



Caring for those who Care



@SaferSurgeryUK



The Association for Perioperative Practice



The Oxford English Dictionary defines wellbeing as 'the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy'. However, it also includes how satisfied we are with our life, our sense of purpose, how we cope with day to day life, our ability to manage stress and how in control we feel.

These feelings are fundamental to our overall health and looking after our mental health and wellbeing is vital. Feeling good about ourselves boosts our confidence to learn new skills, visit new places and make new friends. Good self-esteem helps us cope when life takes a difficult turn.

There are a range of things that you can do to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Trying some of these could help you feel more positive and help you enjoy life more.

Keep in touch

Try to make time to spend with your family, friends and colleagues. Creating and maintaining good, strong relationships is important for our wellbeing.



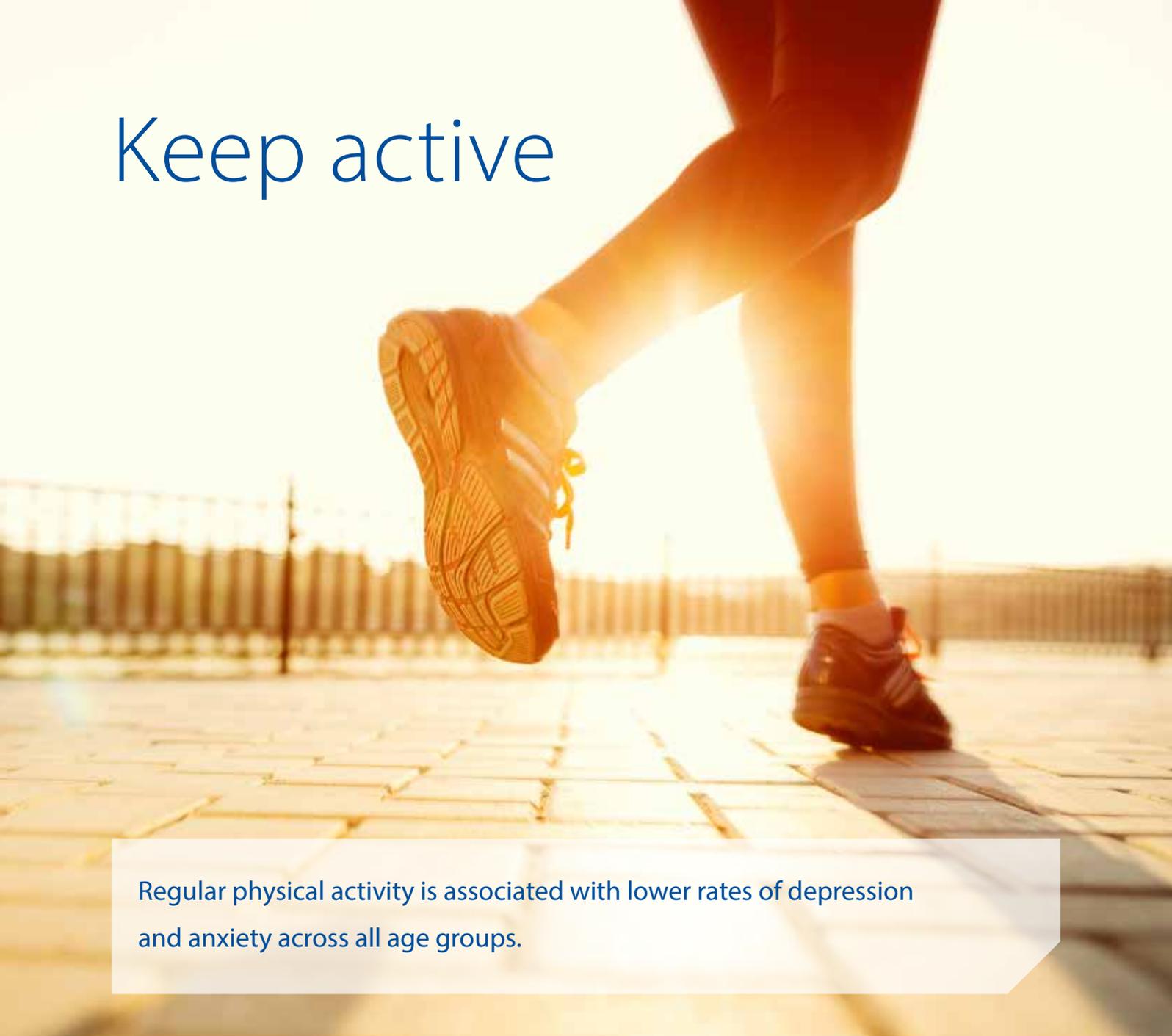
Feeling close to, and valued by, people is a basic human need. Knowing we have people around us who care about us increases our sense of self value. Friends and family can also help provide us with emotional support.

