ways to cope with negative thoughts

Don't block negative thoughts but learn how to interrupt them and not let them take over.

### Set personal goals

For example finish the book you started three years ago, walk around the block every day, learn to knit or play bridge, and call your friends instead of waiting for the phone to ring.

### Keep a journal (or even talk to the wall!)

Expressing yourself after a stressful day can help you gain perspective, release tension, and even boost your body's resistance to illness.

### Volunteer

Volunteering helps others, makes us feel good about ourselves, widens social networks, provides new learning experiences, and can bring balance to people's lives.

<sup>1</sup> *Act-Belong- Commit* is a community-based campaign. Mentally Healthy WA at Curtin University directs the campaign. For more information see <http://www.actbelongcommit.org.au/>

