**Food, Mood and Health**

In difficult times when life is demanding and stressful, it is easy to become overwhelmed, and it’s so important to take care of yourself by supporting your own physical and emotional health – including nourishment.

A healthy balanced diet is important but nourishment for self-care is about more than just what we eat. Most people know what foods are needed to stay physically healthy, however *what you eat* and *when you eat* can also make a big difference to how you feel.

Improving your diet may help you to cope, by:

* Improving your mood
* Giving you energy
* Thinking more clearly

What about weight?

Most of us will have heard stories recently about people gaining weight during the pandemic, or may feel like we have gained a few pounds ourselves. However, if the past 2+ years has taught us anything, it is that we need to be kinder to ourselves.

Your weight does not need to define your health, or your self-worth. Your weight is determined by many things. These can include genes, dieting history, medication, and many other things that happen during life...including a pandemic and all that goes with it.

A healthy weight is the stable weight you achieve when you adopt healthy behaviours. These might be:

* Improving the quality, variety and amount of food you eat
* Eating in response to internal cues of hunger and fullness
* Recognising emotional eating and doing something different
* Having a social life
* Drinking alcohol within recognised limits
* Doing physical activity which you enjoy
* Building good self-worth, self-care and body respect

Your weight may go up and down from attempts to lose weight. This weight yo-yoing is not good for your health. Many people spend a lot of time, effort and money on trying to lose weight. It is better to be a stable weight by following healthy habits.Rather than 'dieting' think about the changes that you can make, and sustain, and notice how it makes you feel. Some of the options might be:

* **Improving what you eat:**
  + - Plenty of fruit and vegetables
    - Including oily fish, nuts and seeds
    - Trying more fibre foods – wholemeal bread, oats, peas, beans and lentils, high fibre breakfast cereals
* **Improving how you eat:**
  + - Eating when you’re physically hungry
    - Stopping when you’re full
    - Recognising when you’re eating because of how you feel
    - Having options to improve how you feel emotionally
* **Doing regular physical activity:**  
  Becoming more active can seem a daunting task if you’ve not enjoyed it in the past. Taking small steps to find enjoyable ways of moving, stretching and relaxing your body will help build a sense of vitality. Too often the missing ingredient in active living is fun! What activity do you feel better in yourself for doing? Do you want time alone or as part of a group? What makes activity fun for you? Could pain management techniques help? Look for something that will work for you.
* **Other things:**  
  Larger people are often stereotyped as not bothering about their health and given other negative characteristics. Everybody deserves respect, whatever their size, shape, fitness level, health status, eating patterns etc. Learning to look after yourself and protect yourself against these stereotypes may be difficult, but is important.

**Be compassionate**

Many foods or eating patterns hold stigma and judgement which can leave us feeling worthless and out of control. These feelings can drive reckless eating and make us feel worse. Try to remember there are no bad food choices. There is room for any food within a healthy balanced diet.

It is OK to eat foods that you consider unhealthy. We choose foods for many reasons, often beyond nutritional content. Food can help make us feel better when things around us feel bad, so acknowledge that you may have needed food soothing and that is ok.