



Mental Health
Foundation

How to look after your mental health in prison

A guide written for male prisoners

This leaflet is about ways to look after your mental health in prison.

Being in prison can be very difficult. Losing your freedom can be hard on your mental health. Mental health is about the way you think and feel and your ability to deal with life's ups and downs.

We all have times when we feel down. Most of the time these feelings pass, but sometimes they become more serious. Self-harm is a serious problem in prison. If you self-harm, you can get help from the mental health team.



Looking after your mental health in prison can help you cope better and feel better in yourself.

Some things that could be hard on your mental health are:

- **The death and the funeral of a loved one**

One of the most difficult times you can face in prison is someone on the outside dying



- **Drug use**

It's best to say no and keep saying no to drugs



For both of these issues, speak to the chaplain or a prison officer for help.

"Jail can be scary, the unfamiliar surroundings, the loud noises, a routine that revolves around time..."

Here are ten tips to help look after your mental health



Tip 1. Take care of yourself

When people feel sad, they may not look after themselves. Try to remember to shower regularly and wear clean clothes.



Food is also important to help you feel well:

- Eat three regular meals a day
- Drink plenty of water
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables
- Choose a healthy meal at least once a day
- Don't eat too much sugar



Tip 2. Talk about your problems

This can help you feel less alone. You can talk to Health Care, the Chaplain or Wing Staff.

You may also be able to speak to a prisoner who is a trained Listener.



Tip 3. Get active

Regular physical activity and exercise can help your physical and mental health. Going to the gym or even doing exercise in your cell would be helpful.



Tip 4. Keep learning

Try something new, for example, you could learn to cook or try your hand at drawing or painting.



Tip 5. Stay positive

It is important not to let negative thoughts take over. Although it can be hard, try to stay positive.



Tip 6. Think about how you can be less stressed

Some people try breathing exercises like mindfulness to help relax.



Tip 7. Begin to make plans

Making plans can help fill the time positively. Think about what you want to do and work towards it. To start, choose something easy. It could be something simple like joining a class.



Tip 8. Try to keep in touch with friends and loved ones outside

This can help you feel that people care about and remember you. Don't forget that people outside will be missing you.



Tip 9. Get on with the people around you

This can reduce stress and help you to feel less lonely. In prison, you could make some good friends.



Tip 10. Help others

This can make you and other people feel good, for example, taking part in peer mentoring.

If you want to see the full booklet, How to look after your mental health in prison, A guide written for male prisoners, speak to a Prison Officer for more information.