

Wellbeing





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Introduction

This leaflet is part of a series produced by Blesma. It is designed to give some information on wellbeing. This is general information, and Blesma can assist and advise on an individual basis as required.

What is Wellbeing?

It's a good question, and one that a lot of people are asking at the moment. The World Health Organisation defines wellbeing as; "a state... in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." It goes on to say; "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." In other words, just because nothing's wrong doesn't mean you can't work to feel better. It's becoming clearer that people's emotions, and how they respond to them, play an important part in how happy and successful they are – possibly more important than physical health. The fact is that wellbeing is an area that has only started to be explored, but what is known is that it is vital to everyone.

One of the key factors of wellbeing is that it is a wholly individual matter. There are general themes that apply to most people, but everyone's idea of happiness, or what it means to be successful, will be unique. Ask yourself; "Am I happy with life?" If the answer is that most of the time you are, your wellbeing is probably OK (you can always improve that feeling if you want to – you don't have to settle for OK). If the answer is that most of the time you're unhappy with how things are going, then your wellbeing might not be so great. It's never that simple though. Someone might think; "I'm not happy with the way things are at the moment, but I know what I want and I'm confident I can get it." Does that person have high or low wellbeing? Who are we to say. Only that individual can know.

The first thing to realise is that no-one can say what's good for someone else's wellbeing. So what is wellbeing? It's really just a useful word for how well people are doing. People shouldn't get hung up on the word, but should try to understand what it means to them instead.

How Does Wellbeing Affect Us?

One thing that is for certain is that we have a degree of control over what makes us happy. We're not slaves to our environment or circumstances. We have the power to do things that will make us happier, more relaxed, less stressed or any of the other things that we associate with our own wellbeing.

Think of how the human body works. We have control over certain aspects of our lifestyle, such as what we eat, how much we exercise and how much we indulge (drinking or smoking, for example). Managing these factors effectively will increase our health and fitness which, in turn, will make it easier to carry out the daily chores or succeed at work. It doesn't mean that we won't get sick or injured, but it does mean that our bodies will be in better shape to deal with the sickness or recover from the injury. Even if we get hurt to the degree where our bodies can't recover from a physical condition (such as an amputation) staying fit and healthy will, generally, make our lives easier.

It's exactly the same with the mind. To keep the body fit and strong we have to do the right things to it. To stay happy and deal with the potentially nasty events that life throws up, we have to be aware of how to manage our wellbeing. If it helps to understand the idea, think of wellbeing as fitness for the mind. So the question is; What is it that makes you feel good, positive, and ready to face daily challenges?

Managing Stress

Stress is a normal and natural response to testing circumstances. It's a physical response to an emotional pressure that gets us ready for action, it makes us stronger and think quicker. A certain level of stress in our job can often motivate us to work harder, for example, and can even make us excel.

However, too much stress can often make things go badly for us. Living in a state of high stress for a long period of time can lead to loss of sleep, loss of appetite, negative thoughts and feelings, fatigue and other unpleasant physical conditions.

In extreme cases, people can 'burn out' and begin to suffer from serious mental or physical health problems. So, in order to keep stress at a level where it's useful and not damaging, it needs to be managed effectively. Some people believe that the best way to deal with stress is to just 'toughen up', but that doesn't always work. Here are a few techniques that might help to deal with stress:

– Deal with whatever is causing the stress.

Make a list of all the things that are causing concern. Chances are that when they're written down it will become clear that whatever needs to be done is manageable. Then it's a case of starting to tick things off the list. Every item that is dealt with makes us feel much better.

