



Let's hear it for women's health and wellbeing

Key findings

healthwatch
Kirklees & Calderdale

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Summary

Women aged 16+ and those identifying as female

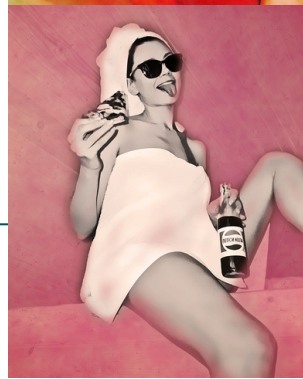
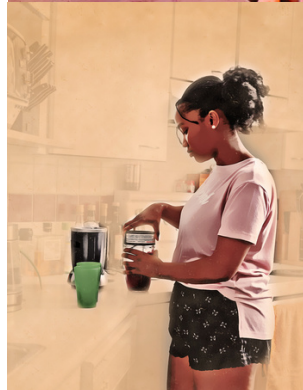
Let's hear it from

you...

"Women's health is more than just our reproductive organs and menopause. When people talk to me about my health and wellbeing, I want to be seen as a whole person, looking at all aspects of my life."

At Healthwatch Kirklees and Healthwatch Calderdale, we wanted to find out what women in our community are currently doing to look after their health and wellbeing and how confident they feel doing so. We invited women to talk to us about how they manage their health and what barriers they face. We provided a welcoming and safe platform for them to share their ideas about how women look after themselves.

During October and November 2023, we heard from 665 women aged 16+, from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds, and from every postcode area in Kirklees and Calderdale.



Health & Wellbeing

Most women in Kirklees and Calderdale said the following things were important to them to help them feel healthy:

Staying active



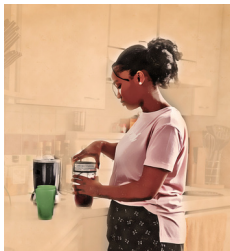
“At 93 it just means being able to keep myself active and look after myself without care.”
(Calderdale, age 93)

Looking after physical and mental health



“It means the body and mind being well balanced. Eating healthy nutritious food, getting enough exercise and practicing things that help to promote good mental health. Such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness or social activities.”
(Kirklees, age 35-49)

Eating healthily



“Try to get a balanced diet, but I do allow sugary foods too.”
(Calderdale, age 35-49 years”

Being free from pain



“Not having any physical and/or psychological barriers preventing one from going about their daily life/routine - and being able to enjoy the life one leads.” (Kirklees, age 25-34)

Access to and quality of services

40% of the women we spoke to told us that improved access to services would help them manage their health and wellbeing. Respondents said that barriers included long waiting lists, being discharged from services and **feeling 'fobbed off'**.

"Things being easier to access such as appointments being nearer. Due to visual impairments, I can't always get to them if I don't have someone to go with me." (Kirklees, age 50-64)

"I've had arthritis in my knee for over a year. Doctors try to fob you off by saying 'old age', putting me on the wrong waiting list for physio, meaning a long wait. They were not sending me for a lady smear test. When I asked, I was told I was too old, and if they sent one when they saw my age, it would be thrown away. Getting an appointment at the doctor for my yearly examination is difficult. (Kirklees, age 65-79 years)

Some women told us they **feel judged by clinicians**, particularly their GP, who perceive their condition as self-inflicted. This makes them reluctant to seek help.

"GP is very judgemental, sees my condition as something I brought on myself so now I have to just 'deal with it' where as a specialist nurse I see is more empathetic. GP's attitude makes me not want to ask for help." (Kirklees, age 50-64)

Women who have struggled with addiction told us they experience judgment from doctors who repeatedly inquire about their drug use, even after years of abstinence. They feel clinicians focus on their past, which overshadows their current health concerns and makes them **reluctant to seek help**.

