

# Your Health

 Health Partners

DECEMBER 2023 NEWSLETTER

## CELEBRATING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

*plus tips on keeping  
mentally fit  
this winter*



It is important to understand, support and celebrate diversity and disability. In this issue of *Your Health*, we aim to raise awareness of the multitude of positive differences, strengths and unique abilities that individuals with disability can bring to the work environment. We are all different, and we are all worthy of respect and compassion.



## Celebrating Individuals with Disabilities

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPWD) is a globally recognised event that highlights the importance of inclusivity and accessibility for people with disabilities.

This day is observed annually on December 3rd and aims to increase awareness, promote understanding and celebrate the achievements and contributions of people with disabilities.

Founded in 1992 by the United Nations (UN), the day was formed to outline and reiterate the UN's commitment to calling for the creation of inclusive, accessible and sustainable societies and communities and to promote the wellbeing and welfare of people living with disabilities.

IDPWD is about:

- **CELEBRATION** – to recognise and value the diversity of our global community, and to cherish the role we all play, regardless of our abilities;
- **LEARNING** – to understand and learn from the experiences of people living with a disability;

- **OPTIMISM** – to look towards the future and the creation of a world where a person is not characterised by their disabilities, but by their abilities;

- **ACTION** – where all people, organisations, agencies and charities not only show their support for IDPWD, but also take on a commitment to create a world characterised by equal human rights.

In the UK, about 16 million people are disabled, with 23% working age adults. It is essential to understand the importance of this day to better support friends, neighbours and colleagues with disabilities.

### How to support someone with a disability or hidden condition:

- **EDUCATE YOURSELF:** Educate yourself on the different types of disabilities, including

physical, psychological, intellectual and neurotypes. This will help you to understand the challenges people may face and how you can support them better;

- **BE SUPPORTIVE:** Be supportive and offer help if or when needed. This can include offering to help them with tasks that may be challenging for them;

- **COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY:** Communicate in a way that works best for them. This may include using alternative forms of communication, such as sign language or Braille.

Inclusive language is an important consideration when talking about disability, but it is important not to avoid conversations about disability if you lack confidence with this. Take time to educate yourself on inclusive language so you can

avoid using unhelpful words or phrases. Always remember that the language individuals use to describe themselves is a very personal thing; make sure to listen to what individuals tell you about how they identify, and if you are ever in doubt, it is always best to ask.

IDPWD recognises visible and invisible disabilities, to promote the importance of inclusion in life and the workplace.

### EXAMPLES OF DISABILITIES CAN INCLUDE:

- **Physical Disability:** The common characteristic in physical disability is that some aspect of a person's physical functioning, usually their mobility, dexterity or stamina, is affected. There are many different kinds of physical disability, e.g. cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinsons, cystic fibrosis, asthma and heart disease, and a wide variety of situations that people experience.

People with physical disability are usually experts in their own needs and will understand the impact of their disability. Never assume that they require or want help, but if you think they might, then always ask first. When speaking, be at the same level as they are. Never assume that a person with a physical disability also has an intellectual disability. And always ask permission before touching a person's wheelchair or mobility aid.

- **Vision Loss:** A sensory disability, refers to significant reduction or complete loss of vision. This may affect one or both eyes and may result from various causes, including eye diseases, congenital conditions, injuries or degenerative disorders. The degree of vision loss can vary, ranging from mild visual impairments to total blindness, where an individual has no light perception or cannot perceive any visual stimuli.

Vision loss can have a profound impact on an individual's daily life, as it affects their ability to perceive and interpret visual information, navigate their environment, read printed materials and engage in activities that rely on sight. People with

vision loss often use alternative methods of communication and navigation, such as Braille, screen readers, white canes and/or guide dogs.

Inclusive and accessible practices, such as providing accessible technology, tactile materials, audio descriptions and accommodating specific needs, can help individuals with vision loss maximise their independence and work autonomously.

