Living with a chronic illness

Your 6 Ways to Wellbeing

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Living with a chronic illness, whether it's asthma, arthritis, diabetes, long COVID, MS, chronic pain, cancer, Parkinson's, ME, mental illness or something else, can feel exhausting, isolating, and unpredictable.

Some days you might be managing just fine. Other days, you might feel overwhelmed by fatigue, appointments, medication, or side effects. Your wellbeing matters every day - not just the "good" ones.

These six wellbeing tools can help you stay connected to yourself and others, even through the challenges of long-term health conditions. You don't have to try them all at once, just start with what feels possible.

Read on to find out more and try them out for yourself.

Your Wellbeing Traffic Lights

For each of the 6 Ways to Wellbeing, think about how you feel right now. Then choose a colour below:

Red		**This is an area I find difficult or I'm not doing much of at the moment.**
Amber		**I'm doing some things in this area, but there's room for improvement.**
Green		**I feel confident and positive in this area.**

Focus first on Red or Amber areas. Small steps-like checking in with a friend or taking a short walk-can grow into something meaningful over time.

There's no right or wrong answer. This is just a tool to help you reflect and take positive steps for your wellbeing.

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Your Wellbeing Traffic Lights

Feeling in control of money reduces stress. This could mean making a budget, getting advice, or taking small steps to plan ahead.

Paying attention to what's around us helps us feel present. You might notice nature, savour a meal, or pause to breathe.

Building strong relationships helps us feel supported. This could mean spending time with family, friends, or joining a group.

Learning new things keeps our minds active and builds confidence. Try a new hobby, recipe, or skill.

Moving our bodies boosts mood and energy. It doesn't have to be sport - it could be walking, dancing, or stretching.

Helping others gives us purpose and joy. You could volunteer, offer your time, or do something kind for a neighbour.

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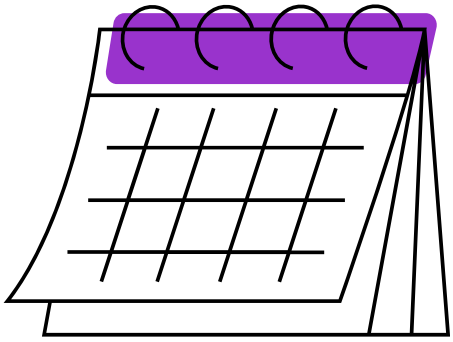
Financial wellbeing

Help is available - you don't have to manage everything on your own.

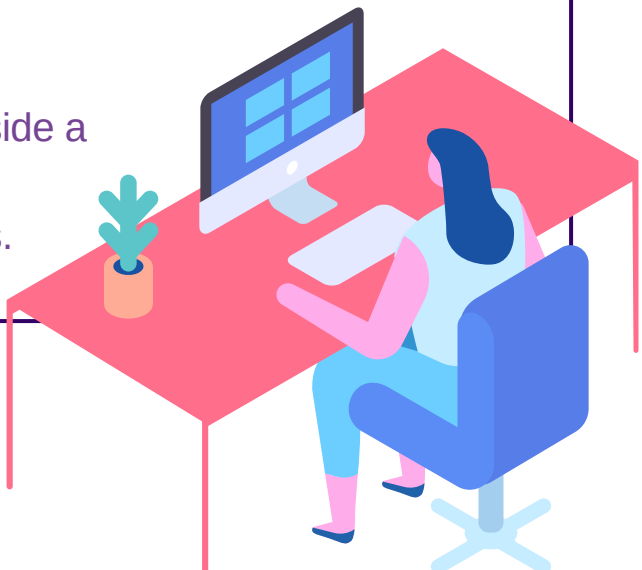


Money worries can add extra stress to the challenges of living with a chronic illness. The uncertainty of managing work, benefits, or medical costs can take a toll on both emotional and physical wellbeing.

Financial wellbeing isn't just about numbers it's about feeling safe, informed, and supported. Taking small, manageable steps can help you regain a sense of control and ease, one bit at a time. You don't have to figure it all out alone - help is available.