Nowadays it's easy to rely on technology and social media to connect and to build relationships. This isn't always helpful though. If you can, try talking to someone instead of emailing them. There's nothing better than catching up with someone face to face,

but if that's not possible, it could be by phone or a video app like FaceTime, Skype or Zoom.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic it may not be possible for us to see our friends and extended family. It's recognised that social distancing and isolation are difficult for our mental wellbeing and it's more important than ever that we keep in touch with friends and family. Tap in to the different types of communication that are available – from phone and video apps to email or even a card or letter in the post!

Keep active



Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups.

Exercise actually creates chemical changes in our brains, producing endorphins, which can change our mood in a positive way. Regular exercise can help you concentrate, sleep, and feel better.

The gym isn't for everyone though! If it's not your thing, there are lots of options to choose from, all for different levels of ability. These include classes, swimming, cycling, park runs and a range of online apps to help get started – like the Zero to Hero 5k Challenge. And if you'd prefer to do something from the comfort and privacy of your own home, you could try online exercise. There are a range of options including classes on YouTube and downloadable apps.

It doesn't have to be particularly intense exercise either – slower-paced activities, such as walking, can have the benefit of encouraging social interactions as well providing some level of exercise. You could just start by making small changes to your routine, like taking the stairs not the lift, going for a walk at lunchtime, walking to work, getting off the bus one stop earlier.

The best way to motivate yourself and to make sure you stick with it is to find the activity that best suits you and that you enjoy.

Learn new skills



Learning new skills and setting goals can stimulate the brain and help tune out anxious thoughts.



It can also boost your self confidence which can, in turn, improve your mental wellbeing and raise your self esteem. It doesn't have to be getting more qualifications or taking exams (although it could be!), you could think about reading a book, cooking something new, gardening, doing the crossword, tackling a sudoku, volunteering to take something new on at work, taking up yoga, painting. The choices are endless!

