

Wellbeing for Educators

Bupa

Foundation

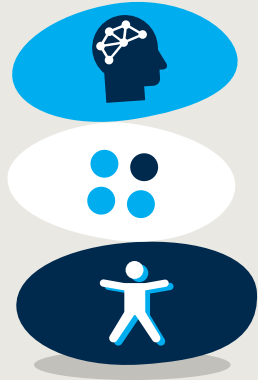


Coping with life during COVID-19

With the COVID-19 pandemic changing the way we live our lives day-to-day, these are unsettling times.

Many of us will feel anxious and unsure of how things will pan out. These feelings are normal. Managing your energy can help you take more control and keep the right balance in your life.





How can Personal Energy help?

Personal Energy (PE) is a system that helps you to identify those things that are most important to you for keeping your energy up and your mood stable, especially when life gets tough. We've been running the programme for many years within Bupa but even if you are not familiar with it, this guide will help you understand and apply some of the key elements.

The PE programme is about finding three or four things that you hold onto as a foundation for keeping your energy up. If your energy drops, other areas of life can suffer – mood, relationships, work effectiveness, wellbeing and happiness.

Start by finding your motivation

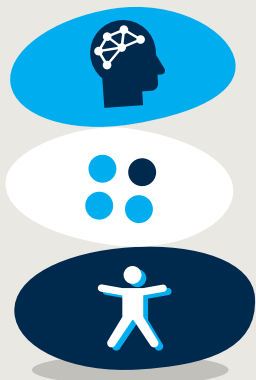
What's your motivation for keeping physically and mentally well now?

It might be staying in a good space mentally, to face the challenging times ahead. It might be recognising that life is going to become more challenging soon and wanting to get ready to support family, friends and colleagues.

Top tip

Find your individual motivation for being in a good place mentally – remind yourself of this every day





Where are you on the curve?

Self-awareness is critical to building resilience. With this in mind, check in where you are on the Personal Energy Curve during this time.

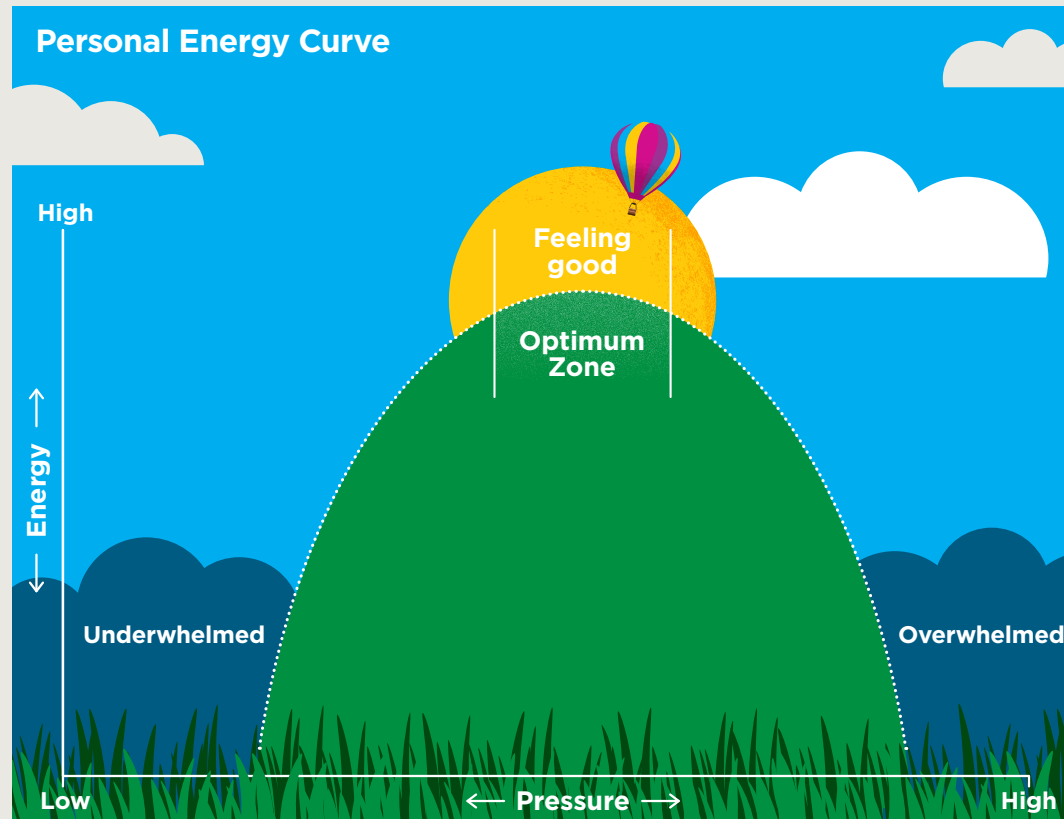
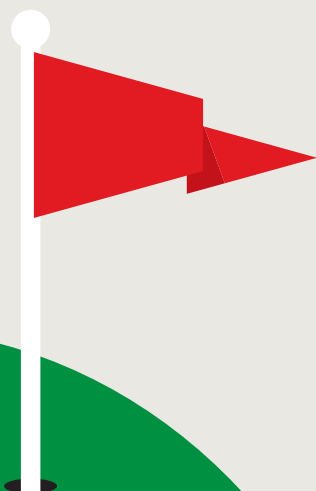
Optimum zone: feeling energised, up for the challenge, in control of things, and feeling well-balanced emotions.

