

Self-Care Toolkit

for Anxiety and Depression



Self-Care Toolkit for Anxiety and Depression

At Ramsay Mental Health, we believe in empowering individuals with tools and support. This toolkit is a companion to help you build resilience, practice self-compassion, and work towards a more balanced mental state. While these strategies can be incredibly helpful, please know that professional support is always available when you need additional assistance.

Section 1: Building a Grounding Routine

Mindful Mornings

Why Morning Mindfulness Matters: Our first moments of the day can significantly impact our mental state and overall wellbeing. Morning mindfulness helps reset our nervous system, reducing anxiety, and setting a positive tone for the day. By intentionally creating a calm start, we interrupt automatic stress responses and cultivate emotional resilience.

Start your day with intention and calm:

The what	Ways it may help
Practice 5-10 minutes of morning meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce cortisol (stress hormone) levels• Improve focus and emotional regulation
Try gentle stretching or yoga	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Releases physical tension• Increase body awareness and mind-body connection
Take a few slow, deep breaths before checking your phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent immediate stress triggers• Allow for a more intentional start to the day
Write down one positive intention for the day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activates a growth mindset• Provides a sense of purpose and direction

Sleep Hygiene

The Crucial Link Between Sleep and Mental Health: Quality sleep is a cornerstone of mental wellbeing. Consistent, restful sleep helps regulate emotions, process daily experiences, and restore mental and physical energy. Poor sleep can exacerbate anxiety, depression, and emotional instability.

Create a restful environment for better mental health:

The what	Ways it may help
Establish a consistent bedtime routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signals to your body it's time to wind down• Helps regulate your circadian rhythm
Limit screen time 1 hour before bed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce blue light exposure that disrupts melatonin production• Decrease mental stimulation before sleep
Create a calm sleeping space (cool, dark, quiet)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote deeper, more restorative sleep• Reduce nighttime anxiety and restlessness
Use soft lighting and calming music or white noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower stress levels• Create a soothing environment
Consider a warm herbal tea or light reading before sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote relaxation• Provide a gentle transition to sleep

Nutrition and Physical Movement

Nourishing Your Body and Mind: Physical health is intrinsically linked to mental health. Proper nutrition and movement support brain chemistry, reduce stress, and improve overall emotional wellbeing. Our bodies and minds are deeply interconnected, and caring for one directly benefits the other.

Support your mental wellbeing through physical health:

The what	Ways it may help
Eat balanced, nutrient-rich meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide essential nutrients for brain function• Stabilise mood and energy levels• Support production of neurotransmitters
Stay hydrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent cognitive fatigue• Support overall brain function• Helps regulate mood and energy
Participate in daily movement as recommended by your health professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Releases endorphins (natural mood boosters)• Reduce stress and anxiety• Improve sleep quality• Movement options:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Walking (increases circulation, clears mind)– Dancing (boosts mood, provides creative expression)– Gentle exercise (builds strength and confidence)– Stretching (releases physical tension)
Include protein, complex carbohydrates, and plenty of vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protein supports neurotransmitter production• Complex carbs stabilise blood sugar and mood• Vegetables provide essential nutrients for brain health

Section 2: Mindfulness Exercises

The “5-5-5” Grounding Technique

Why Grounding Matters: When anxiety or stress overwhelm us, our brain can get stuck in a cycle of racing thoughts. Grounding techniques help activate our parasympathetic nervous system, bringing us back to the present moment and interrupting the stress response.

When feeling overwhelmed, use this quick method to return to the present:

The what	Ways it may help
Name 5 things you can see	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reconnects you with your immediate environment• Shift focus from internal thoughts to external reality
Name 5 things you can hear	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase sensory awareness• Break the cycle of rumination
Name 5 things you can feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase body awareness• Help ground physical sensations
Take 5 slow, deep breaths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce heart rate• Increase oxygen flow• Calm the nervous system
Slowly release tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote physical and mental relaxation• Signal safety to your body

Breathing Techniques

The Science of Breath and Anxiety: Controlled breathing is a powerful tool for managing anxiety. It directly impacts our autonomic nervous system, helping to shift from a stress response (sympathetic) to a relaxation state (parasympathetic).