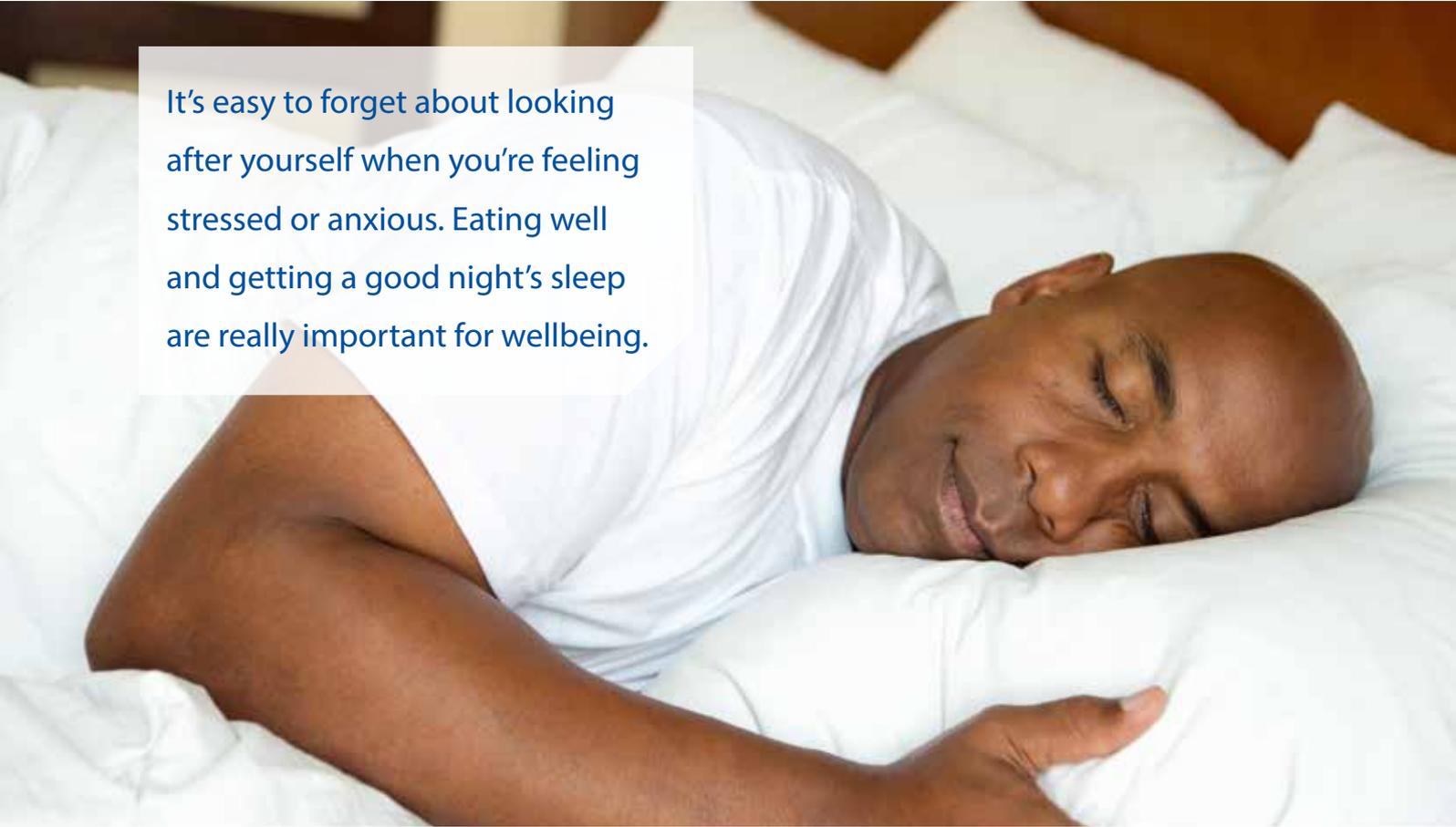
Give something to other people

Wellbeing research shows that people who have an interest in helping others are more likely to feel happy.

Acts of kindness towards other people can help to create positive feelings and increase your sense of self worth. They also help you connect with people and keep up relationships with friends and family.

Small acts of kindness can make a big difference. It could be something as small as saying thank you, asking how someone's weekend was or putting five minutes aside to find out how someone really is. Alternatively, it could be something larger like volunteering in your local community.

Take care of yourself



It's easy to forget about looking after yourself when you're feeling stressed or anxious. Eating well and getting a good night's sleep are really important for wellbeing.

Your brain needs a mix of nutrients to stay healthy and function well, just like the other organs in your body. A diet that's good for your physical health is also good for your mental health.

Cooking can also help detract from negative thoughts. If you're not into cooking, perhaps a friend or family member could help you!

Drinking alcohol isn't a helpful way to manage difficult feelings. Often, when the affect of the drink wears off, you feel worse because of the way the alcohol has affected your brain and the rest of your body.