"Doctors judge me, I have been a drug user and lost vision in my eye and liver function. Every time I see a GP they ask if I am using (drugs) again, I have not taken drugs in 3 years. I don't feel like they listen to me." (Kirklees, age 35-49)

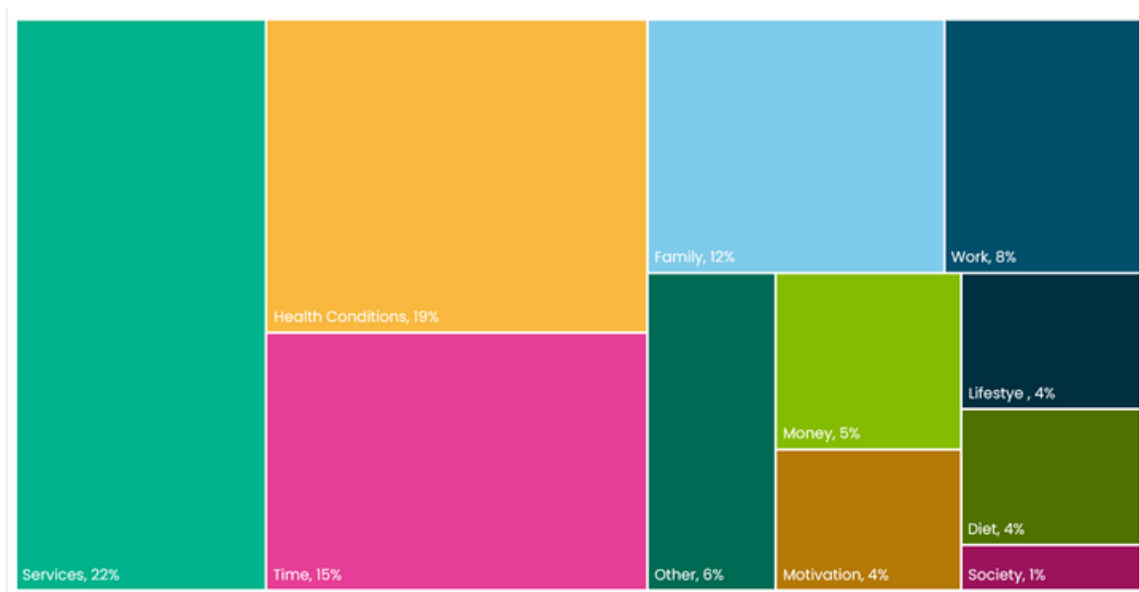


Several women expressed frustration with their GP focusing excessively on their weight during appointments. They felt they were not listened to and that their health concern was dismissed based on weight.

Additionally, they highlighted **the need to understand the impact of underlying medical issues on their weight**, seeking empathy and assistance rather than being perceived as lazy.

“To be listened to by my GP and not to be dismissed or told that everything I go in with is due to me being overweight. If my health is deteriorating due to my weight, rather than just saying, 'it's because you are obese and you need to lose weight', they should offer me advice and support on how to do that because clearly, I am struggling with this. Otherwise, it wouldn't be an issue in the first place.” (Calderdale, age 34-49)

Q. Are there things that make it more difficult for you to be able to manage or improve your health?

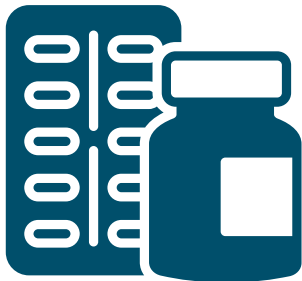


Insight talking point

Visually impaired women Healthwatch spoke to mentioned the lack of services for visual body checks, such as looking for changes in moles and freckles.

Self-care data at a glance

8%



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Only 8% of women mentioned that medical care is an option they use to take care of their health.

“I generally try to avoid medicines and clinicians as much as possible. My mum is an alternative therapist, so I ask her advice on a lot of things.”
(Kirklees, age 35-49 years)

20%

20% of women would look for over-the-counter medicines.



