

Everything Wellbeing: Exercise

 *Estimated reading time: 5 minutes*

Hello Again, Resident Doctors

It's your friendly neighbourhood Wellbeing Fellow back again!

Welcome to another instalment of **Everything Wellbeing**. Today's topic is exercise, which we all hear about but often struggle to keep up with.

Let me be upfront: I've never been an athletic person. I didn't grow up playing sports regularly, and physical activity was never really a part of my routine for most of my life.

I'd have brief bursts of enthusiasm, like playing tennis at university or the occasional run, but they never lasted. And while I love watching cricket and tennis, unfortunately, watching doesn't count as exercise! 🤔

Why Exercise Matters, Especially for Our Minds


We all know exercise is good for our physical health. But what's often overlooked is how powerful it can be for **mental wellbeing**.

Exercise has been shown to:

- Improve mood
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Enhance sleep quality
- Boost self-esteem
- Increase energy levels

According to **NHS guidelines**, adults should aim for:

 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity **or**

 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity **each week**

I first took exercise seriously when I was struggling with my mental health. I remember desperately googling "*How to improve my mental wellbeing*", and every list I came across had exercise in the top five.

So I figured... maybe it's time to give it a go.

Finding the Right Fit (Literally)

At the time, I hadn't exercised in years. I wasn't keen on running, especially not in the cold, dark winter. The gym? Not appealing either. I'd had gym memberships in the past and barely used them. Plus, I always felt *self-conscious* exercising around others.

Then I thought about swimming. I'd learnt to swim back in school and always enjoyed being in water. Beaches and pools had a calming effect on me. The local leisure centre also had a steam room and sauna.

So I decided to give it a try.

Starting from Zero

My first session was humbling. I could barely get across the 25-meter pool. After one lap, I was gasping for breath and had to rest for five minutes.

But I told myself I'd stick with it.

 I committed to going three times a week

 I'd swim for **just 20 minutes**, no pressure to do more

 I'd reward myself with a relaxing steam room session afterwards

It didn't matter how fast or how far I swam. What mattered was showing up. And honestly? It felt good to leave the house and do *something* during those gloomy winter days.

Tiny Tweaks, Big Changes

Slowly, a routine started forming. I began enjoying it. I even watched some YouTube tutorials and realised, my breathing technique was completely off! No wonder I was so breathless.

Bit by bit, I improved:

- One lap turned into two
- Twenty minutes became thirty
- I began to feel stronger, more energised, and more *myself*

Most importantly, I noticed a shift in my *mental health*.

Swimming became my stress buster after work.

On days I felt anxious, I'd head straight to the pool.

The water always helped calm my mind.

Switching Gears (and Getting Back on Track)

We moved house recently, and the local pool's timings didn't quite match my unpredictable rota. So, I decided to give running another go and started the **Couch to 5K** programme.

Full disclosure: I've fallen off the wagon over the past month and a half. Between night shifts, long days, and sheer exhaustion, I lost motivation. I'm currently on holiday and hoping to restart my routine when I return.

Am I the fittest I've ever been? Nope.

But I'm definitely healthier and more active than I was three years ago, and that's a win in my book.

When Exercise Meets Real Life (and Rotas)

One of the biggest challenges I face, and I'm sure many of you do too, is **finding time**.

Between shifts, audits, exams, and training applications, life as a resident doctor doesn't exactly scream "free time."

What helped me:

- **Planning ahead:** I'd check my rota at the start of the week
- **Blocking out time** for workouts on lighter days
- **Being flexible:** If I had late shifts, I'd scale down my workouts
- **Prioritising consistency over intensity**

Even a short 20-minute session a couple of times a week can make a huge difference. Don't underestimate the power of showing up even when it's hard.

Tips If You're Just Starting Out

- 💡 **Start small** – Even once or twice a week is a great beginning
- 💡 **Choose what you enjoy** – Swimming, martial arts, home workouts, anything!
- 💡 **Don't aim for perfection** – Aim for progress
- 💡 **Be kind to yourself** – Missing a session isn't failure
- 💡 **Celebrate small wins** – One extra lap, one extra kilometre, one more day

Useful Resources

If you're looking for inspiration or just want to hear others talk about the impact of movement, check these out:

Podcast – Rhythm Check (PSW East of England)

 *Episode on Movement and Exercise*

 [Listen here](#)

Mind.org – Get Active, Feel Good

Tips, ideas, and even short 10-minute workouts

 [Explore the resource](#)

Mind UK – Video on Physical Activity & Mental Health

 [Watch here](#)

NHS – Better Health: Get Active

A great hub for getting started

 [Visit the site](#)

Final Thoughts

Exercise was never something that came naturally to me. But now, it's something I *value*.

If you've been thinking about getting active, take this as your sign.

Start small. Stay consistent. Be kind to yourself.

Until next time,

Take great care of yourself so that you can take great care of others.

You've got this 💪

Warm Regards

Junaid

(Your friendly neighbourhood Wellbeing Fellow)