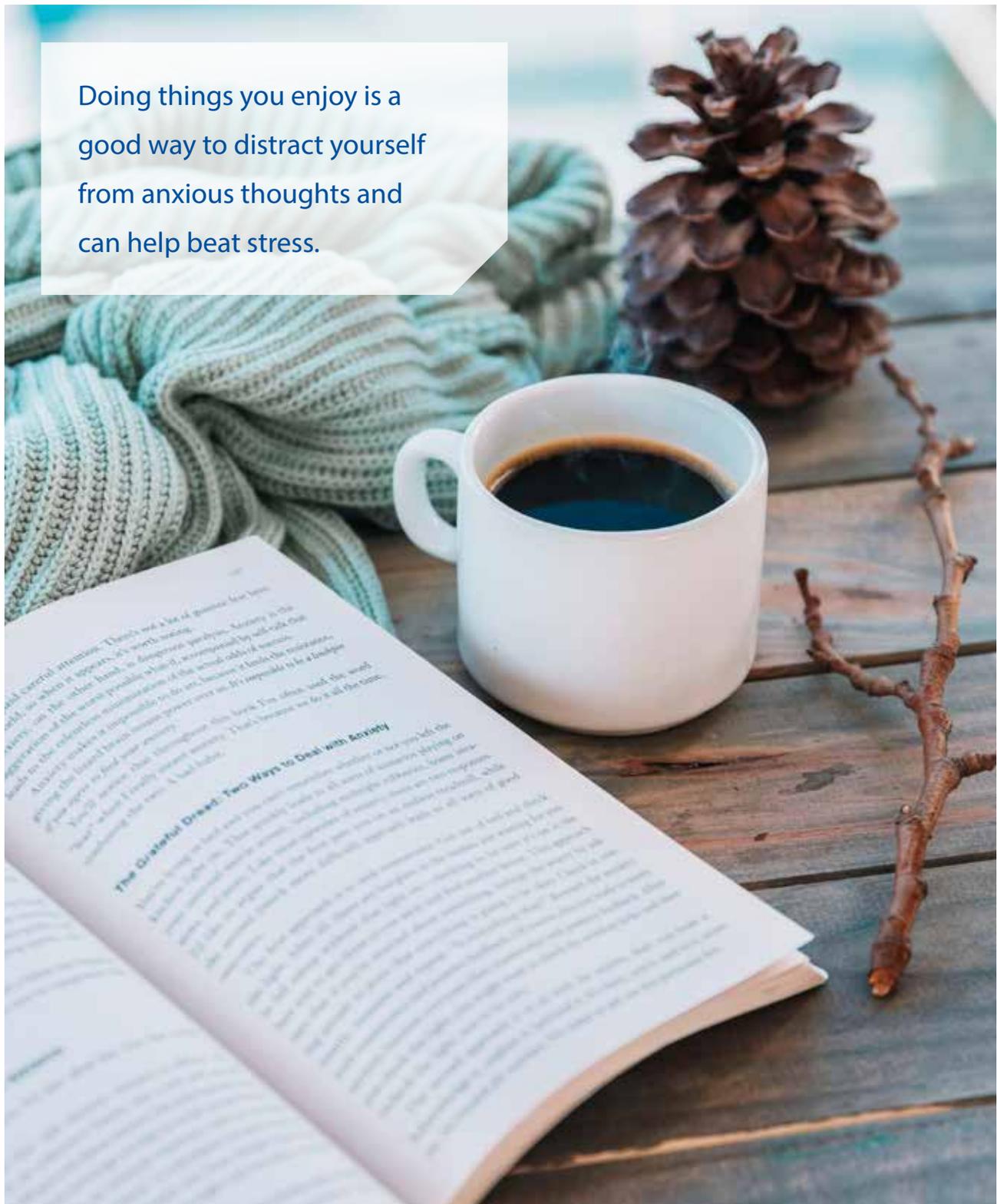
Getting a good night's sleep can be difficult if you're feeling stressed and anxious. It's not always possible, but if you can, try to wind down before bed. A warm bath or reading a book may help.