19% prefer self-care solutions like yoga, mindfulness, acupuncture or herbal remedies. 13% use the internet to search for health information or exchange opinions in chatrooms.

“I feel unsupported and find I’m online looking at chat room advice, which isn’t always useful or supportive.”
(Calderdale, age 50-64 years)

“I take matters into my own hands, be proactive, try to find help elsewhere. As a last resort, I go private if I can afford it. If it were something I could deal with myself or via the pharmacy, I wouldn’t be contacting health and support services. Talking to others with similar health conditions helps. Being articulate sometimes seems to be a barrier to accessing the care and support you need, as you are seen as managing.” (Calderdale, age 35-49 years)

68%

It’s interesting to note that 68% of the women we talked to feel confident in finding trustworthy information when they try alternative treatments.

Family, work and lack of time

Women often highlighted that due to pressures such as caring responsibilities, pressures at home, and pressures at their jobs, they never have time for themselves, causing their needs to take a backseat. Among those who mentioned having caring roles, 40% specified that they were responsible for taking care of their children.

“I have two children with disabilities (genetic-based), and their needs overwhelm mine. I have to ask for help managing them in nursery and school as nothing is offered – you have to ask repeatedly.” (Calderdale, age 25–34 years)

“I often forget to eat as I am focused on making sure my son is fed. I cannot leave the house as often as I would like as it’s always me watching my son while his dad gets to go out whenever he wants, as he knows I’ll be watching our son.” (Kirklees, age 25–34 years)

12% of women said that meeting their family’s needs made it more challenging for them to prioritise their health. This shows the complexities women face in balancing caring roles and personal wellbeing.

“After I had my children, I wanted to lose some weight and asked my mother-in-law if she could watch the children for me so I could go to an all-women gym class local to me. She is very traditional and made me feel like I was putting myself first before the needs of the children. So, I stopped going, and I continued to gain weight. Four years later, my health is quite poor, and I have been recently told I am pre-diabetic and need to make drastic changes. My kids are in school now, so I do have more time for myself, but I now have a much bigger hill to climb. (Kirklees, age 35–49 years)

“I have a very hectic life, three young children, work, care for a neighbour, and am currently experiencing family turmoil. I do the best I can in the time and energy I have left for my health. (Kirklees, age 25–34 years)

33% **33% of those women with a caring responsibility considered that this negatively affects their mental health.**

Mental Health

26% of the women Healthwatch spoke to said that engaging in de-stressing activities played a significant role in maintaining their health.

“I try to exercise regularly by going for walks outdoors and gardening.” (Kirklees, age 25-34 years)

“I avoid stressful situations if possible. If this isn’t possible, I try to find a resolution quickly. I use mindfulness techniques.” (Calderdale, age 50)

19% highlighted the importance of **support from friends and family**, while 18% attributed their wellbeing to achieving **better physical health**.

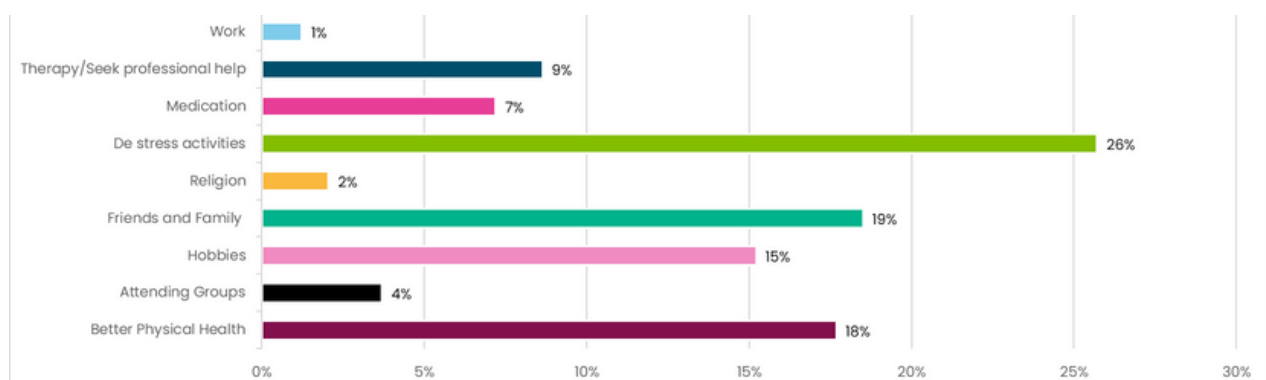
“Talk to my friends and family about issues so I don’t keep things bottled up or playing on my mind.” (Calderdale, age 18-24 years)