Quick anxiety-reduction exercises:

The what	Ways it may help
Box Breathing: Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulate heart rate• Reduce stress hormones• Improve focus and emotional control
Diaphragmatic Breathing: Place one hand on chest, one on stomach, breathe deeply letting the stomach expand while leaving the shoulders relaxed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase lung capacity• Reduce muscle tension• Promote full oxygen exchange
4-7-8 Technique: Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 7, exhale for 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activate relaxation response• Helps manage panic and anxiety• Can improve sleep quality

Managing Overwhelming Emotions

Emotion Regulation Strategies: Overwhelming emotions can feel like a tidal wave, but we can learn to navigate them. These strategies help create a sense of control and safety during intense emotional experiences.

Strategies for self-soothing:

The what	Examples of the how	Ways it may help
Focus on one small, manageable task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make your bed• Water a houseplant• Organise a small drawer• Write a short to-do list with 2-3 easy items	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a sense of accomplishment• Interrupt negative thought cycles• Build confidence in handling challenges
Use positive self-talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instead of “I can’t handle this,” say “I’m doing the best I can right now”• Replace “I’m a failure” with “I’m learning and growing”• Tell yourself “This feeling is temporary” during intense emotional moments• Use gentle phrases like “I’m proud of myself for trying”• Offer yourself words of comfort you’d use for a close friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rewire negative thinking patterns• Build emotional resilience• Increase self-compassion
Break larger challenges into smaller steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If feeling overwhelmed by a work project, break it down into 15-minute tasks• When feeling stressed about cleaning, start with just clearing one surface• For a difficult emotional challenge, identify the smallest possible first step• Create a step-by-step list with very minor, achievable actions• Set a tiny goal like “I’ll just put on my workout clothes” instead of focusing on a full exercise routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce feeling of being overwhelmed• Makes progress feel more achievable• Build problem-solving skills
Practice radical acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledge “This is a difficult moment, and that’s okay”• Accept your current emotional state without judgment• Recognise that some things are outside of your control• Practice saying “This is happening right now, and I can get through it”• Allow yourself to feel emotions without trying to immediately change them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce emotional suffering• Helps let go of unproductive resistance• Promotes emotional flexibility

Self-Compassion Practices

The Power of Kindness Towards Yourself: Self-compassion is a critical skill in mental health. It helps counter harsh self-criticism, reduces anxiety and depression, and builds emotional resilience. Treating yourself with the same kindness you’d offer a good friend can transform your mental wellbeing.

Be kind to yourself:

The what	Examples of the how	Ways it may help
Write a compassionate letter to yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Dear me, I see your struggles and want you to know you’re doing your best.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help process difficult emotions• Build a supportive inner dialogue• Reduce self-criticism
Use positive affirmations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I am capable and strong”• “My feelings are valid”• “I deserve kindness”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rewire negative thought patterns• Build self-esteem• Can help elicit positive feelings
Treat yourself as you would a good friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak to yourself with gentleness• Offer comfort during tough times• Celebrate small victories• Forgive your mistakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps increase self-worth• Provide emotional support• Develop healthier relationship with self
Acknowledge your efforts, not just outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Praise yourself for trying• Focus on progress, not perfection• Recognise courage in attempting challenges• Use language like “I’m proud I tried”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build intrinsic motivation• Reduce performance anxiety• Celebrate personal growth

Section 3: Building Social Connections and Support

The Neuroscience of Social Connection: Humans are fundamentally social beings. Our brains are wired for connection, with social interactions directly impacting our mental health. Meaningful relationships release oxytocin, reduce stress hormones, and provide emotional buffering during challenging times. Isolation, conversely, can exacerbate anxiety and depression, making social connections a crucial aspect of mental wellbeing.