Financial Wellbeing

- Speak to a welfare rights adviser or local Citizens Advice about what you're entitled to.
- Keep a simple budget to help you feel more in control - start small, even 10 minutes a week.
- Look for free or discounted community services, prescriptions, and travel support.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help - financial stress isn't a personal failure.
- Plan for extra costs. Consider setting aside a small buffer for medical supplies, appointments, or unexpected expenses.



Financial wellbeing worksheet

Reminder

You are not alone and there is help available. You deserve financial stability and peace of mind.

Use this space to think about ways to feel more in control of your money and reduce stress.

- Who could you reach out to for financial guidance or support?
- What small step could you take this week to feel a bit more secure or organised?

Take notice

Even in difficult moments, small pauses can bring a bit of calm.

Chronic illness can fill your attention with pain, worry, or exhaustion. It's understandable if you feel consumed by what hurts or what's difficult. But even in those moments, tiny pauses of awareness, like noticing the light through your window or the sound of a familiar, reconnect you with the present moment. Taking notice isn't about ignoring pain; it's about allowing yourself to experience small glimmers of calm or comfort alongside it.

Take Notice

- Spot something comforting. Pause to notice a sound, a colour, or a scent — even a cup of tea or birdsong outside can give a small boost.
- Keep a short journal. Write down little things that make your day easier or brighter, no matter how small.
- Use breathing or grounding techniques. When anxiety or pain spikes, try slow breaths, focus on your senses, or notice five things around you to stay present.
- Celebrate small wins. Getting dressed, attending an appointment, taking a rest - all these are achievements and worth noticing.
- Notice changes in energy. Pay attention to when you feel tired or strong and plan activities around your natural rhythms.

Take notice worksheet

Reminder

Even in pain or discomfort, moments of beauty, comfort, and calm are still possible.

Use this space to explore ways to be more mindful and aware of the present moment.

- When in your day do you feel most grounded or at ease?
- How can you remind yourself to pause and take notice, even briefly?

Connect

Reach out in ways that feel right for you – you're not alone in this.

When you're living with a chronic illness, it's easy to feel disconnected from friends, from your old routines, even from the version of yourself you once were. Fatigue, pain, or uncertainty can make socialising feel like another task on the to-do list. But connection doesn't have to mean constant interaction or large gatherings.

It's about maintaining a sense of belonging and being reminded that your life still has shared meaning and warmth. Even quiet, gentle connections can have a powerful effect on wellbeing.

Ways to Connect

- Message a friend or loved one when you have energy, just a simple "thinking of you" is enough.
- Connect with others who "get it" - whether that's online forums, support groups, or local meet-ups.
- Let someone you trust know how you're really doing. Being honest can lift some of the weight.
- Ask for connection in a way that works for you, like short check-ins or voice notes if you're too tired for long chats.
- Attending a local group can help you feel less alone. Many community centres, libraries, and health groups in West Lothian run gentle social drop-ins where there is no pressure to talk or perform.
- Notice when connection makes you feel steadier. Even a few minutes of kind conversation can remind you that you are not going through this alone.

Connect worksheet

Reminder

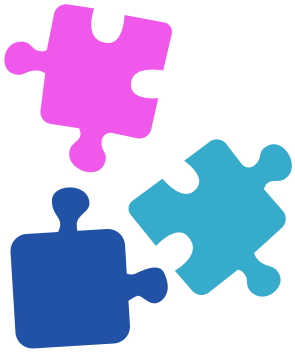
You don’t have to be the “strong one” all the time. Real connection includes being seen as you are.

Use the space below to explore ways you can connect with others. Think about what works for you and add your own ideas.

- Who in your life helps you feel seen and accepted as you are?
- How do you like to connect when you’re low on energy (text, voice note, short call, etc.)?

Keep lerning

You're still growing and adapting every day - that's real learning.



Living with a chronic illness often means becoming an expert in adaptation - learning how to manage symptoms, advocate for yourself, and navigate healthcare systems. But learning isn't only about survival. It can also be a source of joy and curiosity that reconnects you with parts of yourself beyond illness.

