

**Wellbeing  
+ Self-care  
+ Relaxation  
+ Happiness**

**It all adds up to**

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**Livability**

## **What's your Life Sum?**

Your guide to better  
wellbeing and self-care



# WHAT IS YOUR LIFE SUM?

**Thinking about yourself and the things that make your life add up is an important part of maintaining a healthy wellbeing.**

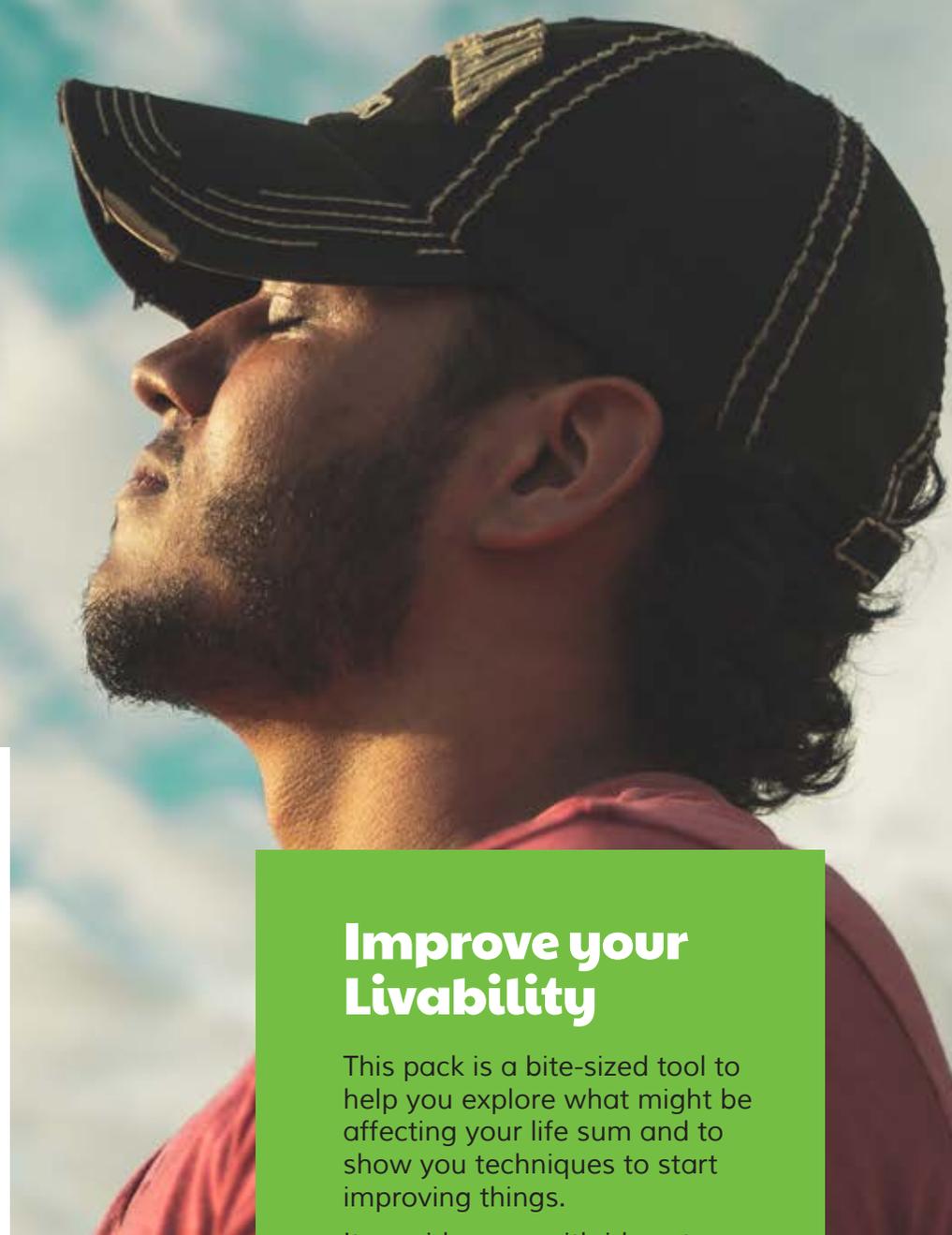
From friendships to fun, companionship to community, health to happiness – it all adds up to what we call your 'life sum'.

