



THE CAN DO MANUAL



275 great ideas to boost mental wellbeing



MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

The Men's Health Forum's Man Manuals are full of easy-to-read information on a wide range of men's health subjects. Founded in 1994, the MHF is the independent voice for the health and wellbeing of men and boys in England, Scotland and Wales. Our goal is the best possible physical and mental health and wellbeing for all men and boys.

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THE CAN DO CHALLENGE

When we **CONNECT**, keep **ACTIVE**, **NOTICE** stuff, **DISCOVER** more and **OFFER** to others, we **CAN DO** a lot to improve our own well-being...

#CANDOchallenge

THE CAN DO CHALLENGE

Are you ready for the CAN DO challenge?

The Men's Health Forum's CAN DO challenge is based on what are known as the five ways to wellbeing. These are five things we can all do that are scientifically-proven to help us feel better. (For background and for more ideas, search 'five ways to well being' on the NHS website.)

The five things we CAN DO are:

- > **Connect** - connect with other people
- > **(Be) Active** - move your body, exercise
- > **Notice** - take notice of the environment around you, be in the moment you are living
- > **Discover** - learn something new
- > **Offer (or give)** - do something for someone else.

You can probably think of many examples of these for yourself but this booklet can help. The CAN DO Manual is full of wonderful ideas of things we CAN DO from the brilliant minds of the Forum's trained men's health champions - 275 ideas in total. Some of them are very simple, some of them far harder. You won't fancy them all. The idea is to get you thinking. What can you do?

Find out more about the CAN DO challenge here:
menshealthforum.org.uk/cando

- > Find out more about men's health champions here:
menshealthforum.org.uk/champs
- > Check out Man MOT for the Mind, our interactive manual based on the CAN DO challenge:
menshealthforum.org.uk/mmm
- > Send us your ideas for the next edition of the CAN DO manual to the following email address:
can.do@menshealthforum.org.uk

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CONNECT

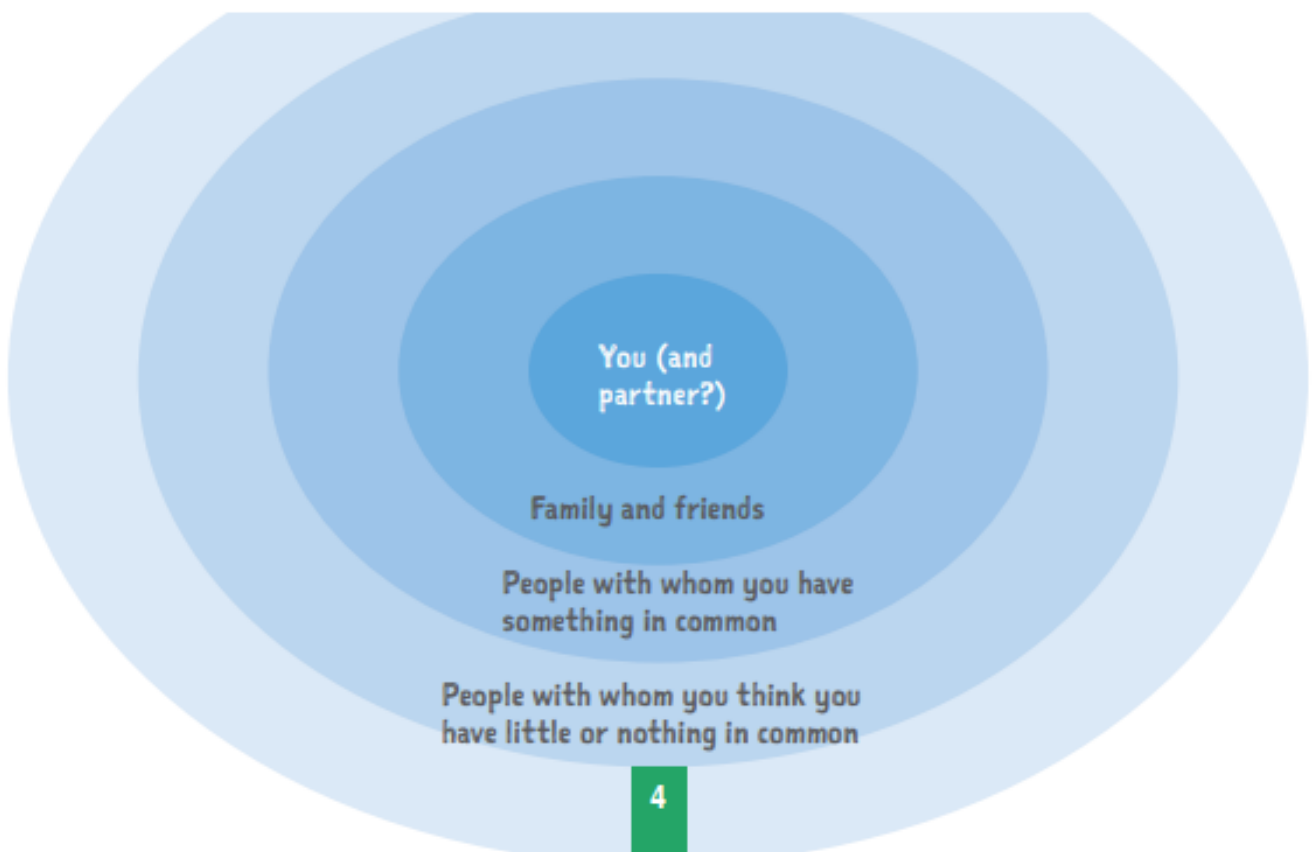
There are all types of connection.

