- Psychotherapy / Mental health

Can creating art improve your mental wellbeing?

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After a year of various stay-athome orders, many of us have picked up new hobbies to help pass the time – such as painting, sketching or sewing.

Art can calm the mind

Creating art isn't just a way of filling up your weekends – it could also have a positive impact on your mental wellbeing. A new report from the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal College of Occupational Therapists says 'social prescribing' – where health professionals refer patients to non-clinical services, such as art classes, group gardening projects or playing football in a local team – could help combat the mental health fallout from the pandemic.

Speak to your GP if you have any questions about social prescribing or your mental health, but if you're keen for more moments of mindfulness in your day, art might be the way forward…

Art "is for you, and that's probably the most important thing", says Audrey. "When it comes to self-expression, the key is the self – it's for us to get those feelings out, it's for us to learn a little bit more about ourselves, and no one else needs to be part of that journey."

No matter how skilled an artist you are, ultimately "you've created something that's yours, you've got ownership of it - it's something that belongs to you and you've got that sense of pride", the psychologist explains.

Social prescribing recommends group activities like art classes, and Audrey says: "If we meet like-minded people, we get to chat, we expand on our social circle, we build on our skills – those are really positive elements for our wellbeing in general."

Particularly as loneliness is on the rise – according to the Office for National Statistics, 86% of women and 74% of men reported feeling lonely at the end of January – meeting new people could help combat this.