“I like to get out and about when I’m having a good day. I go to the lunch club when I can, and I see my grandchildren.” (Kirklees, age 80+)

Only 9% indicated a willingness to seek professional help or therapy, suggesting a **potential gap in access or confidence** in existing healthcare services.

“I use a mental health tracker app and weekly therapy appointments. I have used medication in the past.” (Kirklees, age 35-49 years)

Q. What if anything do you do to look after your mental health?



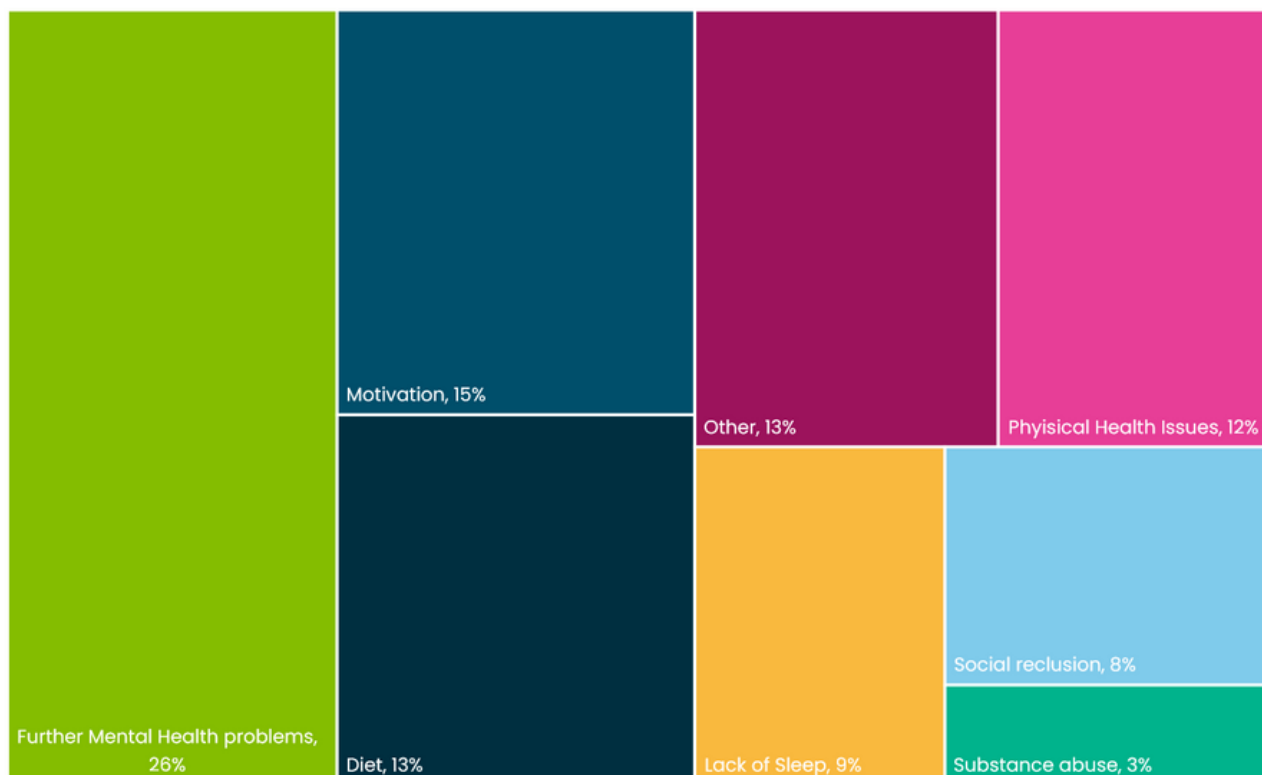
Women told us that stress or mental ill health caused them to have further mental health problems, which then led to negative consequences – impacting their motivation and their diet.