Blue light is found in many digital devices like your phone, your tablet and even your television. It has a short wavelength that stimulates sensors in the eyes to send signals to your brain's internal clock, tricking it in to thinking it's day time. It suppresses the natural production of melatonin, the hormone that makes you feel sleepy, making it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Some smartphones and tablets now have a night mode to change the blue light to warmer, redder wavelength light but the best thing to do is to try to have some time away from screens an hour before you go to bed. Try to keep electronics out of the bedroom too.

Do things you enjoy

Doing things you enjoy is a good way to distract yourself from anxious thoughts and can help beat stress.



Try to make time in your day to do an activity you enjoy. If you enjoy it, it probably means you're good at it and achieving something boosts your self-esteem.

What do you love doing? What activities can you lose yourself in?

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment and being fully engaged with whatever it is you're doing at that moment.

It's about being aware of your thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. It can decrease stress and help you enjoy life more, understand yourself better, positively change how you approach challenges and help you make positive choices based on your own values and motivations.

Reminding yourself to take notice of your thoughts, feelings, body sensations and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness. Try to use all your senses to be aware of the moment in which you're in and take your time to experience them.

You can learn mindfulness and train in this moment to moment awareness through meditation. Mindfulness meditation involves sitting silently and paying attention to your thoughts, sounds, the sensations of breathing or parts of the body, bringing your attention back whenever the mind starts to wander.

Mindfulness isn't a temporary state that only occurs during meditation though, it's a way of living.

Read more about breathing techniques in the next section and try watching this short mindful breathing exercise video on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/2yJkhoo>



Find out more about mindfulness at www.headspace.com

Breathing and meditation

A well known breathing technique to help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, and treat insomnia, is box breathing or four square breathing.

Box breathing is very simple to learn and practice. It involves taking slow, deep breaths. Before you start, make sure you're in a comfortable, upright position, if possible in a quiet and stress free environment. You need to be able to focus on your breathing without getting distracted.

Step 1

Slowly exhale through your mouth, focussing on getting all of the oxygen out of your lungs. Be conscious of what you're doing.

Step 2

Slowly inhale through your nose for a count of 4. Count slowly, in your head. Concentrate on breathing in until your lungs are full and the air moves in to your abdomen.

Step 3

Hold your breath again for another slow count of four.

Step 4

Slowly exhale through your mouth for the same slow count of four, expelling all the air from your lungs and abdomen. Be conscious of your breath emptying out of your body.

Step 5

Hold your breath again for another slow count of four.