It's useful to take time and reflect on your life sum, to keep track of what is making you happy and what might need adjusting.

Life is made up of positives and negatives and it's perfectly natural for us to experience both. But if the negatives become too difficult to cope with your mental and physical wellbeing could suffer.

Are you experiencing a negative imbalance in your life?  
You might be feeling; **busy, stressed, tired, upset or unable to cope.**

If this sounds familiar, it could be time to take stock of what's adding up and what's not.



## Improve your Livability

This pack is a bite-sized tool to help you explore what might be affecting your life sum and to show you techniques to start improving things.

It provides you with ideas to build up the positive balance in your life through simple, practical steps.

**Let's add up your life.**

# WHAT IS WELLBEING?

**Your sense of wellbeing is based on how you feel about yourself and your life. You have physical and mental wellbeing, and it can be positive or negative.**

There are lots of things that can affect your wellbeing. It could be external factors – like your environment, your finances, your health, and your work<sup>1</sup> – or internal factors – like your confidence, your relationships, your emotions, and how you cope with everyday life.<sup>2</sup>

Some people are more vulnerable to a negative sense of wellbeing, for example if you have experienced trauma, are living with a physical illness, are in debt, unemployment, or isolation.

**But anyone can experience a negative change in their wellbeing, and sometimes it can seem like there is no reason for it, which may be frustrating.**

If your wellbeing isn't adding up, you might feel stressed, lonely, isolated or unable to cope. But remember, wellbeing can change from day to day, and there are steps you can take to improve things.

# WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care is about the actions you take for yourself to maintain and improve your health and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.



GET ENOUGH SLEEP



EAT HEALTHY FOODS



EXERCISE



TALK TO OTHERS



TAKE TIME TO DO YOUR  
FAVOURITE THINGS

Whether you have a diagnosed mental or physical condition, or you are just starting to feel like things are getting too much, practising self-care can help you to understand what you're going through and help keep life enjoyable.

Self-care techniques include things like getting enough sleep, eating a balanced healthy diet, exercising, talking to others and taking time to do your favourite things.<sup>4</sup>

**It's important to regularly keep up these activities to feel the benefits of self-care, for example keeping aside some time every day or every few days.**

The positive impact of self-care doesn't necessarily happen all at once. It's about small improvements that gradually add up to big changes in your wellbeing.

