

## Maintaining your mental health – easy as A-B-C

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're 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 reduce anxiety – many studies have come to this conclusion. People who exercise report feeling less stressed or nervous. Even five minutes of aerobic exercise (exercise which requires oxygen, such as a step class, swimming, walking) can stimulate anti-anxiety effects.
- Physical exercise helps to counteract the withdrawal, inactivity and feelings of hopelessness that characterise depression. Studies show that both aerobic and anaerobic exercise (exercise which does not require oxygen, such as weightlifting) have anti-depressive effects.
- 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. Enhanced self-esteem is also a benefit.

- Exercise can bring you into contact with other people in a non-clinical, positive environment. While you're walking or working out you're engaging with people who share your interest.

### About Endorphins:

- You may have heard about "runner's high"— this is the euphoria that runners feel after pushing themselves physically.
- Endorphins are chemicals produced in the brain and they provide relief from stress and pain.
- Exercise stimulates the production of endorphins, which is why we feel good afterwards.
- Endorphin release varies from person to person; some people will feel an endorphin rush, or second wind, after jogging for 10 minutes, others will jog for half an hour before their second wind kicks in.
- You don't have to exercise vigorously to stimulate endorphin release: meditation, acupuncture, massage therapy, even eating spicy food or breathing deeply – all cause your body to produce endorphins naturally.