

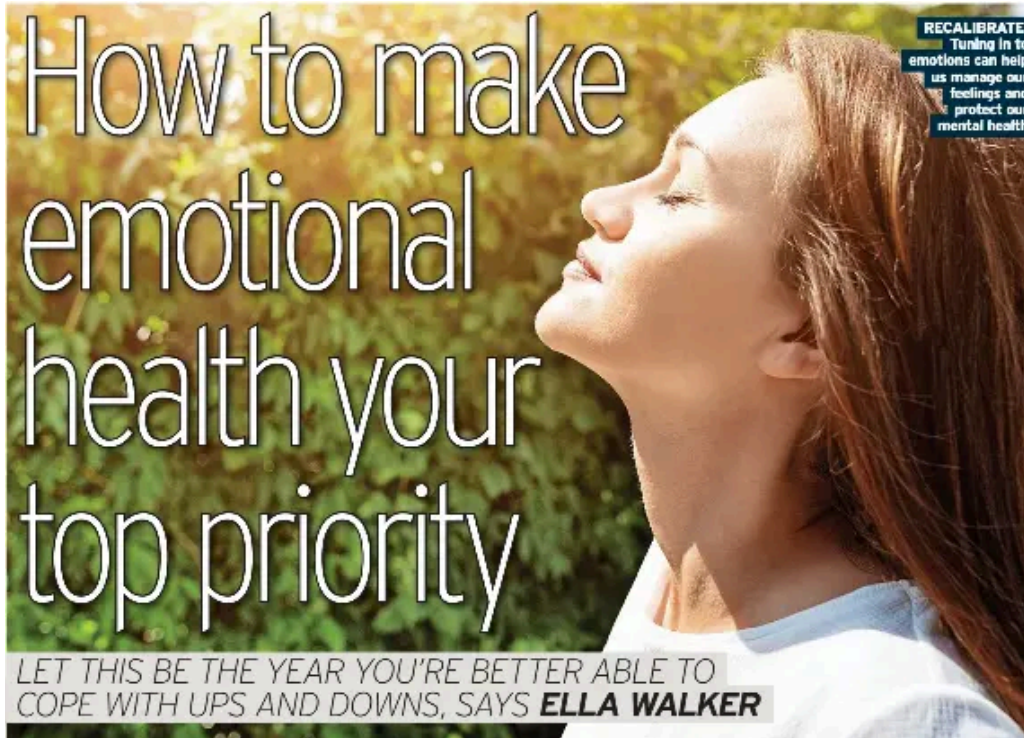
- Emotions / Mental health

## How to make emotional health your top priority

LET THIS BE THE YEAR YOU'RE BETTER ABLE TO COPE WITH UPS AND DOWNS, SAYS

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ALL the chat around 'new year, new you' can be incredibly depressing.



Pressure to go on an extreme diet, push your body to the limit at the gym and cut out anything tasty can make the start of the year an ordeal.

With all that focus on how we look physically, our emotional health often gets bypassed, or forgotten altogether.

So why not reflect, recalibrate and put in place strategies that will help you manage your feelings and protect your mental health; strategies that will have an impact long after you lose interest in avoiding cake.

“Emotional health refers to our ability to recognise, understand and manage our emotions in a balanced way,” explains Dr Elena Tourni, a consultant psychologist and co-founder of The Chelsea Psychology Clinic.

“It’s about being in tune with our feelings, responding to them in a healthy manner, and coping effectively with stress, setbacks and life’s challenges.

“Emotional health also means having the resilience to recover from difficult situations, maintaining a sense of wellbeing and building positive relationships with others.”

Here’s how to make 2025 the year your emotional health becomes a top priority...

Set an ‘emotions goal’ for 2025

“We often set goals for our physical health, but how about setting one for your emotional wellbeing?” suggests Claire Fitzsimmons, emotions coach practitioner and founder of If Lost Start

Here.

