

NHS Mental Health Clinical Lead, Owen O'Kane shares some of his top tips for staying mentally fit in 2019.



By Owen O'Kane

When we think of fitness we automatically think of the body, but keeping our minds fit is just as important. When our minds become overly tired or frazzled due to stress, responsibilities or the simple demands of life, the brain functions less effectively. Our minds need time and work, like every part of the body, yet often they get the least attention.... leading to anxiety, depression and many other mental health challenges.

When the mind becomes unwell, all of life is negatively impacted. In my view poor mental wellbeing is one the epidemics of our generation. The evidence available from a variety of studies is irrefutable; a balanced mind has a positive impact on every aspect of our lives and leads ultimately to health and happiness, which includes our physical wellbeing.

Here are 5 of my top tips for staying mentally fit in 2019

Stop

Stopping and taking 10 minutes out of each day can have the most incredibly positive impact on your life. In a short amount of time you can allow the brain to quieten, leading to calm and rational thinking. It will also allow you time to process events in your life. When we don't stop to process, our level of distress very often increases.

Surround yourself with radiators, not drains

The saying goes that there are two types of people in life, radiators and drains. While an over simplification, it is incredible important to have people in your life that pick you up and offer hope and support when you most need it. Sometimes we find ourselves surrounded by people who have a negative impact on our happiness and mental wellbeing... 'drains', which can

leave us feeling depleted. It's helpful to recognise which people in our lives make us feel stressed or add to our stress, and which people we enjoy seeing or spending time with. Take ownership of your decisions and don't be afraid to create healthy boundaries for the good of your mental health.

You are not your thoughts

Many people have patterns of thought that are unhelpful. A recent research study suggests that around 80% of our thoughts consist of negative content. If some of your negative thoughts include being critical, judgemental or harsh about yourself, remember that they don't define you and they aren't factual....they are simply thoughts. Learning to restructure those thoughts and just observe them can be incredibly liberating.

Treat yourself kindly

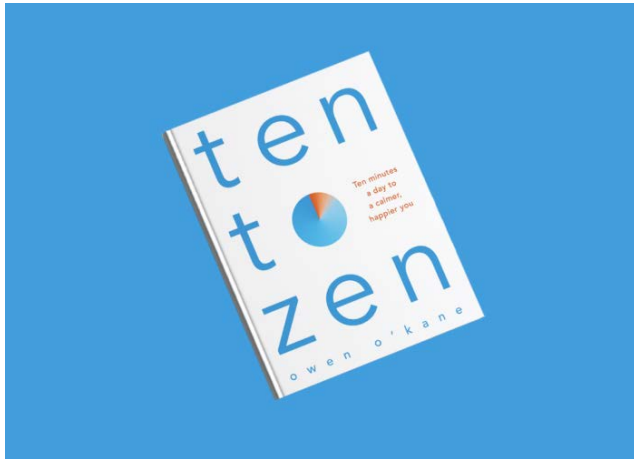
This might sound like an odd or even selfish suggestion, but it's central to a happier, calmer life. It is very easy to treat yourself harshly or critically when things go wrong, with internal cries of "idiot," or "stupid". However let me ask you a question, would you speak to someone you care about in the same way? I'm guessing probably not. How we treat ourselves has a huge impact on our mental wellbeing. A kind compassionate approach to yourself will change your world and those around you.

Live in the moment

This final tip sounds devilishly simple, but I know it can be a challenge in our modern busy world. When we spend our time preoccupied with the past, or worrying about the future, we tend to ignore or erode the joy that might exist in the present moment. And worse still we may trigger depression or anxiety. I truly believe it is possible to make small changes that will help you on the road to living more in the moment.

Adapted from <https://www.thebodycoach.com/blog/get-mentally-fit-in-2019-with-ten-to-zen-1217.html>

Ten to Zen is available in bookstores and from Amazon: <https://amzn.to/2QinSwW>



About Owen

Owen is an NHS Mental Health Clinical Lead with a dual medical and psychotherapy background. He is the author of the new book Ten to Zen, which he was inspired to write after seeing the impact of not caring for our minds every day in his work