Think about the circle of connection below. It's easy to think that only connection with our inner circles really matters but that's not true. All circles are important if we're to feel connected to the world.

Connection isn't just about those rare, deep and meaningful meetings of the mind but fleeting, everyday connections too. Nor is it just about making new connections, Maintaining existing ones and reconnecting with lost ones are equally important. Perhaps more.

We've grouped the ideas according to circle but many of them apply to people in all circles.

Whenever and however, you connect, be yourself. Easier said than done, sometimes.



Partner

It's easy to take connection with our partner for granted but the evidence is that it's even better if we think about it consciously and work on it.

- ☐ Turn off the TV, put down your phone and chat
- ☐ Go for lunch together
- ☐ Have a walk together (sometimes without your phones on)
- ☐ Share a passion (do something your partner enjoys but you don't - yet)
- ☐ Meet one of your partner's friends who you don't really know
- ☐ Cook together

Family and friends

Again, it's easy to take these relationships for granted (or leave them to someone else to take care of), especially as we get older.

- ☐ Write a letter to someone - by hand
- ☐ Send someone a card for no 'official' reason
- ☐ Send someone a postcard
- ☐ Get in touch with someone you haven't spoke to since before lockdown
- ☐ Next time you ask someone 'how are you?', ask it twice? 'How are you really?' (and really listen to the answer)
- ☐ Organise a group watch (TV, film etc)
- ☐ Meet an online 'friend' in real life
- ☐ Put 5 or 10 minutes aside daily to connect with family and friends by text
- ☐ Swap books
- ☐ Sit down and eat a meal with your family
- ☐ Arrange to meet with two people you know but don't know each other
- ☐ Or ask someone to introduce you to someone you don't know
- ☐ Fix something with someone
- ☐ Build something with someone
- ☐ Do something creative (write a poem or song, paint a picture or make a model) inspired by a friend or family member and share it with them
- ☐ Share music and playlists - why do you love what you listen to?
- ☐ Build your family tree (there are lots of resources online) and reach out

Something in common?

Build connection with those you already have something in common with.