**Always busy  
+ Lack of sleep  
+ Wellbeing  
+ Time**  

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**Unlivable**

# **HELP!**

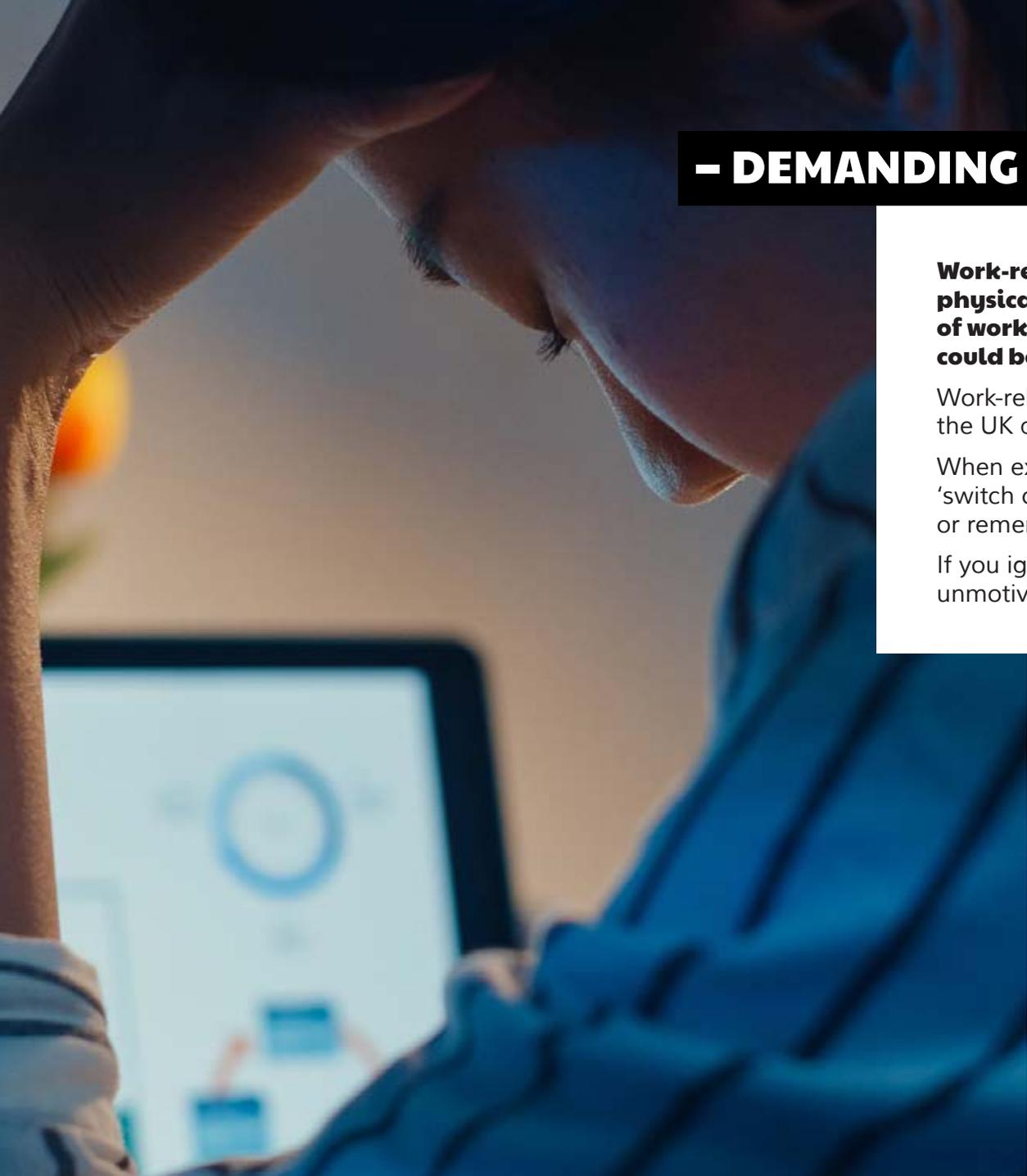
## **LIFE JUST GOT REALLY HECTIC**

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**Sometimes you may feel like life is getting on top of you. There are lots of reasons why you could be slipping into a negative pattern of thoughts and emotions.**

You might feel too busy, unable to sleep, isolated from others, unmotivated, or unable to look after yourself.

Here are some reasons why your life sum may not be adding up.



## – DEMANDING WORK AND STUDY

**Work-related stress can have a huge impact on your mental and physical health. Being busy is one thing, but when the demands of work or study mean that you're finding it difficult to cope, it could be time to make a change.**

Work-related stress is common. In fact, nearly half a million people in the UK are experiencing it to the point that it's making them ill.<sup>5</sup>

When experiencing work-related stress, you might feel unable to 'switch off'. You may have trouble concentrating, making decisions or remembering things.

If you ignore these symptoms, you might become anxious, unmotivated or depressed.

## – TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME

**Many of us spend a lot of time in front of screens. Whether at work, watching television, or using social media, the average screen time for adults in the UK is up to 9.5 hours per day.<sup>6</sup>**

If you spend too much time looking at screens, you may have lower levels of physical activity, which can affect your health. It's also proven that screen time before bed means that you will sleep for less time, with a much lower quality of sleep.<sup>7</sup>

This in turn can cause problems with your wellbeing and how you engage with the world. It can affect your mood, your ability to concentrate, and even the quality of your relationships.

## – NOT SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS



**If your lifestyle or environment means that you're unable to spend quality time with people around you, life can quickly feel empty of meaningful connections.**

Feeling socially isolated can happen to people from all walks of life. However, reports show that 18–34 year olds are more likely than any other group to feel lonely.<sup>8</sup> Many people believe this is down to social media use, expectations of 'how to be', and a pressure to 'do well'.

Social isolation and loneliness can have a significant impact on wellbeing. It is said that being lonely is as bad for the average person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>9</sup>



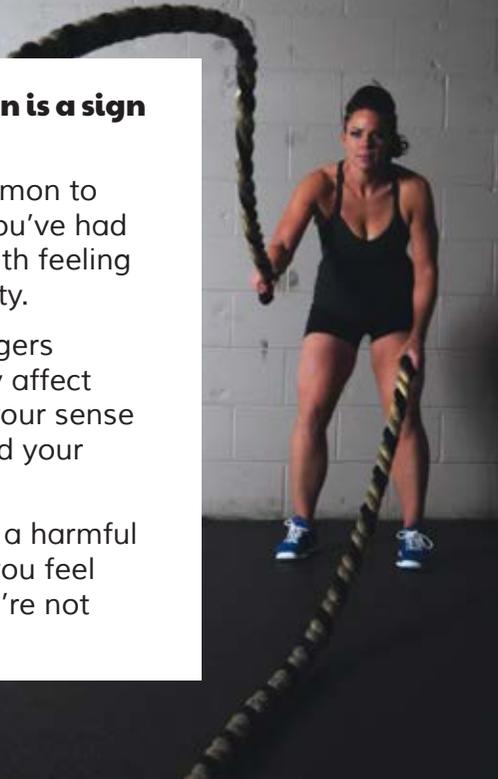
## – NO EXERCISE

**Feeling tired or lacking motivation is a sign that things aren't quite right.**

When your wellbeing is low, it's common to feel lethargic and groggy – even if you've had enough sleep. This is often paired with feeling unable to take part in physical activity.

It is known that physical activity triggers chemicals in the brain that positively affect your mood.<sup>10</sup> So by not exercising, your sense of low wellbeing could get worse and your overall fitness could suffer.

This means you may find yourself in a harmful cycle of doing no exercise because you feel low, then feeling worse because you're not being active.<sup>11</sup>



## – POOR DIET

**If you're busy or you're finding life difficult, it's common to reach for the nearest takeaway menu or chocolate bar. Studies have shown that people living with mental ill health generally eat fewer healthy foods and more unhealthy foods than others.<sup>12</sup>**

Eating lots of junk food or processed food has been found to have a negative impact on your wellbeing.

In the short-term, sugary foods are absorbed quickly into your bloodstream and you will experience an initial 'sugar rush'. Then your body will crash, bringing down your mood and affecting your energy levels.

In the long-term, a poor diet can be more damaging, building up to potential health issues, lethargy, and a lower sense of wellbeing.