We all have things that calm us down, like listening to music, taking some exercise or spending time with family

- **Accept it for what it is.** Feeling stressed can lead some people to feeling guilty because they feel that an inability to cope is a sign of weakness. But feeling guilty about being stressed is like piling one heavy rock on top of another. Stress can affect anyone. It's important to accept that it's happening and try to find a way out of it, rather than blaming yourself for something which is a normal human response.
- **Talk to someone.** Getting problems out in the open helps. Talk to friends or loved ones, or even total strangers if it helps. Once things are said out loud they sometimes don't seem as bad. And if someone decides to confide in you, just let them talk. Don't try to solve all their problems for them before they've finished the first sentence!
- **Take some time to relax.** We all have things that calm us down, such as listening to music, taking some exercise or spending time with family. Unfortunately, in today's world, it's far too easy to spend all our free time dealing with day-to-day chores, so make sure to schedule in at least an hour every few days to do something enjoyable. Watching TV isn't necessarily relaxing either. It's fine to watch a programme we like, but simply staring at a TV screen has no benefit.
- **Financial Security.** The saying is that money doesn't make you happy, but research shows that statement needs a little revising. Generally, people become unhappy when they live in a state of financial uncertainty – when they are afraid the money might run out. Taking advice from a financial advisor on how to budget can give a greater feeling of security without necessarily resulting in the need to earn any more money.
- **Avoid negative coping strategies.** Negative coping strategies are things that we do to make ourselves feel better in the short term, but which have negative effects on us in the medium to long term. These can include excessive drinking, taking drugs, engaging in risky behaviour, or avoiding dealing with whatever is causing the stress. Sometimes, it's difficult to spot the difference between positive and negative coping strategies. For example, going for a drink with a friend to talk through a problem can be very useful, but getting drunk every night and being late for work the next day will only be more damaging in the long run.

Promoting Wellbeing

We don't have to wait until we start suffering to take action. Even those who feel they're doing OK can plan a few things to make themselves feel even better about life. There are literally hundreds of resources that can be tapped into to improve wellbeing. Some may not appeal, which is fine, because we'll naturally know which ones might work for us. They include:

- **Spending time with friends and family.**

We are social creatures and have lived and worked in groups for mutual benefit and protection since the dawn of time. We're geared towards wanting to spend time with people and, as such, doing so makes us happy. Whether someone prefers to have a small group of very close friends and family, or they like spending time with lots of different people, it's important to make an effort to spend time with the people who make us feel good.

- **Avoiding toxic relationships.** Unfortunately, not every relationship is good for us. Abusive partners, unsupportive families and selfish or destructive 'friends' can all have a severely negative impact. It can be hard to do, but sometimes the best thing is to get out of a relationship with someone who is harmful.

- **Doing something nice for other people.**

We don't need to devote our lives to selflessly

helping others, but small acts of kindness (such as paying someone a compliment) will often help us to build closer bonds with those around us.

- **Thinking about our work.** Many people spend eight hours (or more) a day, five days (or more) a week at work. Research has shown that our relationship with our boss is often the one with the most significant impact on our overall wellbeing – especially if it's a bad one! Taking the opportunity to build solid relations with the people we spend a third of each day with can often make us happier.
- **Doing some reading.** Health and wellbeing is a growing topic, and there is a huge amount of material on all manner of self-help strategies, philosophies and lifestyle tips that might help to make us happier. Some of it may sound a little odd, but that just means our minds are tuned to seek out the things we know stand a better chance of working for us. Don't try everything – just those that sound like a good idea.
- **Learning something new.** Picking up a new skill or bit of knowledge can have a wide range of benefits. It might help us in our work, enhance our daily lives, give us something interesting to talk about,





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or just provide us with a sense of achievement at having done something a bit different.

– **Getting a hobby.** Hopefully, learning new things will prompt us to pursue a new interest; something which we find exciting (or relaxing), worthwhile and fulfilling. It doesn't even need to be a 'new' interest. Something we enjoyed in the past but haven't tried for years will often evoke a raft of happy memories.

– **Living a healthier lifestyle.** People are always talking about eating well and taking exercise, but it really does work. The key is to find the right balance to make it sustainable. Rather than embarking on a whole new regime (which can become tiresome very quickly) try making a few small changes, and monitor if there is a change in mood after a few weeks or months.

– **Learning to count our blessings.** It's all too easy to become frustrated by life's little annoyances, so why not allow ourselves to be lifted by life's little victories? Do you find yourself getting angry when someone cuts you up when you're driving your car, for example? The next time someone lets you out at a junction, focus on the fact that he or she has been courteous and see how that makes you feel.