■ **Hearing Loss:** A sensory disability characterised by a reduced or complete inability to perceive sounds in one or both ears, which may range from mild to profound. Deaf individuals, and those experiencing hearing loss, may face challenges in their ability to detect and interpret

auditory information, including speech, environmental sounds and other forms of communication.

Hearing loss can be caused by various factors, including genetic predisposition, exposure to loud noises, ear infections, aging and medical conditions. The degree of hearing loss can vary significantly among individuals, impacting their ability to engage in verbal communication, understand spoken language and, potentially, to participate fully in social and environmental interactions.

It is essential to approach deaf individuals and those with hearing loss with sensitivity, understanding and accommodation to ensure that they have equal access to communication and can participate fully in various aspects of life. Affirming and

inclusive practices, such as providing sign language interpreters, captioning, assistive listening devices and maintaining clear and effective communication strategies, can significantly enhance the quality of life and opportunities for deaf individuals and those with hearing loss.

■ **Mental Health Condition:** Mental illness is a general term for a group of illnesses that affect the mind or brain. These illnesses, which include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and personality disorders, affect the way a person thinks, feels and acts. A person with a mental health condition may experience difficulty concentrating, which can sometimes be the result of medication. Try to avoid overly

stressful situations wherever possible so that their condition is not exacerbated.

■ **Intellectual Disability:** A person with an intellectual disability may have significant limitations in the skills needed to live and work in the community, including difficulties with communication, self-care, social skills, safety and self-direction.

Severity in intellectual disability varies, and some individuals can work in a supported environment. The most important thing to remember is to treat each person as an individual and not assume anything.

**WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND DIFFERENCES OF NEUROTYPES?**

■ **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** ADHD individuals can be extremely creative, out-of-the-box thinkers, have excellent communication skills and periods of high focus and efficiency.

However, this penchant for divergent thinking can occasionally lead to attentional differences while focusing on a single task.

Natural enthusiasm and passion can make ADHDers highly engaged in numerous interests and ideas. While this enthusiasm is a strength, it may occasionally result in difficulty sustaining attention on one task when their mind buzzes with excitement about other intriguing possibilities.

Due to the structural brain differences and brain chemistry, this can cause transient differences with executive functioning including memory, concentrating on certain tasks, time management and emotional regulation.

■ **Autism:** Autistic people are often highly logical, have good attention to detail and can be excellent at recognising patterns. They have the ability to harness hyperfocus and singular thinking.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. This will look differently to every autistic individual, but these differences may relate to their sensory experience and communication, with autistic





individuals often valuing honesty and direct language, with attention to detail. This can sometimes mean there is an increased risk of burnout for autistic people.

■ **Developmental coordination disorder (DCD/Dyspraxia):** Dyspraxic individuals are often creative and very adept at devising strategies to overcome challenges. DCD can have an impact on their gross and fine motor skills, spatial awareness and organisation. This can result in differences in coordination and balance, as well as challenges related to planning and time management.

■ **Dyslexia:** Dyslexia is on a continuum, sliding scale, so the presentation is very unique. Dyslexic individuals have differing abilities, with strengths in creative, problem solving and communication skills and may present with some differences in literacy skills, such as spelling, reading, and processing information. Generally, a dyslexic cognitive profile shown as a graph, will be 'spiky' when compared to a neurotypical cognitive profile, highlighting the different thinking patterns with the dyslexic mind.

■ **Dyscalculia:** Individuals with dyscalculia often have strong strategic thinking abilities, creativity skills and a preference for words. Dyscalculia impacts how people see numbers and the ability to acquire and use mathematical skills in everyday life. This can mean individuals may experience impacts to their understanding of finances, reversing or transposing numbers and understanding/interpreting the passing of time.

■ **Tourette Syndrome:** Touretters – an identity-first term for people with Tourette Syndrome (TS) – can have strengths with creativity, be very empathic and be high-achieving individuals. Touretters can experience tics, repeated movements and sounds that are involuntary. These can be motor tics or vocal tics and can be simple or complex, for example: eye blinking, jumping, coughing and uttering words or phrases out of context.

**HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

By acknowledging our individual differences and promoting inclusive practices, we

can create environments that empower individuals to thrive and reach their full potential.


Neurodivergent individuals and disabled individuals can benefit from a range of accommodations/adjustments in the workplace. If you would like to seek further support, a workplace needs assessment will help to consider what accommodations/adjustments may support you.

You can support people around you by:

- Educating yourself and raising awareness of disabilities and neurotypes;
- Being aware that everybody is unique and will have different experiences;
- Asking people what their communication preferences are;
- Asking people how you can best support them.

IDPWD is an essential awareness day that highlights the importance of inclusivity and accessibility for people with disabilities.

As an individual, you can help support your friends and colleagues with disabilities and create an inclusive environment wherever

you are. As a society, it is vital we live and act inclusively to ensure everyone feels valued and supported. 



*The word 'neurotype' refers to a type of brain, with consideration of neurobiological (brain) differences, which present as certain traits – such as the attentional differences of ADHD, for example. The word 'neurodivergent' is used to describe communities and/or individuals with certain neurobiological differences and often refers to people of a certain neurotype, such as autism, dyscalculia, ADHD, etc.*

*Some Resources*

- **International Day of Persons with Disabilities:** This site provides detailed information about IDPWD activities and how to get involved.
- **Disability Rights UK:** A charity that provides information and advice to disabled people in the UK. They also offer training and consultancy services to organisations to improve accessibility and inclusivity.
- **Scope:** A charity that provides support and advice to disabled people and their families. They offer a range of services, e.g. employment support, information and advice, and community support.
- **The National Autistic Society:** A charity that provides information, advice, and support to autistic people and their

families. They also offer training and consultancy services to organisations to improve their understanding of autism.

- **British Dyslexia Association:** The BDA is the voice of dyslexic people. As an organisation, it aims to influence government and other institutions to promote a dyslexia-friendly society that enables dyslexic people of all ages to reach their full potential.
- **The ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity:** They offer support to ADHD individuals and other neurotypes, as well as training for education, businesses and healthcare.
- **Tourettes Action:** This is a support and research charity for Touretters and their families.

## Tips on Staying Positive and Healthy this Winter



As the winter months approach, many individuals may experience a decline in their mood and mental health. This can be especially challenging during the winter holidays, as the pressure to be happy and social can become overwhelming. However, there are many things you can do to boost your mood and wellbeing during this time.

Here are some self-care tips to help you improve your mental health during the winter months.

- **Get outside:** Even if it's cold outside, getting some fresh air and natural light can do wonders for your mood. Try to spend at least 10-15 minutes outside each day, whether it's going for a walk or sitting in a park.

- **Stay active:** Exercise is a proven mood booster, so try to incorporate some physical activity into your daily routine. This could be as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or going for a run or yoga class.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Mindfulness can help you reduce stress and anxiety and improve your overall mental health. Try practicing mindfulness meditation or simply taking a few minutes each day to focus on your breath and be present in the moment.
- **Keep a gratitude journal:** Start the month of December with a gratitude journal, writing down at least one thing you are grateful for each and every day. Keep it

simple and true to you, and you might find at the end of the month you are more aware and appreciative of the good things in your life and around you.

- **Connect with others:** Social connections are essential for our mental health, so make an effort to connect with friends and family during the winter months especially. This could be as simple as calling or texting someone or making plans to meet up for coffee or a meal.
- **Treat yourself:** Self-care is crucial for our mental health, so make sure to take time for yourself. This could be anything from taking a relaxing bath to treating yourself to a massage or a night out with friends.


### Try to avoid:

- Relying on texting, messaging or emailing people – hearing someone's voice and spending time in someone's company, face

to face, is important for bonding;

- Only spending time in the gym – making the time to incorporate outside exercise and movement into your daily routine will help improve your physical and mental health;
- Dwelling on what you don't have in your life – focus instead on what you have and enjoy it!

It's important to remember that mental health is just as important as physical health. If you're struggling with your mental health, don't be afraid to seek help from a mental health professional. There are many resources available, including therapy, counselling and support groups.