When life gets more demanding, we can start to drift away from this zone.

Red flags: A red flag is a warning sign that you are slipping out of the optimum zone.

For example a red flag could be poor sleep, poor food choices, giving up exercise, irritability, impatience, checking news obsessively, a twitching eye, biting your nails or being unable to make decisions like you usually do.

Identify one or two red flags that act as warning signs that you are drifting away from the optimum zone. Consider what happens to your thoughts, feelings, behaviours and body when life gets more demanding. Red flags act as warning signals, both that life may be getting more demanding and that we need to strengthen our balancing system to get ourselves back to the good zone. The earlier we can respond positively to our red flags, the quicker we can get back on track. Knowing the red flags of people around us can help us to support them to stay energised too.



Top tip

Check in with where you are on the curve regularly and talk to others about where you are and how you are feeling

Share your red flags with the people you work and live with. Allow people close to you, family and colleagues to tell you when they spot signs you are drifting. Take it seriously and prioritise the few things that anchor you back into the good zone.

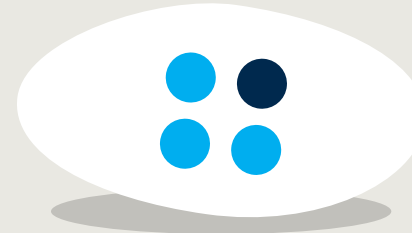
Three building blocks: Physiology, Choices and Mindset

The system has three core elements:



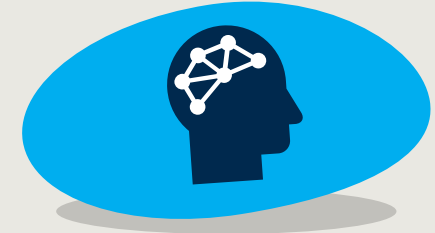
Physiology

Our energy, including our mood, effectiveness and ability to concentrate, is physiological. It is affected by exercise, diet, sleep, relaxation and connecting with friends and family. These are even more important in stressful times. Having a few non-negotiables helps us stay energised.



Choices

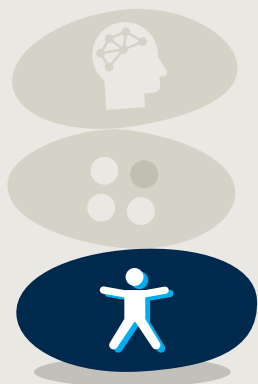
Learning to challenge where we have slipped into bad habits rather than making smart choices in all the things we do to preserve and boost our energy.



Mindset

Training ourselves to have a positive attitude and mindset will make a huge difference to our wellbeing.

▶ **Doing something in each of the three building blocks builds a balancing framework to protect us when life gets more demanding.**



Getting the **physiology** right

Exercise

Exercise stimulates chemicals that make you feel better. Just 20 to 30 minutes doing something that makes you slightly breathless will really help.

Downtime

What do you do to wind down and completely switch off? Breathing exercises. Mindfulness. Listening to relaxing music. Having a bath. Yoga. Reading. All of these will help reduce your adrenaline levels and stabilise your cortisol system. Just be in the moment.

Sleep

Try to get a good solid 7 hours. Get to bed at a reasonable time, have a good routine, by getting ready for bed and getting up at the same time each day.

Alcohol

Keep alcohol consumption low.

Social time

Connect with people who make you feel good and help you find perspective. Even in these stressful times, being able to laugh with friends is physiologically as powerful as exercise. Use technology to help connect virtually while you can't connect in person.

Relationship

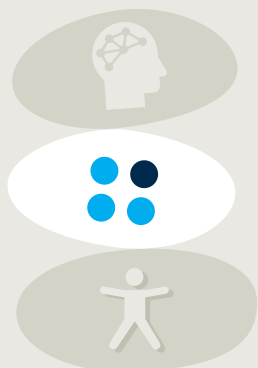
If you have a significant other, invest in your relationship. Make time for each other.