**Self-care**  
**+ Friendships**  
**+ Community**  
**+ Fun**  

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**Happy life**

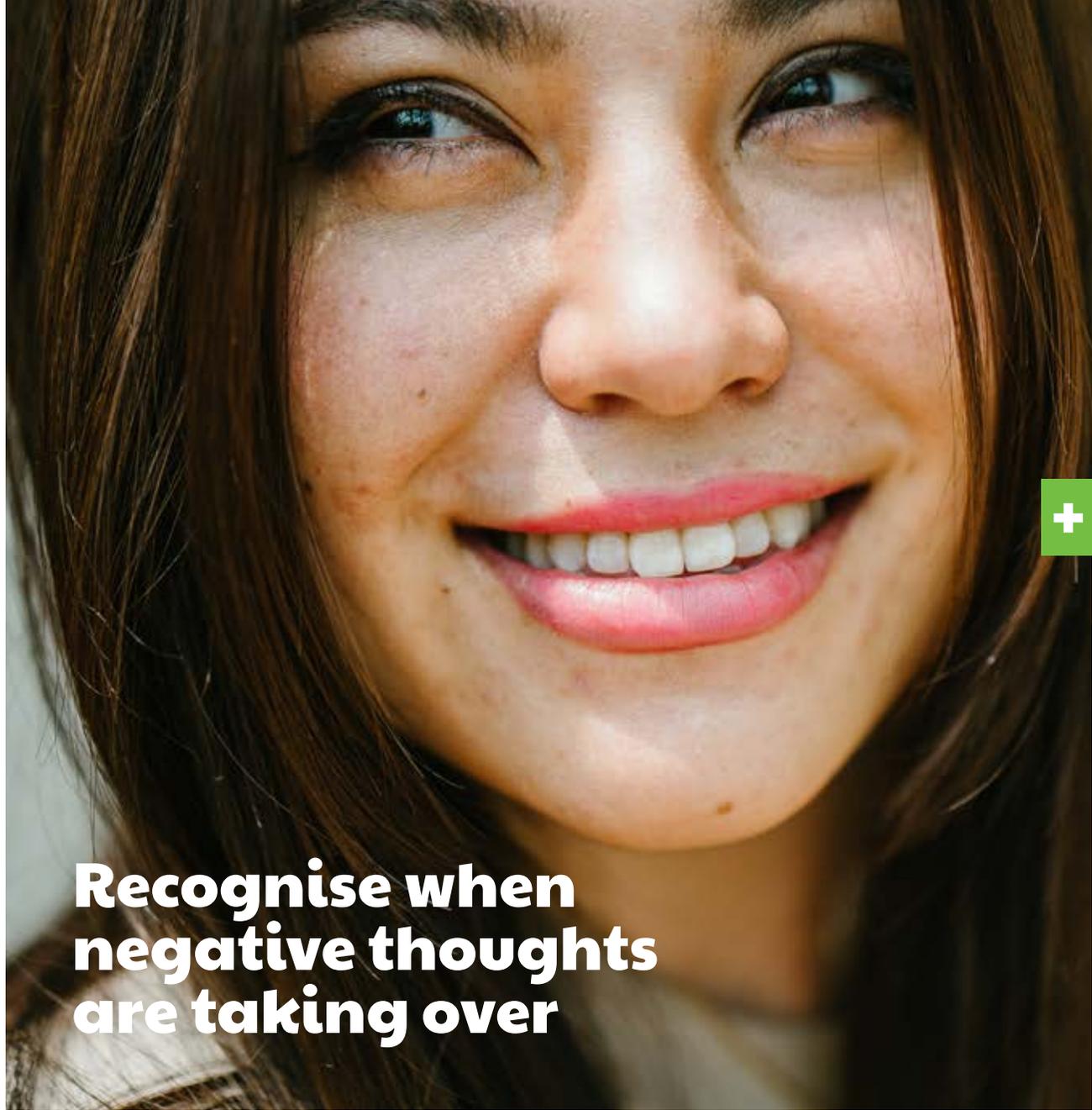
# WAYS YOU CAN CREATE A POSITIVE LIFE SUM

**If you feel like the negatives are building up in your life, try not to worry. The fact that you recognise the problem is a positive first step.**

There are practical ways you can make a change to gradually improve your life sum.

Here are some things you might want to consider adding into your life.





**Recognise when  
negative thoughts  
are taking over**

## **+ BEING MINDFUL**

**Mindfulness is an excellent way of improving your wellbeing. It can help you to recognise a potentially harmful pattern of thoughts and encourage you to take a step back.**

By being mindful, you purposely take notice of your emotions, the things around you, and how you are experiencing them.