Identifying a Support Network

Why Social Support Matters: Social support is more than just having people around—it’s about creating a network of genuine, supportive relationships that provide emotional safety, validation, and practical help. Strong social connections can:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Increase resilience
- Create a sense of belonging
- Provide alternative perspectives
- Improve overall mental health

Practical steps:

- List 3-5 trusted people you can reach out to
 - Include diverse sources of support
 - Consider different types of support (emotional, practical, professional)
- Include friends, family, support groups
 - Diverse support systems provide comprehensive care
- Consider health professionals such as a psychologist
 - Provide specialised, objective support
 - Offer professional mental health strategies

Setting Boundaries

Boundaries as Self-Care: Boundaries are essential for mental health. They protect your emotional energy, prevent burnout, and create healthy relationship dynamics. Setting boundaries is an act of self-respect and self-preservation.

Protect your mental energy:

The what	Examples of the how	Ways it may help
Learn to say “no” without guilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice simple, direct refusals• Use phrases like “I can’t commit to that right now”• Remember: No is a complete sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent emotional exhaustion• Prioritise personal wellbeing• Demonstrate self-respect
Communicate needs clearly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be direct and specific• Use “I” statements• Express your limits calmly and respectfully• Example: “I need some time to recharge”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce misunderstandings• Build healthier relationships• Increase personal empowerment
Prioritise your wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Put yourself first without apology• Recognise your limits• Understand that self-care isn’t selfish• Make choices that support your mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevent people-pleasing behaviours• Support mental and emotional health
Recognise when you’re overextending yourself	Watch out for signs such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constant exhaustion• Feeling resentful• Neglecting personal needs• Experiencing physical or emotional burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify potential burnout• Allow for proactive self-care• Helps maintain emotional balance

Connection

The Healing Power of Connection: Human connection is a powerful antidote to mental health challenges.

Meaningful interactions can:

- Reduce feelings of isolation
- Increase sense of belonging
- Boost mood and self-esteem
- Provide emotional support
- Offer new perspectives

Maintain and build supportive relationships:

The what	Examples of the how	Ways it may help
Schedule regular check-ins with friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set recurring coffee dates or calls• Use calendar reminders• Create consistent connection rhythms• Mix digital and in-person interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistent connection prevents isolation• Creates predictable social support• Build deeper relationships
Join virtual or in-person support groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find groups online or locally• Connect with people facing similar challenges• Attend regularly• Be open to shared experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connects you with others with similar experiences• Reduce feelings of loneliness• Provides mutual understanding and support
Engage in community activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteer• Join hobby-based clubs• Attend local events• Take classes or workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expands social network• Provides sense of purpose• Increases opportunities for meaningful connections
Practice active listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give full attention• Ask thoughtful questions• Avoid interrupting• Show genuine interest• Validate others' feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deepens relationships• Build empathy• Creates safe spaces for sharing
Share your experiences when comfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be vulnerable when comfortable• Start with trusted people• Normalise conversations about mental health• Listen without judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce stigma around mental health• Build authentic connections• Provides potential mutual support

Section 4: Reflecting and Tracking Progress

Daily Mood Tracker

Date: _____

Time	Mood Rating	Notable Emotions Key Events/Interactions Self-Care Activities
6:00am - 9:00am	<div>/10</div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	
9:00am - 12:00pm	<div>/10</div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	
12:00pm - 3:00pm	<div>/10</div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	
3:00pm - 6:00pm	<div>/10</div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	
6:00pm - 9:00pm	<div>/10</div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	
9:00pm - 12:00am	<div>/10</div> <div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	

Weekly Reflection Prompts

Date: _____

What went well this week?

What challenged me?

What small actions helped me feel more balanced?

What can I be proud of?

Goal-Setting for Personal Growth

Set 1-3 small, achievable mental health goals

Examples:

- Practice gratitude daily
- Limit social media time
- Try a new self-care activity weekly

Section 5: Knowing When to Seek Professional Support

Recognising Your Limits

Understanding when to seek professional help is a crucial step in mental health care. Professional support is a courageous act of self-care and healing.

Signs it's time to seek professional help:

- Persistent low mood
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Recurring negative thought patterns
- Difficulty functioning in daily life
- Significant changes in sleep or appetite
- Thoughts of self-harm

Ramsay Mental Health Services

Taking the first step toward mental health care can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to face it alone. Ramsay Health Care, Australia's largest private mental health provider, is here to guide and support you or your loved one at every stage of the journey.

