

Researchers drill down to the core of wellbeing worldwide

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Researchers at SAHMRI and Flinders University have conducted the largest ever meta-analysis of wellbeing studies from around the world to answer the question, "What's the best way to build personal wellbeing?".

The analysis included 400+ clinical trials involving more than 50,000 participants. Researchers divided people into three main groups, those in generally [good health](#), those with [physical illness](#) and those with mental [illness](#).

They found it is possible to build the wellbeing of all individuals, but Mr Joep Van Agteren, Co-lead at the SAHMRI Wellbeing and Resilience Centre, says there's no one-size-fits-all solution.

"During stressful and uncertain periods in our lives, pro-actively working on our mental health is crucial to help mitigate the risk of mental and physical illness," Mr Van Agteren said.

"Our research suggests there are numerous psychological approaches people should experiment with to determine what works for them."

Practicing mindfulness, using techniques such as meditation and conscious breathing, was found to be effective at increasing wellbeing across the three groups.

Positive psychological interventions, including working on your sense of purpose, performing small acts of kindness and keeping a gratitude journal were shown to be effective, but only when done in combination, but not individually.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) proved to be beneficial for many with mental illness, while acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) was most useful for those in generally good health.

Co-author, Mr Matthew Iasiello from SAHMRI says all the interventions share a common need for consistent and prolonged practice for them to be effective in improving wellbeing.

"Just trying something once or twice isn't enough to have a measurable impact. Regardless of what method people are trying out, they need to stick at it for weeks and months at a time for it to have a real effect," Mr Iasiello said.

Professor Michael Kyrios from the Órama Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing at Flinders University says the study shows that in addition to seeking out professional help when distressed, there are many practical steps people can take to improve their wellbeing and prevent [mental health](#) problems.

"Implementing such interventions can be done safely for individuals on their own or in a group format, either in person or online," Prof Kyrios said.

"It is therefore potentially a cost-effective addition to current referral pathways and treatment methods."

Researchers believe these results highlight the need for a change of tactics in how society cares for people's wellbeing, whether they're living with a [mental illness](#) or not.

"We need to take everyone's wellbeing seriously and ensure we're taking the necessary steps to improve mental and physical [health](#) so we can prevent future complications for ourselves and keep healthcare costs down," Prof Kyrios said.

The researchers, as part of the new SAHMRI and Flinders collaborative lab, the "Be Well Innovation Lab," will continue the meta-analysis year on year to build on the evidence and ensure it stays up to date.

The data has been used to form the foundation of the "Be Well Plan," a [wellbeing](#) program that is delivered in-person and via an app, recently

tested on over a thousand South Australians, that can be accessed online.

The study is published in *Nature Human Behaviour*.

More information: A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological interventions to improve mental wellbeing, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-021-01093-w](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01093-w)

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