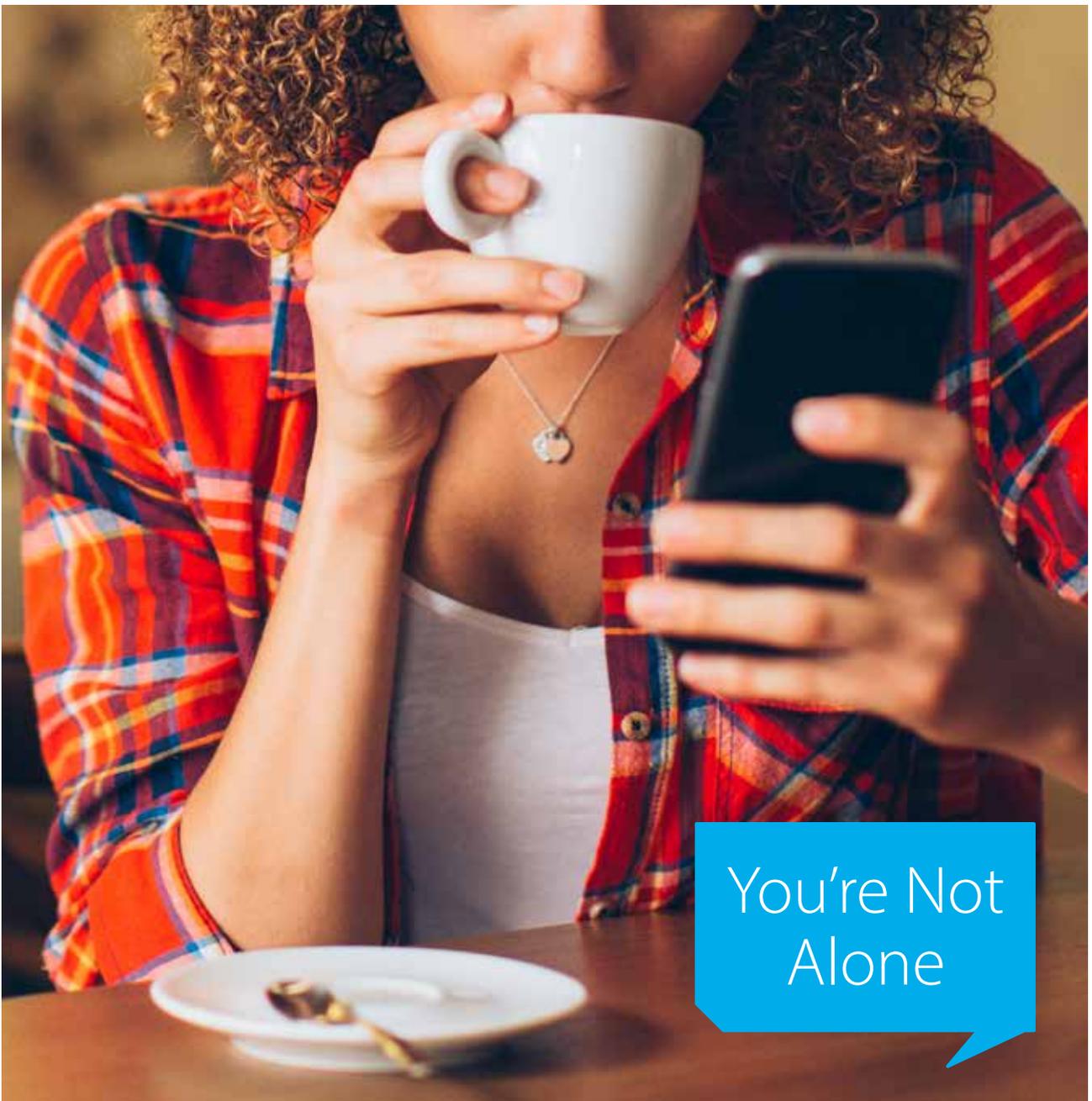
Repeat this process as often as you need to.

There is a link to a mindful breathing exercise on [YouTube](#) in the section above.

Togetherall

AfPP members have access to online mental health support from Togetherall, a multi-award-winning digital mental health and wellbeing service.

The service is designed to help you get support, take control and feel better. It provides anonymous, safe 24/7 peer and professional support, (with trained healthcare professionals online at all times), a supportive community and a range of information and wellbeing tools.



You're Not
Alone

Talk about your feelings and ask for help

None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get overwhelmed by how we feel or when things don't go to plan.

If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. Talking about your feelings with someone you trust can help you stay in good mental health and deal with times when you feel troubled.

Think about who you speak to. Find somewhere quiet where you can sit down and chat openly and honestly about your feelings and your concerns. It's easy to get overwhelmed in our own pattern of negative thoughts, so talking these through can help break those cycles.

You can also speak to your GP and there may be local services available to help you too.

You can get in touch with:

NHS

<https://bit.ly/3aNZc9H>

Mind

<https://bit.ly/3bFeuyZ>

The Samaritans

<https://bit.ly/2zCPHNY>