- ☐ Find a local facebook or other meet up group for people with similar interests
- ☐ Join a hobby group
- ☐ Join a club
- ☐ Join an exercise class or group
- ☐ Join a choir or dance class
- ☐ Take an 'evening class'
- ☐ Form an online social group - discuss topics, play games
- ☐ Join a team or group (eg pub quiz or 5-a-side) with members you do not know
- ☐ Sit beside someone you don't know at a meeting
- ☐ Have a chat with a work colleague in which you can talk about anything but work
- ☐ Shop locally - and chat to the staff
- ☐ Become a trustee for a voluntary organisation
- ☐ Play Coffee Roulette - a random group of people from your workplace or group, meet for a coffee and chat
- ☐ Pay someone a genuine compliment
- ☐ Take your lunch break and share it with colleagues - eat and/or walk together
- ☐ Host a party
- ☐ If you're lucky enough to be good at DIY (or even erecting flat-pack furniture!), offer your skills to neighbours
- ☐ Go dog walking with someone

Nothing in common?

Some cultures welcome strangers as friends from the outset. Others do not. But building connection with people you think you have nothing in common with can be the most satisfying of all.

- ☐ Respond to a local blog post/social media post to engage with someone new in your community
- ☐ Use local community-focused reusing, recycling, sharing and swapping apps - a great way to connect with people you wouldn't normally meet

- ☐ Go and see your neighbour
- ☐ Talk to a stranger in a queue
- ☐ Visit someone who lives alone
- ☐ Join a randomised coffee trial (internet search it if you're not sure what it is)
- ☐ Greet new joiners at work or in your group
- ☐ Genuinely smile when you meet people and thank those who have served or helped you
- ☐ Talk to someone you don't know in the pub or coffee shop
- ☐ Talk to someone you don't know in a queue or at a bus stop or on the train or at the school gates
- ☐ Perhaps ask that someone about their hobby or interest
- ☐ Do something kind for a stranger
- ☐ If you work in a public place like a cafe, talk to those you meet



BE ACTIVE

We know that keeping active is good for our physical health but it's equally important mentally.

Being more active is not about upping your weekly gym visits. It's about building activity into your everyday life - and perhaps doing things differently to achieve this.

Be EVERYDAY active

Ideas for things to do to build activity into your everyday life..

- ☐ Take a 15 minute walk at lunchtime
- ☐ Do the housework

- ☐ Spring clean
- ☐ Compile a list of jobs round the home that need doing: gardening, DIY, hand-washing etc. Then do them!
- ☐ Pick up litter
- ☐ Find an exercise class you can do from home - perhaps on You Tube or with an online teacher
- ☐ Get as little delivered as possible - go and collect everything else
- ☐ Get your NHS health check and ask for advice on improving your scores
- ☐ Get up earlier!
- ☐ Don't always drive to the supermarket, walk to your local shops - do it often
- ☐ Take active screen-breaks
- ☐ Learn some chair-based exercises or yoga that you can do in short work-breaks
- ☐ Dance around the home
- ☐ Exercise when waiting for the kettle to boil
- ☐ If you work in an office block, use the stairs to the toilet or coffee machine on another floor
- ☐ Stop using lifts.

Be FUN Active

Ideas for activities that don't even feel like exercise.

- ☐ Volunteer to walk dogs from a shelter (or get a dog)
- ☐ Have sex
- ☐ Visit a country house and walk around the gardens
- ☐ Do the allotment or garden
- ☐ There are other active things you can do in the sea as well as swim - paddleboarding, kayaking, surfing etc
- ☐ Organise a hair-raising group activity like skydiving or bungee jumping

Be RE-Active

Rediscover the activities you used to enjoy.

- ☐ Try the walking version of your favourite childhood sport. There are already

walking versions of touch rugby, basketball, cricket, hockey, netball and football

- ☐ Take up something you haven't done for a while - golf, fishing, swimming, dancing, tai chi, tennis, the list is endless
- ☐ Organise a game that everyone can join in at work - say, rounders or softball
- ☐ Play like a child

Do things differently

Rethink what you do to make your life more active.

