

# WORKING WELL

## top tips for mind fitness



The Equity Wellness Committee was formed last year in response to two surveys which showed troubling levels of anxiety and depression among performers. In honour of Mental Health Week, we asked committee members for their top tips for keeping your mind fit and healthy.

The committee is made up of passionate and generous people with experience and interest in helping our industry adopt a more holistic approach to wellness. Their tips provide an overwhelmingly positive, inspiring and varied array of advice, guidance and experience. We've condensed their answers to a few key thoughts but you can read everyone's full response online at [www.meaa.org/campaigns/equity-wellness/](http://www.meaa.org/campaigns/equity-wellness/). We hope you find encouragement and inspiration, and we invite you to share this resource with your colleagues to continue the conversation around wellness at work.



### **Sarah Borg**

Make relaxation a routine part of your everyday life. Try doing a few rounds of controlled breathing every time you have a shower or put on the kettle. Or some muscle-release exercises when you drive or are on public transport. Doing things like this regularly reminds our bodies and brains that relaxation is achievable, and can help take the edge off the negative impacts of chronic stress.

### **Liam McIlwain**

Practise gratitude. Sometimes I keep a gratitude journal that I add to every morning. Take time to think of three things every day, either over your morning coffee or maybe on your commute to work. This definitely helps me to gain perspective, keeping me focused and positive.



### **Sharon Davis**

Go for a walk. It can really help clarify your thoughts, while also doing good things for your body. I find that even taking a half-hour walk during lunch break or first thing in the morning helps to unlock ideas, make mental notes or just switch off. Bonus points for finding a slice of nature to wander in.

### **Eve Morey**

Actively prioritise your mental health. Seek help from a mentor, counsellor or psychologist in the same way you would prioritise your physical health if you were injured or sick. Also, seek purpose outside of the entertainment industry, so as to find activity and fulfilment that is not dependent on someone else's choices.





### **Alan Fletcher**

Stay well by sharing. When I discuss my feelings with friends and colleagues, I find many people feel the same way and the connection is healing. If you can't share with friends, share with a helpline.

### **Pip Edwards**

Let go of what you cannot control. What feels like a loss may actually be a blessing. Say 'no' when you need to, and feel damn good about it. Sneaky secret: no one else feels 100 per cent ready either. Have a laugh at yourself; it's all make-believe anyway. Trust your gut rather than what 'he/she says'. Embrace the unknown.



### **Michael McCall**

Sleep is essential to a performer. If you struggle with quantity, sometimes you have to take a step back and go, Tonight I will hug my pillow! The demands on an actor's brain and body mean that anything less than blissful nocturnal inactivity is a sure-fire way to negatively impact on your art.

### **Elliot Cyngler**

If I'm feeling frustrated, lost, anxious about where I am in my career or otherwise, I find it useful to do a bit of self-reflection. Try asking yourself these questions... Am I satisfied with where I am in my career? Where do I want to be? How do I get there? If you can't find the answers yourself, talk to someone. It doesn't have to be a mental-health professional – it could be a fellow actor, friend or family member. Just tell someone!





### **Stephen Heart**

Before I undertake an audition, I finish this sentence: "I deserve to succeed in this because..." Finishing the sentence helps me go through all the reasons why I can feel good going into this situation – I've learnt my lines, I've done my research, I spent days doing the work etc – and reassures me that I have something to offer.

### **David Spencer**

In more of a preventative sense, what also helps is to make sure that every day I take a little time – sometimes 15 minutes, sometimes half an hour – to have a complete break from my routine. I find that even in that short time I can recharge and get back to it with more vigour. I wish I'd started doing this years ago.



### **Amy Welsh**

Take time for your health and wellbeing. This is not always easy, but recuperation is just as important as physical and mental exertion. It can include meditation, exercise, eating well or going on holiday. Also, make time for everyday activities that bring you relaxation and joy. Mine is predominantly reading – I own far too many books!

### **Jonathan Mill**

Two things I tell young performers about the industry: it's not fair, and most of the time it sucks. That's why we invented Equity – to make it fairer and to suck less often. Be an active member. Support yourself. Support each other. If you see someone losing it, help them. Check in with everyone, all the time. Give them a hug, praise them.





### **Stuart Halusz**

See the beauty and serenity in art. I have a favourite painting by local artist Shiva Amir-Ansari titled Pneuma (Breath), which is an abstract piece, very evocative, and speaks to me on an emotional level. I always find that just a few moments spent standing in front of this, breathing into it and allowing its beauty to wash through me, is an effective tonic and spiritual recharge that gives me a boost for the day.

### **Simon Ward**

Warm up and cool down. Your brain needs time to recalibrate and settle from the super-high adrenaline state of performance. Two to seven minutes is often enough - some people like doing a 'take makeup and costume off' style ritual - to reconnect with your body in the world. A cool-down is incredibly effective in helping avoid alcohol use and post-show blues or crash. Stretch out your body, stretch out your brain.



### **Lucas Stibbard**

Make a time with yourself, even if it is only five minutes, to take stock of how you are going and what you need to do, and ensure they are in balance. If they aren't, redress immediately – don't waste time or put it off – and be clear and honest with people about your time and limits in regards to this. If you are feeling off, take time to look after yourself before overloading with work. A small moment now can help avoid a big moment later.

## Patrick Frost

There's nothing I enjoy more than cooking for relaxation. When I was working on consecutive shows, a ritual evolved which became my means to a solid, reliable performance every night. With some cool music playing and the kids off doing homework or chilling out with their mum, I'd begin creating a culinary masterpiece. Here's where what I now know as 'mindfulness' would take over. I'd begin a process of trusting that night's performance, putting it away and placing the meal at the front of my mind. I took this routine on tour with me, as well, and the mind-focusing effect was a real saviour.



## Naomi Lisner

I'm a real people person and if I'm left on my own for too long, I get down. I am aware of this, so I phone friends and say, I really need company. People aren't mind readers; if you act like you're great when you're not, friends and family won't be able to give you the help you need. It's okay to say, I am feeling lonely, can we hang out? The truth is, most people feel like that from time to time.



email: [equitywellness@meaa.org](mailto:equitywellness@meaa.org)  
[www.meaa.org/campaigns/equity-wellness/](http://www.meaa.org/campaigns/equity-wellness/)