Top tip

Choose one or two things from the list above that will really anchor you

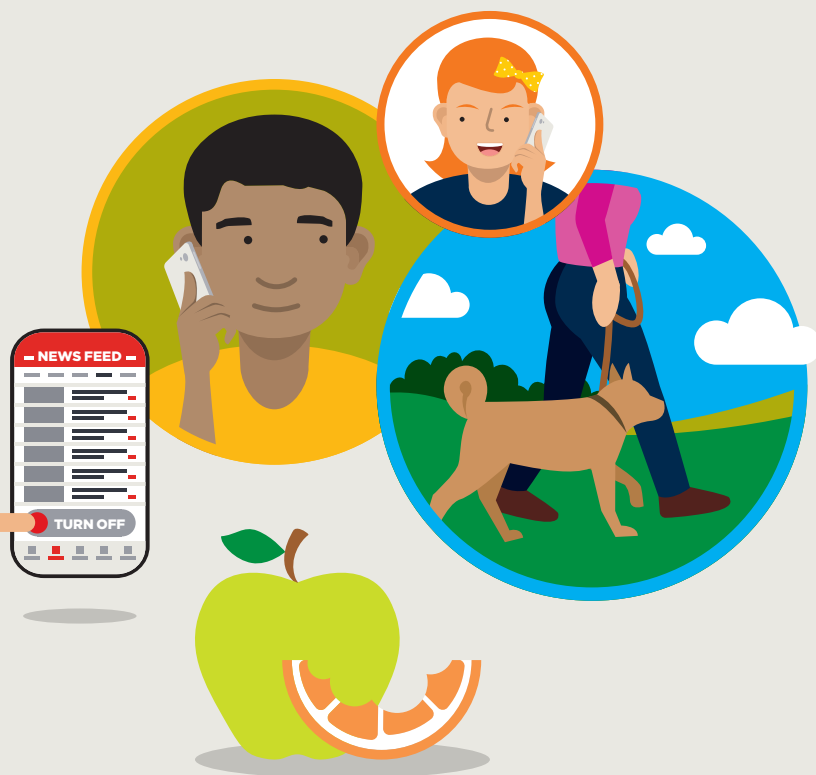
Prioritise them and don't drift away from them - despite increasing pressures. Look at your schedule and plan how you can ring fence time for things that give you energy.



Make considered choices

It might not feel like it but there are still things that you can take control of – you can still make smart and conscious choices.

For example, you can choose to speak to a friend or loved one more often rather than look at the news and social media. You can choose to get outside and have a walk every day or eat healthy foods.



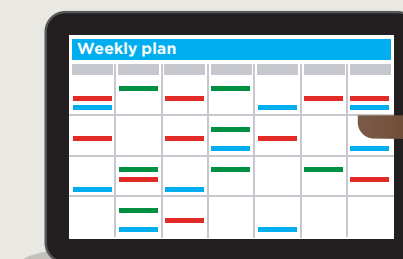
Here are some choices you can make to help protect your energy:

- Have a structure to your day and stick to it, balancing work, family and anything else you need to do. Let others in the household and at work know what your schedule is so everyone knows what to expect.
- Be clear about what you want to achieve today, have a focus and prioritise. Achieving something each day helps to build a sense of fulfilment and purpose.
- Have a routine at the end of your working day and don't get into the habit of staying at work later than you need to, working longer hours, watching TV with your laptop on your knees!
- Connect with colleagues, family and friends to help avoid feeling isolated.
- Be flexible, work with your team to help everyone make the current situation work for them.

Top tip

Make a plan for the week and stick to it

Let the plan dictate what you do, not how you feel. Being guided by your plan and not your feelings is a far stronger way of sticking to the things that give you energy.





It's all in your mindset

The degree to which you feel that you can stay in control of your life even though you can't stay in control of circumstances is down to mindset, and how you respond to the circumstances.

Don't let lack of control about this virus lead you to a mindset of helplessness about nearly everything.

How empowered do you feel to make life work for you? How can you take control of certain aspects of your life that matter?

Check if you've drifted to hopelessness - you could have inadvertently given up the very things that could keep you healthy and energised.

Five helpful and healthy mindsets

- 1 Empowerment** vs helplessness - **Acknowledge difficult feelings you might have** but also recognise that you can make choices, you can take control of things, you do have flexibility and autonomy. You can't alter the circumstances but what **can** you take control of? Even in the toughest environment, we have control over more than we think.
- 2 Challenge** vs threat - See things as a challenge and an opportunity rather than assume everything will be a disaster. There might be an opportunity to learn something new, adopt better ways to work, to do some good for others. Remind yourself of past successes.
- 3 Purpose** vs futility - Try to find purpose in every single thing you do rather than allowing your head to go to 'what's the point'. Don't rush through the day. Find purpose and meaning in even the small things.
- 4 Pragmatism** vs Perfectionism - Perfectionists tend to view life in binary way - either flawless or failed. Try to see that there's a big space between perfect and failure - think of it as a learning zone, accept mistakes, be kind to yourself. Avoid being overly self-critical when something goes wrong.
- 5 Permission** vs guilt - You need to give yourself permission to look after yourself. For you to be the best support you can to your students, family, friends and community you need to be in the best shape possible. That means letting go of guilt. Many people feel guilty when they are doing things just for them. You have a duty of care to yourself.

Top tip

Look ahead, envision the future

Imagine the future. Think about things that will make you smile, perhaps going out with friends, going to a family wedding, going on holiday, getting back to the gym. Have an image of that time in the future when we've got through this. This will pass, together we will get through this, learning new things, finding even better ways of doing things and supporting each other.

This guide was developed in partnership with Dr Bill Mitchell, the London based clinical psychologist designer of the PE programme, and author of 'Time to breathe: navigating life and work for energy, success and happiness', published by Bloomsbury.