“This could be believing that your feelings matter this year or taking time to notice them when they show up.

“It could be to allow for a whole range of your emotions over the next year, and not just happiness – often our default choice – so we can feel more fulfilled and connected to ourselves and others.”

Practice self-compassion

It can be hard to find time for yourself, but a little bit of self-care can make a huge difference.

“Mindfulness helps you stay present, reducing stress and anxiety,” says Dr Touroni. “Taking a few minutes each day to check in with yourself – through deep breathing or mindful moments – can improve emotional regulation.

“Being kind to yourself during tough times is also crucial; remember it’s OK to feel difficult emotions, you don’t have to be perfect.”

Remember to breathe

“When faced with a challenging situation, big or small, controlled breathing techniques help regulate the nervous system, lower cortisol levels and promote the release of feel-good hormones like serotonin,” says Jamie Clements, breathwork practitioner and founder of The Breath Space.

“By improving oxygen flow and reducing stress, breathwork can increase energy, enhance mental clarity, and create a sense of calm.”

Not sure where to start? Jamie recommends the 4-4-8 technique: inhale for four seconds, hold for four, then slowly exhale for eight.

Invest in people that make you happy

Whether it’s chatting over coffee with a mate, going for a swim with your sister, having an after-work drink with a colleague or calling your nan, building and maintaining strong, supportive relationships “is essential for emotional wellbeing,” says Dr Touroni.

“Spending time with people who lift you up and who you can be vulnerable with helps you feel understood and valued.

“Social connections are one of the strongest predictors of long-term emotional resilience.”

Develop healthy routines

You’ve got to get the basics right. “Maintaining regular routines that include exercise, good sleep and time for relaxation can help balance emotional health,” says Dr Touroni.

“Identifying healthy coping strategies like journaling, talking to someone you trust, or engaging in a creative hobby can make a big difference when stress levels rise.”

Don’t ‘fix’ negative emotions...

If you try to brush things off when they get tough, this year, consider sitting with those emotions.

“Negative emotions are a normal part of life, but learning how to manage them is key to emotional health,” says Dr Touroni.

“Acknowledging and validating your emotions is the first step, don’t push them away or try to ‘fix’ them too quickly.”

If you’re struggling or feel overwhelmed, seek help.

“A friend, therapist, or counsellor can help you gain perspective and find ways to navigate challenging feelings,” she adds.

... in fact, avoid labelling emotions

Reframing how you see emotions can make them easier to negotiate.

“Shift from seeing emotions as good or bad, but see them as messages,” says Claire. “They often tell us when a value hasn’t been met, a boundary has been crossed, or even when something matters to us.

“Try to shift from judging what you feel to getting curious about what you feel. We often push our emotions down because we don’t have time for them, but they offer valuable guidance on what we need.

“Being in contact with them can ultimately help us with everything from decision-making to boundary-setting.”

Be patient with major life events

“Big life changes, whether it’s a new job, moving to a different area, or going through personal transitions, can be exciting but also stressful,”

Spending time with people who lift you up and who you can be vulnerable with helps you feel understood and valued

Dr Elena Touroni on investing time in people who make you happy

says Dr Touroni. “The key is to give yourself time to adjust and acknowledge that change often comes with a mix of emotions.

“It’s important to remain flexible and patient with yourself during this period.

“Focus on the positive aspects of the change and what you can learn from it. Talking things through with others who understand can offer support and remind you you’re not alone navigating the transition.”

Embrace change

“Be open to change and willing to adjust your perspective or approach,” says health psychologist Ravi Gill. “Release the need to control everything and focus on adapting to what’s in front of you.

“View the change as an opportunity for personal or professional development, even if it feels challenging initially. Get used to asking yourself, ‘What can I learn from this experience?’”

She adds that it can help to “recognise the aspects of your life that remain stable and draw strength from them.

“Accept that not everything can be controlled and focus your energy on things within your influence.”