Learning can open windows when other doors feel closed, reminding you that your mind and creativity remain alive and capable.

Keep Learning

- Watch a short documentary, read an article, or listen to a podcast on something you enjoy.
- Learn more about your condition if it helps you feel informed and empowered.
- Pick up a gentle hobby like puzzles, writing, crafts, or learning a new recipe.
- Learn how to advocate for your needs in healthcare, work, or relationships.
- Look for local workshops or groups. Community centres, libraries, or support organisations in West Lothian offer wellbeing sessions, relaxed groups, or creative classes.
- Celebrate learning in your own way. Even recognising what helps you rest, what makes symptoms worse, or what brings a bit of comfort is meaningful learning.

Keep learning worksheet

Reminder

You are still growing and adapting every day and that in itself is a kind of learning.

Use this space to think about ways to try new things and keep your mind active.

- What's something you've learned about yourself since living with your condition?
- What helps you stay curious, even when things feel hard?

Be active

Move gently, rest deeply — both are ways to care for your body.

Chronic illness can dramatically change your relationship with your body. Some days, movement feels like freedom; on others, it feels impossible. But being active isn't about pushing yourself to meet a standard - it's about finding a rhythm that fits your current capacity.

Be Active

- Stretch gently while lying or sitting. Even small movements can ease tension.
- If possible, take a short walk or get outside for a change of scenery.
- Explore low-impact movement like chair yoga, hydrotherapy, or tai chi.
- Honour rest as part of activity, it's just as valid and important.
- Move to your rhythm. Notice when your energy is lower or higher throughout the day and plan movement around those patterns.
- Start where you are. Some days active might mean a slow walk. Other days, it might mean sitting up in bed and breathing deeply. Both are valid.

Be active worksheet

Reminder

All movement counts, but so does stillness. You know your limits and trust yourself.

Use this space to think about ways you can move more and stay active.

- What kinds of movement help your body feel supported or soothed?
- How do you know when your body needs rest?

Give

Your empathy and lived experience are gifts — even on hard days.

When you're managing a chronic condition, it can feel like your energy is always being used just to get through the day. You might feel like you have nothing left to give and that's okay.

But giving doesn't have to mean overextending yourself. It can mean offering a kind word, sharing your lived experience, or practising self-compassion. Giving connects us to others and reminds us of our value, even when our capacity looks different than it once did.

Give

- Offer a kind word to someone else who's struggling -it might be exactly what they need.
- Share a tip, story or moment from your experience (if and when you feel able) - your voice matters.
- Be present in a conversation, even if it's just a short message or emoji.
- Show kindness and patience to yourself. Self-compassion *is* a meaningful way of giving.
- Look for small ways to be part of your community. This might mean chatting with a neighbour, leaving a kind comment online, or supporting local groups gently when you can.

Give worksheet

Reminder

Even if you feel worn out, your presence, your empathy, and your lived experience are gifts. You still have value and you still have something to give, just as you are.

Use this space to explore ways you can help or support others.

- In what ways do you already give to others, even on difficult days?
- How can you show yourself the same kindness and patience you'd offer a friend?

The 6 Ways to Wellbeing

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Final Thoughts

You didn't choose your condition, but you can choose to be gentle with yourself as you live with it. Your worth isn't measured by your productivity, energy level, or diagnosis.

You are still you, still connected, capable, and deserving of wellbeing.

Even one small step can be a radical act of self-care. Start where you are.

And don't keep it to yourself! Share this guide with friends, family, or neighbours. We all face challenges, and sometimes just knowing someone else is trying too can be incredibly reassuring. When we support each other, we build stronger, more compassionate communities - and that's good for everyone's wellbeing.

For more ideas, local resources, and community support, visit:

Your thoughts...

This space is yours. Use it to jot down ideas, reflections, or anything that comes to mind as you explore the Six Ways to Wellbeing.

There's no right or wrong way to do it. It's simply a space to pause, reflect, and capture whatever feels helpful in the moment.

Your thoughts...

Stay in touch

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