“The more stressed I get, the less productive I am. So I won’t do things like cook or clean. Then my house starts falling apart, and I feel even more stressed and end up in a vicious cycle.”
(Kirklees, age 25-34 years)

An interesting finding is that 12% of women mentioned that **stress also triggers physical health issues.**

My rheumatologist feels that acute stress may have contributed to me developing the chronic health issues I have. I have experienced issues with anxiety and depression since childhood. During bad episodes, I have been unable to look after myself well at all.”
(Kirklees, age 35)

Q. What effect does stress or mental ill health have on your lifestyle choices and ability to manage your health and wellbeing?



Stress triggers physical health issues

What would help women look after their health and wellbeing

Women's voices have been heard, and whilst sharing their views with Healthwatch, they came up with ideas that would improve their health and help them to take care of themselves.

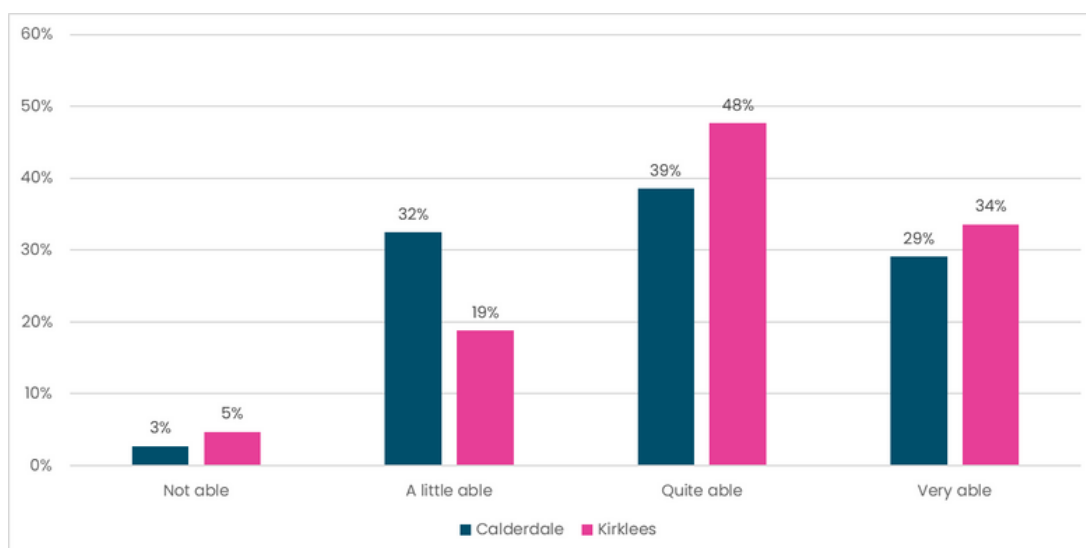
- 1.** Access to quality health services without waiting times or judgement.
- 2.** Affordable and accessible childcare services.
- 3.** Affordable or free dietary advice that is constructive and supportive of weight management.
- 4.** Affordable, community-based exercise options.
- 5.** Female-only services with female practitioners or specialists in women's health.
- 6.** Support and ideas to help manage home, work and wellbeing.
- 7.** Free access to occupational, grief and/or wellbeing counselling options. Anxiety, stress, and depression therapy.
- 8.** More reliable and trustworthy information on the internet regarding symptoms and services. More communication on how to book services online.
- 9.** Knowing where to find information about support available.