Try to set aside some time each day to practise mindfulness. Register the sights, smells and sounds you are experiencing and check in on your emotions, but don't focus on them.

Over time, mindfulness can help you to recognise when your thoughts are taking over and help you to control them. It's not about ignoring your thoughts, but about letting them go by – like watching a bus go past without getting on it.<sup>13</sup>



## + CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

**The quality of your relationships with others can have a significant impact on your wellbeing. This can mean your family, your friends, your colleagues, or people in your local community.**

There is lots of evidence to show that connecting with people around you means you will function better and gain a greater sense of wellbeing.<sup>14</sup>

Try taking time to strengthen friendships or make new connections. Interactions don't necessarily need to be grand gestures. You could call someone instead of sending an email, talk to someone new in your community, or ask how someone's day is going.

Be sure to really listen and engage with the person you are speaking to. You may be surprised what comes of your new connections.

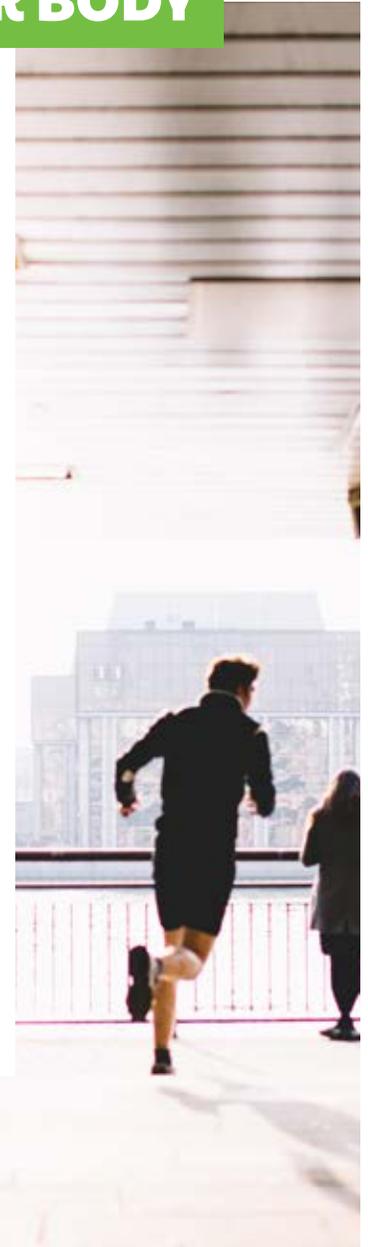
## + TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY

**There are lots of ways that taking care of yourself physically can boost your sense of wellbeing. Looking after your body can come in many forms.**

Try to get enough quality sleep. This can mean taking time away from screens before you go to bed and setting a time that you'll start winding down each night.

Avoid too much junk food or alcohol. This can lower your mood in the long term and means that any issues you're experiencing may get worse.<sup>15</sup> Eating healthy foods can also improve your mood and help you think more clearly.<sup>16</sup>

If you can, keep physically active. There are many studies that show physical exercise is good for your body and mind. Even 10 minutes of brisk walking can increase your mental alertness and energy, and help you feel more able to cope.<sup>17</sup>





## + LEARNING

**Focusing on a new activity can significantly improve your mental wellbeing**

**Everyone has a different attitude towards learning and trying new things. But there is evidence to suggest that focusing on a new activity can significantly improve your mental wellbeing.<sup>18</sup>**

Anything from reading a book, to learning a new language, to starting a new hobby – it can all make a difference.

Try writing a list of things that interest you or something that you've always wondered about. Then when you have time, try it out.

By setting a challenge and working towards it, your confidence and self-esteem will get a boost. Soon, you may find that the activity is integrated into your everyday life as a new passion. Or if it's not, you can feel proud that you tried something new.

## + GIVING

**Research shows that helping others directly benefits your wellbeing. It can reduce stress, build your confidence and even improve your physical health.<sup>19</sup>**

Doing things for other people can help change your outlook on life. There is a saying that 'happiness is infectious', so the more you help other people and see how it is making them happy, the better you will feel about yourself.