Our services are tailored to different levels of care, ensuring you receive the support that's right for your needs.

Everyday Support: Ramsay Psychology Services

If you're navigating life's challenges—such as stress, relationship issues, or grief—our psychologists offer one-on-one therapy in a compassionate and supportive environment. No referral is required, and with a Mental Health Treatment Plan, Medicare rebates are available for up to a number of sessions annually.

To explore the services near you, contact your closest Ramsay Psychology service.

Comprehensive Care: Ramsay Mental Health Clinics

For those needing more intensive support, Ramsay Mental Health Clinics provide inpatient and day programs designed to help with conditions such as depression, anxiety, addiction, and eating disorders. Our dedicated team includes psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health nurses who work together to support your recovery journey.

We also offer specialised programs for teenagers and young adults and advanced neurostimulation therapies for treatment-resistant conditions.

To learn more about our clinic-based care options, reach out to your nearest Ramsay Mental Health Clinic.

Bibliography

Harris, R. & Hayes, S.C (2009). ACT Made Simple: An Easy-To-Read Primer on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

McKay, M, Wood, J.C. & Brantley, J. (2007) The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook: Practical DBT Exercises for Learning Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance. New Harbinger Publications.

Wallace, L. (2016). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: 7 Ways to Freedom from Anxiety, Depression, and Intrusive Thoughts

Additional Resources

We understand that recovery is a difficult process and we want to make sure you have access to all the resources available to you. These services are here to help.

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, please call: Emergency 000.

Mental Health

Lifeline (24 hr)

lifeline.org.au

13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

1300 659 467

Beyond Blue

beyondblue.org.au

1300 224 636

Black Dog Institute

blackdoginstitute.org.au

02 9382 2991

SANE Australia

sane.org

1800 18 7263

Men's Helpline

mensline.org.au

1300 78 99 78

Grief Line

griefline.org.au

1300 845 745 (6am to midnight)

Trauma and PTSD

Phoenix Centre

phoenixaustralia.org

Blue Knot Foundation

blueknot.org.au

1300 657 380

Veterans & Their Families

Open Arms

openarms.gov.au

1800 011 046

Financial & Practical

Financial Counselling Australia

financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au

1800 007 007

Service Seeker

serviceseeker.com.au

Family and Sexual Violence

National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling Service

1800respect.org.au

1800 737 732

Full Stop Australia

fullstop.org.au

1800 385 578

Sexual Abuse & Redress Support Service (formerly Sexual Assault Counselling Australia)

1800 211 028

Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline (formerly Domestic Violence Impact Line)

1800 943 539

Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline (formerly LGBTIQ+ Violence Service)

1800 497 212

Elder Abuse Help Line

eapu.com.au/helpline

1800 353 374

Men's Referral Service

ntv.org.au/get-help

1800 650 890

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Drug Info & Advice Line

adf.org.au

1300 85 85 84

Family Drug Support (24 hr)

fds.org.au

1300 368 186

Al-Anon Family Groups

al-anon.org.au

National AA Helpline

aa.org.au

1300 22 22 22

Narcotics Anonymous

na.org.au

1300 652 820

SMART Recovery

smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au

Eating Disorders

National Eating Disorders Collaboration

nedc.com.au

InsideOut (formerly Centre for Eating Disorders and Dietetics)

insideoutinstitute.org.au/

Butterfly Foundation

butterfly.org.au

1800 33 4673

Parenting and Relationships

Relationships Australia

relationships.org.au

1300 364 277

ReachOut Australia

parents.au.reachout.org

Young People

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness

copmi.net.au

Kids Help Line (5-25 year olds)

kidshelpline.com.au/

1800 55 1800 (24hrs)

Headspace (12-25 year olds)

headspace.org.au

1800 650 890

(9am-1am 7 days a week)

Carers & Family Members

Carer Gateway

carergateway.gov.au

1800 422 737

Mental Health Carers Australia

mentalhealthcarersaustralia.org.au



Ramsay
Mental Health

ramsaymentalhealth.com.au

People caring for people