In conclusion, the winter months can be challenging. If memories, thoughts or judgements arise, label them as a thought and refocus your attention. 



**SIGHT**

Spend a few moments tuning in to your experience of sight, paying attention to familiar items, people and places around you. Pay attention to colour, form, movement, shape. Notice the facial expressions of others. If you have a pet, focus your sight on them. Try to capture as much detail as if taking a picture. If your mind drifts, label the thought and return to your senses.



**TOUCH**

Spend a few moments tuning in to your experience of touch, some of which may have become automated – flicking the switch on the kettle, swiping your phone, holding your toothbrush. Expand your reflections as touch isn't just through our fingertips but through our feet as we walk, air on our face, or pressure sitting or lying down. Notice your movement throughout the day. Is it fluid, slow, painful?

When falling asleep tonight, notice the background sounds, the sensations as you're lying in bed, see the darkness when your eyes are closed. If your mind drifts, label the thought and return to your senses.



**MINDFULNESS EXERCISES**

Mindfulness might have a happy side effect of feeling relaxed, but did you know the aim of the mindfulness is to develop openness and awareness to your internal and external experiences? Mindfulness can be a useful tool when you're feeling stressed as it allows us to intentionally focus our attention elsewhere from the worries, stresses and strains of life.

Play about with some of the exercises and find your personal preferences for which activities or senses you most enjoy.



**TASTE**

Spend a few moments tuning in to your experience of smell and taste. Try mindfully eating a favoured food. Place down cutlery between every mouthful, put down your phone, switch off the television or radio. Savour the taste, notice your saliva. Notice the texture and smell. Try not to swallow your food until it has broken down completely in your mouth. If your mind drifts, label the thought and return to your senses. Memories or judgements about self, label them as a thought and refocus your attention.



**SMELL**

Spend a few moments tuning in to your experience of smell. What scents are you exposed to throughout the day? Are they natural or synthetic? Do you have an aversion to certain scents? We often use scented products throughout the day – cosmetics, soaps, washing powder, washing liquid, cleaning materials, air fresheners, candles. Perhaps you have an intolerance to synthetic scents. We may live in area where the air is polluted. Seek out an aroma that is agreeable and observe mindfully. If memories, thoughts or judgements arise, label them as a thought and refocus your attention.



**SOUND**

Spend a few moments tuning in to sounds around you, sounds which may have become background noise. Electronics, pipes, sounds from outdoors, from neighbours etc. One example may be when driving.

We often don't pay attention to the sound the car makes except for when we notice something different, then we pay close attention – turning down the radio, opening the window, revving the engine? Try paying mindful attention to the sounds of your car next time you drive and record what you notice. If you don't drive, choose another familiar activity such as cycling, boiling the kettle, switching on the central heating, running the shower or bath.



**MOVEMENT**

Movement can often throw up a barrier as we might equate it with exercise and all sorts of negative judgements that go along with that. Try this simple breathing exercise perhaps as a way to focus on smaller movements. There are exercises such as mindful walking, but it can be helpful to start small and build up.

Take a comfortable, seated position. Elongate your spine, holding an upright, elegant and open posture. Focus your attention on your breath without trying to change it – just focus on the flow of air in and out. Notice the difference in temperature of cool air as you inhale and warm air as you exhale. Guide your attention to your breath and imagine your tummy rising and falling as you inhale and exhale.



**REMINDER:** *It might be tricky to maintain focus, but it is like a muscle, the more you practice, the easier it becomes. Start off small as you would with any training programme and build up. Increased frequency (more than time spent) may help.*

**NEXT ISSUE:**

- Emotional Health
- Alcohol Awareness

At Health Partners we offer a full range of tailored health and wellbeing services.

**Our thinking is innovative.** We constantly develop new responses and tools designed to address the health and wellbeing challenges that face your business and people.

**Our commitment is total.** We invest in our services, creating new ones and keeping in step with every client. We constantly explore new ways of working and make no compromises in the quality of our services.

**Simply put, we are here to help people be their best.**