Data summary

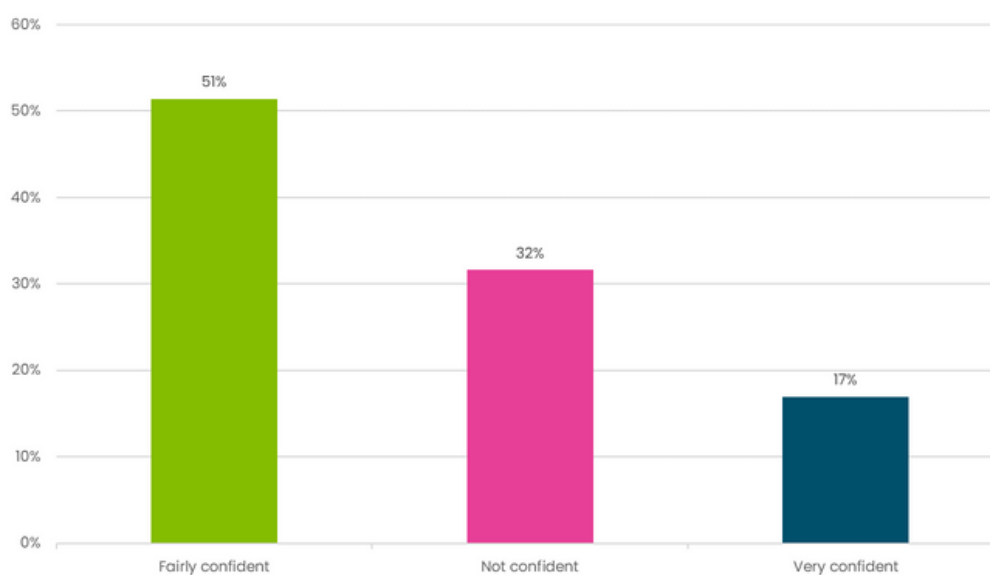
Women's Health Confidence in Kirklees and Calderdale

Q. How would you rate your ability (knowledge, skills and confidence) to manage your own health and wellbeing?



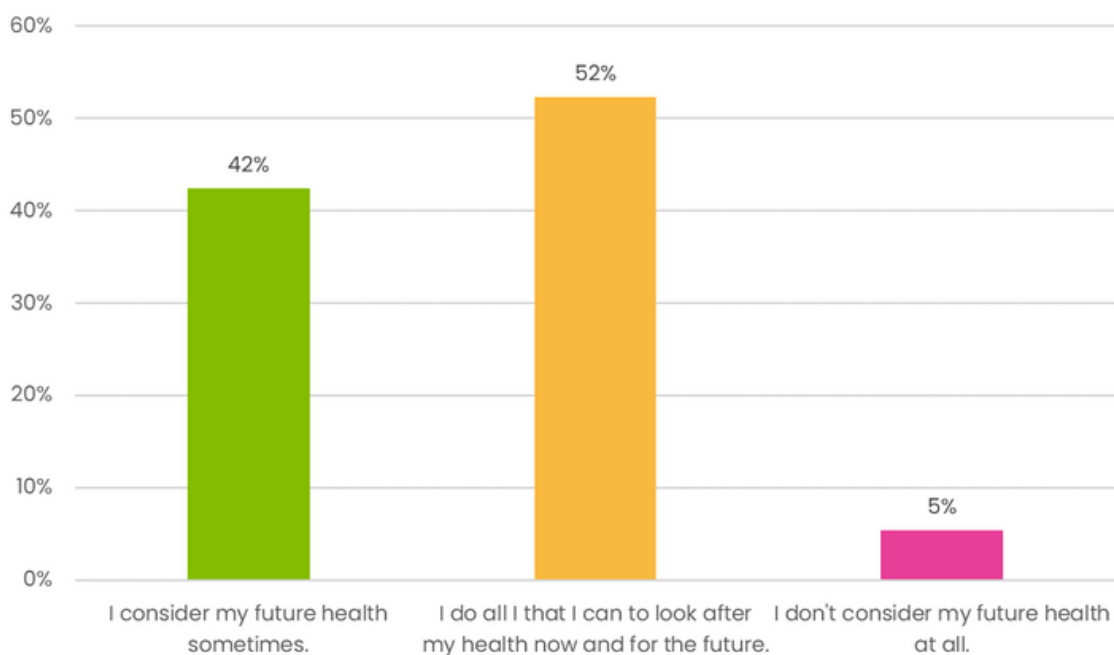
The graph above shows that most women in Kirklees and Calderdale feel quite able to manage their health and wellbeing.