- ☐ Find your local green gym (free gym equipment in a park or other open space)
- ☐ Replace a car or train journey with a walking or cycling journey
- ☐ Ideally, make it a regular trip - eg to work
- ☐ Even on a longer journey you can't replace, build in some walking: park further away, get off a stop or two early (saves a little money too)
- ☐ Try walk and talk meetings
- ☐ Don't go to the nearest coffee shop, find the best
- ☐ Try a standing desk
- ☐ Try standing at meetings - as an added advantage, meetings at which everyone stands are generally shorter and more business-like
- ☐ Get a bike (take advantage of any cycle to work scheme)
- ☐ Get a training buddy - a mate to mutually motivate each other as you walk, jog or whatever
- ☐ Use phone alarms to encourage yourself to move
- ☐ Learn a morning stretch routine (disability in later life is often caused by lack of flexibility)

Be GOAL Active

Some men find a target or goal helps motivate them. If you're one of them, this list is for you. (Telling everyone you know about your goal might help motivate you further.)

- ☐ Visit all the parks in your area
- ☐ Walk down every street in your town
- ☐ Sign up for a challenge such as the Couch to 5K. Perhaps fundraise

- ☐ Arrange a lunchtime car cleaning exercise (money raised goes to charity)
- ☐ Set yourself an achievable one month personal goal - 100 press up a day, a mile walked a day, 10,000 steps a day etc
- ☐ Set a longer-term, achievable fitness goal - something to aim for
- ☐ If competing with others helps motivate you, find an app where can post your running or cycling times etc. Compete with friends



TAKE NOTICE

The key to noticing more is often about simply being open to it.

That means turning off devices from time to time and being willing to break habits. It's about being in the moment and engaging all your senses.

Everyday noticing

Things you can look out for as part of your day.

- ☐ Spend some time with a pet/animals
- ☐ Don't eat at your desk. Eat your lunch outside, or sitting in your favourite peaceful spot
- ☐ Enjoy the different wildlife coming into your garden by feeding birds.
- ☐ Pick a random something to look for each day to get yourself looking at different areas of your environment
- ☐ Look for the best in each day's weather - eg. it's chilly but the sky is beautiful
- ☐ Every couple of hours find something in your environment that starts with a letter from your name. Perhaps go through your name letter by letter.
- ☐ Do the same thing, trying to work your way through the whole alphabet
- ☐ Look up. Notice the rooftops not the pavements

- ☐ Get some fresh air everyday

Screen-break

Some specific ideas for freeing yourself from your phone and other screens.

- ☐ Turn off your phone for an hour and look around
- ☐ Have a break from social media for one day every week
- ☐ People watch - far more interesting than your phone screen
- ☐ Set aside a specific time for answering emails/social media messages. Focus for that time and ignore at all other times.
- ☐ Try a screen time countdown - go down slowly to zero and have a screen-free day (including no telly!)

Time Out

Some specific ideas to help you stop and take notice.

- ☐ Write a gratitude journal - note down one thing everyday to be grateful for
- ☐ Try a novelty journal - note one new thing you spot or experience each day
- ☐ Or a picture journal - do a daily drawing of something you can see in your environment
- ☐ What changes can you spot in your local neighbourhood since you moved in?
- ☐ Listen to the birds. How many different species are there?
- ☐ How many different types of tree can you spot?
- ☐ How many different types of flower can you spot?
- ☐ How many different types of insect can you spot?
- ☐ How many different types of cloud can you spot?
- ☐ Have a 'clear the clutter' hour (use the timer)
- ☐ If that works, try longer. Or another room. Or even the shed or garage.
- ☐ Describe things (to yourself or to a journal) - what something tastes like or smells like. Describe a landscape
- ☐ Pretend you have to describe family or friends to the police - how tall are they, what build, what are they wearing, what colour are their eyes
- ☐ Take up star gazing. Learn and find the constellations.

- ☐ Draw something from memory
- ☐ Jot down a list of five things that are going well for you

Breaking habits

Doing things differently will force you to notice more.

