



Improving well-being

Gavin Murphy suggests five ways of improving well-being which can be helpful in a time of depression or burn-out.



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Pope's Intention (evangelisation): We pray that people who suffer from depression or burnout will find support and a light that opens them up to life.

"Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'en-circling gloom... And with the morn those angel faces smile." – Saint John Henry Newman

A deep listening process took place some years ago when researchers in the UK (The New Economics Foundation) tuned into the mental health needs of the general public. They came up with five healthy activities that can improve our well-being and which can also help us when we feel

low. While there will often be a need for professional help, the five activities can help in well-being and at a

time of depression or burnout.

1) Connect: Being with people is just so important for our mental health. Every day it is good for us to contact a family member, friend or someone who makes us feel better in their company. If we're feeling low, it will make a difference if we try to talk and express how we feel. Having the courage to say "I'm having a downer" can help us unload the burden and make us feel more connected.

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2) Be active: Physical exercise can open us up to a bigger world whether going for a walk, run or other activity. Since we can experience loneliness when we feel down, it may be helpful to exercise with another person. We may also need courage to get out and about, but we are likely to feel a bit better afterwards. The more exercise becomes part of our routine, the easier it will be to do it.

3) Be curious, be grateful: Asking questions about our experience of the world can make a difference to our mood. Let us look around and see what draws our attention. If we see a bird on an electricity wire, perhaps we can wonder why it is there. Or we can ask ourselves, "What is the most beautiful thing that I see right now?" Focusing our attention away from our mood can help expand our minds and hearts, and lead us to gratitude.

4) Learn: There is always something new to discover each day, enabling us to build on our gifts and talents. If we have a flair for languages, we can learn a few new words or sentences that would be helpful in preparing for a trip abroad. Or perhaps doing the Messenger crossword or exploring science will give us a sense of satisfaction. Perhaps we can try to relish the learning no matter how small.

5) Give (a little): Psychologists tell us that giving too much leaves us vulnerable to depression. We may forget during difficult times to give ourselves compassion. We may also need to be the receiver of gifts, be it a cup of tea from a loved one or phone call from a friend. At the same time, reaching out in a small act of kindness produces the hormone oxytocin which in turn creates an atmosphere of bonding. Giving a little can help a lot.

For those of us who need extra help from mental health professionals, we would do well to listen to retired psychiatrist Linda Gask who lives with clinical depression. When asked about the most effective treatment for her condition, she says it's not the medicine she has been taking for years, or her expertise and therapy. "It's love," she says, "my husband John and the power of our relationship help me more than antidepressants or therapy. It helps that I matter a great deal to him, and he does to me. It's love, care, talking to him" (Daily Mail).

Perhaps Linda's husband sometimes mirrors the silent presence of Jesus who is all ears and wants us to talk to him. Whether we feel very low or experience clinical depression, the kindly light of love can guide us through darkness and despair until we see those angel faces smile.❤️