Try joining a volunteering program, doing something for a good cause, or challenge yourself to perform a 'random act of kindness' – something small but unexpected for another person. It will help build your life sum and your connections with others.

**“Awareness helps us to notice signs of stress or anxiety earlier and helps us to deal with them better.”**

Professor Mark Williams,  
former director of the  
Oxford Mindfulness Centre

# ADD UP YOUR LIFE SUM

**Now that you have a better idea of what can affect your wellbeing, you may want to make a few adjustments to your lifestyle.**

Use the space below to plan the practical steps you'll make. Try to stick to it for at least a few weeks and see how you feel. **Remember to keep checking in with yourself and set new goals if needed.**

## - Things to take out

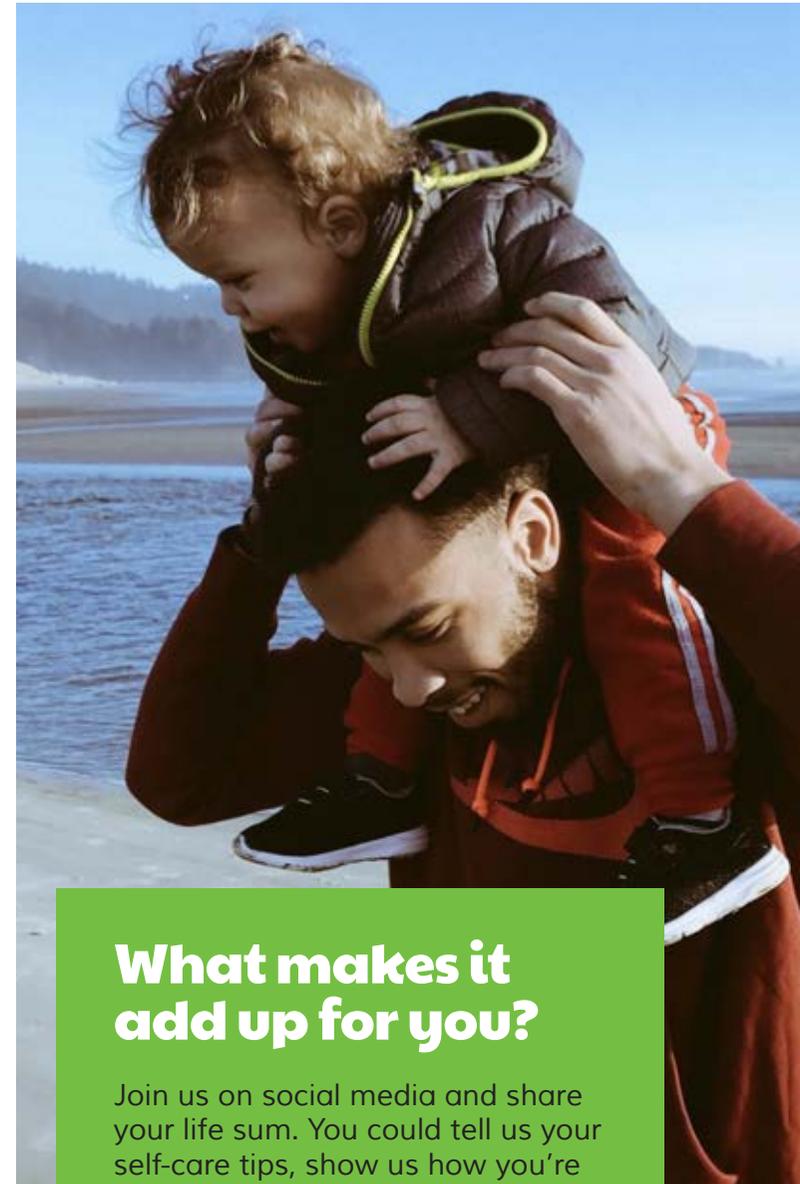
What are some negative factors that are affecting your wellbeing?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## + Things to add in

What can you do to improve your life sum?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## What makes it add up for you?