- ☐ Try a different route to work or the shops
- ☐ Try walking in your local area at different times of the day so you can notice the different colours, sounds and atmosphere in the morning and afternoon. Notice as the seasons change
- ☐ Visit and shop in a different town or place
- ☐ When visiting family or friends, ask them to show you round their local area
- ☐ Go somewhere you've never been before
- ☐ Change things - new screen background, swap photos, move furniture
- ☐ Take photos you don't normally take - insects, trees, dogs etc
- ☐ Stand still
- ☐ Take your coat off in the rain and let it wash all over you (don't catch a cold!)
- ☐ Read the local paper if you don't already

Engage your senses

Ideas that will help you to use your five senses more.

- ☐ Listen to music with the lights off
- ☐ Draw/paint your favourite local view and then compare when you visit
- ☐ Learn some mindfulness exercises such as a 'mindful body scan'
- ☐ Start by closing your eyes and 'watching' your breathing. Look up 'box breathing'
- ☐ If you like mindfulness exercises, learn some meditation
- ☐ Slow down at mealtimes, appreciating the flavours and textures of food (you'll probably eat more healthily too)
- ☐ Play the 54321 game on your next walk - notice 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell and 1 you can taste. Great with kids
- ☐ Close your eyes. What can you hear and smell?
- ☐ Sit in a garden or park. Set a timer for 20 minutes and just look, listen and smell



DISCOVER

Discovering is also about rediscovering.

This is not about being good at things. It's about the fun of not knowing and finding out. Rediscover something. Find something new. Stick to it. Don't stick to it. It's up to you but don't stop learning, discovering and rediscovering..

There's so much you can learn...

- ☐ Read a book you haven't read before
- ☐ Read a book you have read before
- ☐ Revisit something you used to do but not recently (eg. playing an instrument)
- ☐ Or learn a new musical instrument
- ☐ Learn to paint, draw or sculpt
- ☐ Take a quiz - real, online, alone, with others, up to you
- ☐ Set a quiz with others
- ☐ Learn how to play a new sport, find a beginners group (eg adult tennis)
- ☐ Listen/watch TedTalks, exploring new topics
- ☐ Find out more about the development opportunities at your workplace
- ☐ Ask someone from a different generation about anything (life before you were born, an old skill, their first job)
- ☐ Watch a factual programme about a topic that would not normally interest you
- ☐ Build Lego or other construction toy
- ☐ Learn magic tricks
- ☐ Learn games like chess or cards
- ☐ Learn new 'party tricks' like Rubik's cube or juggling
- ☐ Learn sign language

- ☐ A new job is always a new learning experience
- ☐ Get into podcasts or audio books
- ☐ Learn to cook
- ☐ Learn to bake
- ☐ If you can do both already, learn a new dish or a new bake
- ☐ Or set yourself a cooking challenge: what can you make from the ingredients you have in your home right now?
- ☐ Got a favourite take-away meal? Learn to cook it.
- ☐ Or something you always order in the restaurant? Learn to cook it.
- ☐ Learn how to mix cocktails and mocktails
- ☐ Learn how something works - car, TV, phone, central heating, toilet plumbing, anything at all
- ☐ Learn to knit, sew or crochet
- ☐ Do some local research - history, geography, local trees, birds and animals.
- ☐ Research something that will improve your environment - electric cars, wind farms, cycling, whatever
- ☐ Go on a local historical or cultural visit or walk
- ☐ Write your life story, autobiography, memoir or personal history
- ☐ Sign up for a course or class online
- ☐ Sign up for a course or class offline
- ☐ Do crosswords, Sudoku, wordsearch or Wordle
- ☐ Try the A-Z game. Choose a category and find an example for every letter of the alphabet. Animals - aardvark, badger, cat... Car brands - Audi, Bugatti, Cadillac... 70s rock bands - Argent, Budgie, Can... play with others and connect too.
- ☐ Find a new brain exercise that you haven't come across before. Or make your own one up.
- ☐ Visit the local library and browse until you find something that inspires you!
- ☐ Learn something from You Tube or other online videos
- ☐ Ask someone to choose an unusual book for you.
- ☐ Fix something that is broken
- ☐ Learn basic maintenance and repairs for your bike or car