– **Working with what we've got, but striving for what we want.** It can be incredibly frustrating when we don't get the things we think we deserve, but sometimes that's exactly what happens. One of life's key skills is to be able to determine what is in our power to change, and what isn't. Where we have the power to get what we want, we should work as hard as we can for it. However, if we cling on to the feelings of frustration over something that we can't change, it will start to eat away at us. In that case, it's better to just accept what's happened as best we can and move on.



What Blesma Can Do

Blesma is on hand to provide support for its Members in many ways. We have a dedicated team, all with a huge amount of experience when it comes to issues that affect amputees and veterans, who can offer advice and guidance on a number of aspects of Member welfare. If we can't help directly, we'll know someone who can.

- **Financial assistance:** Blesma can provide financial assistance, whether it's for buying sports equipment, fitting adaptations to the home, or just supporting day-to-day living when things are a little tight. We can't guarantee to fund everything a Member asks for, but it doesn't hurt to ask.
- **Activities:** Blesma runs an activity programme throughout the year that covers a number of pursuits ranging from skydiving and skiing, to fishing and photography. Our focus is on Member engagement; having a good time with other Members who face the same, or similar, daily challenges.
- **Prosthetics:** Blesma has a dedicated Prosthetics Support Officer who will help to ensure that a prosthetic provider is giving the correct level of service.
- **Respite breaks:** The Blesma Blackpool Home is a fully adapted care facility which is capable of caring for people with almost any physical disability. Sometimes it's nice just to get away from home for a break, and the staff at Blesma Blackpool ensure that its guests and residents are very well cared for.
- **Welfare support:** Blesma Support Officers are hugely experienced in dealing with all manner of issues surrounding the trials faced by our Members. They should be the first port of call for any issues or advice that a Member might need help with. Their particular speciality is in ensuring that Members receive the correct benefits in relation to their injury, or signposting towards other agencies that can help with specific problems.
- **Volunteering opportunities:** Blesma strongly believes in Member helping Member, which means there is a great scope for Members to assist others in a number of ways. Our dedicated National Volunteer Officer can offer great advice on how to get involved and help in your local area.

Mental Illness

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, things can get a bit too much. Thankfully, attitudes towards mental illness in the UK are gradually improving, and it's becoming easier to access help through a variety of sources. Mental illness can manifest itself in a number of ways, but there is often a noticeable change in someone who might be suffering. Things to look out for include:

- **Extreme stress (to the point that it becomes unmanageable)**
- **Fear of leaving the house**
- **Unusual beliefs and paranoia**
- **Persistent confusion**
- **Inability to cope with daily pressures**
- **Reliving past traumatic events**
- **Trouble sleeping**
- **Extreme fatigue**
- **Loss of interest in day-to-day living**
- **Thoughts of suicide or self harm**

Those who begin to experience any of these symptoms should consider seeking advice from the following:

- **A GP or doctor**
- **Samaritans (08457 909 090)**
- **NHS Increased Access to Psychological Therapies Services (IAPT). Search IAPT online or call NHS Choices on 111**

- **NHS Wellbeing Online (Search NHS Choices Wellbeing online)**
- **Combat Stress (www.combatstress.org.uk, call them on 0800 138 1619 or email contactus@combatstress.org.uk)**
- **Mind (www.mind.org.uk)**
- **Mind Infoline, a mental health information service, is open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for Bank Holidays). The telephone/email/text service can be contacted on 0300 123 3393, by emailing info@mind.org.uk, or by texting 86463**
- **www.bigwhitewall.com (an anonymous, online mental health service which was set up specifically for veterans and offers help 24 hours a day)**



This is the last in a series of six leaflets about the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, or Blesma, The Limbless Veterans as it is normally known. The other leaflets in the series are:

- 1 Introduction and General Information
- 2 Amputation Explained
- 3 NHS Limb Service and Prosthetic Information
- 4 Phantom Limb Pain
- 5 Stump Care
- 6 **Wellbeing**

All these leaflets can be downloaded from **www.blesma.org/leaflets**
If you prefer, you can receive hard copies by calling **020 8590 1124**
or by emailing **chadwellheath@blesma.org**

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THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

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