Join us on social media and share your life sum. You could tell us your self-care tips, show us how you're involved with your community, or talk about your wellbeing.

**#livabilitylifesum**

[twitter.com/LivabilityUK](https://twitter.com/LivabilityUK)

[facebook.com/LivabilityUK](https://facebook.com/LivabilityUK)



**Wellbeing  
+ Volunteering  
+ Faith  
– Bullying  
+ Friends**

It all adds up to

**Livability**

## HOW DOES LIVABILITY HELP?

**Debbie lives by the seaside in Sussex and is brilliant at connecting with other people. Despite being badly bullied and left out at school because of her disability, her life is all about being part of the community, meeting people and helping wherever she can.**

Debbie is very independent, supported by a Livability service for adults, where she shares one of a small group of houses with her friend Louise. 'I always welcome new people who come to live here,' she says. 'I want them to feel included in Livability. He's welcome to come to our house for a cuppa and we have a lovely new conservatory which we share. I'm sure we can make him feel at home.'

Debbie has volunteered and fundraised with St John's Ambulance for 14 years, helping at local events. 'We do training courses, very much so, and I have badges and certificates for this. I know quite a lot about first aid. Helping like this makes me feel good.' This group has become a second family for her and with her 40th birthday approaching, Debbie has plans to take a special cake along to the weekly meeting. 'Last year I took a cake with the St John's logo and my photo on it!'

Debbie works at her local McDonalds, where she is part of the front-of-house team. 'It's my job to help members of the public. I always make eye contact with people and talk to them, and I usually ask "how's your lunch?" I help them if something is needed. Over the years, Livability staff have supported me to find jobs and to get my confidence and independence so I can take buses and taxis on my own.'

# LIFE'S BETTER WHEN YOU'RE CONNECTED



**Hopefully you now have a good idea of how to recognise when your wellbeing might need some attention and the steps you can take to start improving your life sum. If you're feeling like you need to take stock, you can use the exercises in this pack at any time.**

Remember, nurturing your wellbeing is an ongoing process, so don't worry if you have days where you feel like things are slipping.

Stay connected to yourself, your sense of wellbeing, and the community around you. Your life sum will be better for it.

**If you like what you've learnt here, why not tell a friend about this pack? You can download from [www.livability.org.uk/lifesumpack](http://www.livability.org.uk/lifesumpack)**

## About Livability

Livability is the disability charity that's committed to enabling children, young people and adults to live a life that adds up for them.

What makes life livable is never down to just one thing - it's the sum of many things. From friendship to fun; from companionship to community; from a great chat to a challenge overcome - it all adds up to Livability.

We are a wellbeing-driven charity. Wellbeing looks different for each of the hundreds of children, young people and adults with disabilities who use Livability's services.

Through a wide range of disability care, special education, and rehabilitation services, we promote inclusion and wellbeing for all.

Together, we work to see people take part, contribute and be valued. We put the elements in place that all add up to connected lives.

Find out more at [livability.org.uk](http://livability.org.uk)

# Sources

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18. <https://www.ghll.org.uk/MHF-Doing-good-does-you-good-WEB.pdf>

Material in this pack has been compiled with reference to a range of sources.

This pack provides general information and is not intended to diagnose any medical condition or to replace your healthcare professional.

# About us

This pack has been written by Livability. We are a wellbeing-driven charity. At Livability we provide care, education and rehabilitation support for people with disabilities.

Livability is the disability charity that's committed to enabling children, young people and adults to live a life that adds up for them.

Wellbeing looks different for each of the hundreds of children, young people and adults with disabilities who use Livability's services.

If you'd like to find out more about our work in this area please visit:  
[www.livability.org.uk/lifesum](http://www.livability.org.uk/lifesum)

It all adds up to

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# Livability

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