- ☐ If you're lucky enough to have a garden, learn more about gardening. What plants would suit your soil and climate? How do the seasons affect your garden?
- ☐ Teach your pet some tricks
- ☐ Attend a support group - a group open to people who have something in common and wish to help each other live with it (common examples are caring, a long-term medical condition or an addiction but it could be related to anything at all)
- ☐ Try a learning challenge with a friend or family member. Ask each other two questions: what would you like to learn and what is preventing you doing it? Work through the barriers for your chosen learning activity together.
- ☐ Go along to a public talk (at a church or library, for example)
- ☐ Teach someone something - you'll learn something too
- ☐ There are 193 countries in the United Nations plus two observers (the Holy See and the State of Palestine). How many do you know? Research some of them. What is life really like there?
- ☐ Learn how to use a feature/app on your phone, tablet or computer that you're curious about but haven't tried.
- ☐ Write a story
- ☐ Have a child (some of these ideas require more consideration than others!)
- ☐ Learn a new skill related to an existing interest - for example, become a referee or umpire at your favourite sport or a trustee of the charity you volunteer at
- ☐ Stand for election - you'll learn a lot about your community, those who live in it and especially yourself
- ☐ Try something you've never done before
- ☐ Make a video
- ☐ Make a podcast
- ☐ Interview a family member about family history
- ☐ Interview an expert - record it or write it up
- ☐ Learn more about 'the five ways to wellbeing' on which this CAN DO manual is based
- ☐ Learn computer code
- ☐ Keep a diary - a page a day
- ☐ Talk to those younger than you about what interests them

- ☐ Talk to someone from a different religion or culture
- ☐ Talk to someone with different political views to yours. By trying to understand their point of view, what can you learn about your own?
- ☐ Revisit and relearn something from school - can you tackle GCSE Maths?
- ☐ Challenge yourself - think of something that you enjoy and/or do frequently? Why do you do it? What can you learn about yourself?
- ☐ Try a martial art
- ☐ Read the Highway Code - and then do the driving theory test (on an app)
- ☐ Go to your nearest zoo or urban farm
- ☐ Start your own business (again, this one may be easier said than done!)
- ☐ Learn something new as a family or friendship group
- ☐ On your next walk, try to notice all the things the state provides for you - schools, hospitals, roads, waste collection etc. Can you find ten things?
- ☐ Ask someone who is at least 15 years younger than you what is important to them and try to understand why



OFFER

We can give all sorts: our time, our money, our things and our skills.

But perhaps the most important gift is the one we most often forget: our attention and solidarity with others. We've got ideas in all these categories. Obviously many overlap: we might well give our time and our skills, for example.

Think outside the box. There's far more you can do under even the most obvious category like giving money if you think about it.

Whatever you give, give unconditionally - without expecting anything in return.

As soon as you make it transactional like buying something in a shop, it loses its feelgood magic.

Don't deny someone else the joy of giving by insisting on paying for their gift or giving something in return. Assume they give unconditionally too. (The one exception to this could be if you swap skills - you hang a door in return for your friend giving you accounting advice.)

BETTER DECISION-MAKING

Try to make decisions that favour the greater good rather than your self interest. In fact, try to take yourself out of it altogether.

For example, if you're cutting a cake in half and you know which half you're having, you might be tempted to make your 'half' bigger. If you don't know, you're more likely to try to make the halves equal. A fairer outcome for all. This idea can revolutionise (and massively improve) your decision-making. If it interests you, look up 'veil of ignorance', the philosophical idea on which it is based.

Time

- ☐ Volunteer at a charity, community organisation or food bank
- ☐ Help decorate or do DIY
- ☐ Pick up litter
- ☐ Join a park or beach clean-up
- ☐ Volunteer for a listening support helpline such as Samaritans or Cruse Bereavement Support
- ☐ Organise a fundraising event for a charity or community organisation
- ☐ Reduce your carbon footprint - what do you do that is impacting on the planet?
- ☐ If you're a member of any groups or clubs, volunteer for an organisational role
- ☐ Offer to walk someone's dog (or feed their goldfish!)
- ☐ Drive cautiously - accidents happen and regardless of whose fault it is, they are less dangerous at lower speeds
- ☐ Offer to go with someone to support them at an important appointment
- ☐ Last but not least, give your children your time - it's probably the only gift they'll keep throughout their lives

Money

- ☐ Treat your work colleagues - coffees all round or bring in a basket of fruit
- ☐ Buy someone a drink or a coffee
- ☐ Try to avoid using companies that exploit their workforces with low pay and insecure employment
- ☐ Pay your taxes (and be grateful you have enough money to be asked to pay them)
- ☐ Don't own more property than you need - fairly obvious in a country like UK which has a housing shortage
- ☐ Invest any money you're lucky enough to have ethically
- ☐ Research what your favourite charities actually do and make a donation to one of them, perhaps a regular one.

Things

- ☐ Declutter and donate unwanted items to charity
- ☐ Send a friend or family member an impromptu gift
- ☐ Give blood
- ☐ Become an organ donor
- ☐ Plant something
- ☐ Install solar panels
- ☐ Buy a greener car
- ☐ Share your books - lend them or give them
- ☐ Don't buy stuff you don't need or throw away stuff that could be useful to someone else - donate, sell, recycle
- ☐ Car share

Skills

- ☐ Become a mentor
- ☐ Offer to help at a local school or even become a school governor
- ☐ Bake or cook for someone else
- ☐ Become a men's health champion
- ☐ Learn some active listening skills

- ☐ Fix someone's car or electronic gadget
- ☐ Share a skill. Figured out a new way to do something at work? Don't keep it to yourself.

Attention

- ☐ Give way to a pedestrian, cyclist or let a car in a side road join the traffic
- ☐ Compliment someone
- ☐ Recycle - find out all the recycling options in your area
- ☐ Smile
- ☐ Join a campaign for something that promotes inclusiveness and togetherness in your community or workplace
- ☐ Join a trade union
- ☐ Find out about 'random acts of kindness'
- ☐ Be positive on social media - if you use it, post something kind daily
- ☐ Pay someone a compliment
- ☐ Be kind to yourself
- ☐ If you love someone, tell them
- ☐ Cut down on food waste
- ☐ If you're a manager, employer or landlord, treat those over whom you have authority as you'd wish to be treated were the roles reversed
- ☐ Don't ask someone to do a job you wouldn't do yourself
- ☐ Don't waste the planet's resources on your leisure - eg. perhaps reduce flying
- ☐ Think about your travel and holiday choices - does your holiday help the people who live in the place you're visiting or are you taking resources locals need and paying a corporation for the privilege?

Keep going. Life is a journey, not a destination. When we **CONNECT**, keep **ACTIVE**, **NOTICE** stuff, **DISCOVER** more and **OFFER** to others, we **CAN DO** a lot to improve how we feel.

Compiled in May 2022 for Men's Health Week 2022. Thanks to all our men's health champions for their ideas.

THE CAN DO MANUAL

Works great
with the Man MOT
for the Mind
manual

One man in five dies before he's 65. Not just men in mid-life but young men too. The causes are not only physical, they're also in our head.

Based on five proven, evidence-based ways to feel better, The CAN DO Manual will show you just how much we CAN DO to boost our own mental wellbeing.

275
ways to feel better
based on ideas from
our men's health champions.

WARNING:

Reading this booklet could seriously improve your health.

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www.menshealthforum.org.uk

MEN'S HEALTH MADE EASY