Q. How confident are you that you can find trustworthy sources of information when using alternative remedies at home or seeking health advice from alternative sources? eg. internet search.



51% of respondents said that they feel fairly confident of finding trustworthy sources of information when using alternative remedies. An important consideration is that almost a third of women said otherwise.

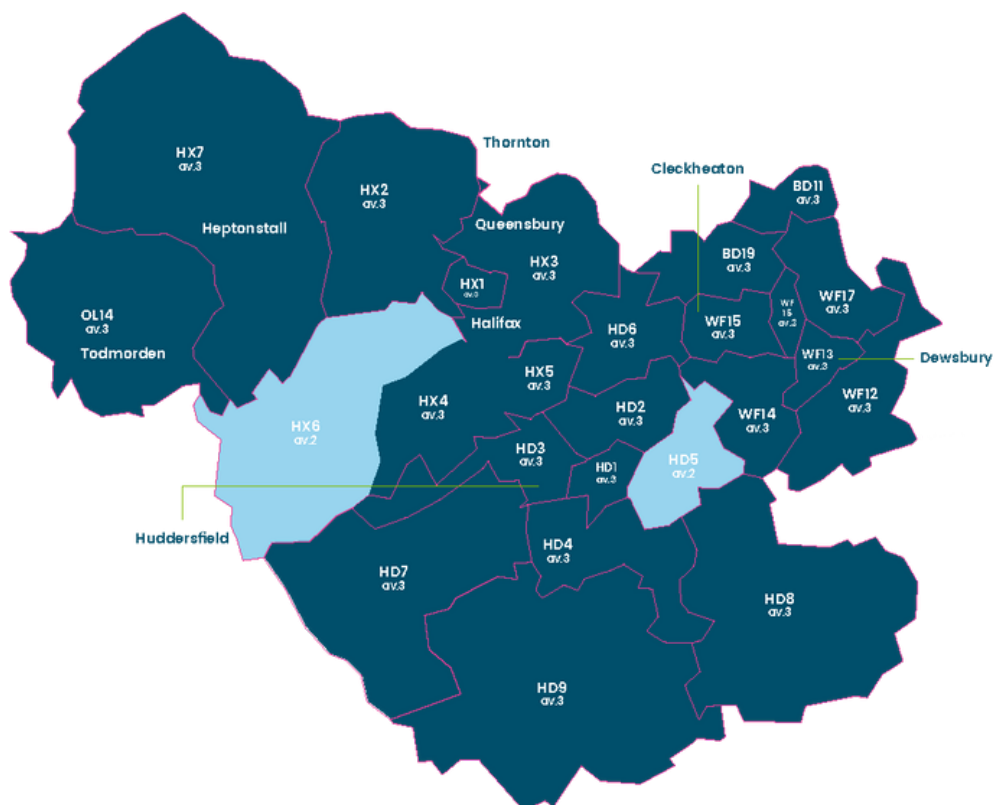
Q. Do you think about your future health and take steps to prevent new or additional health conditions that require ongoing medical care?



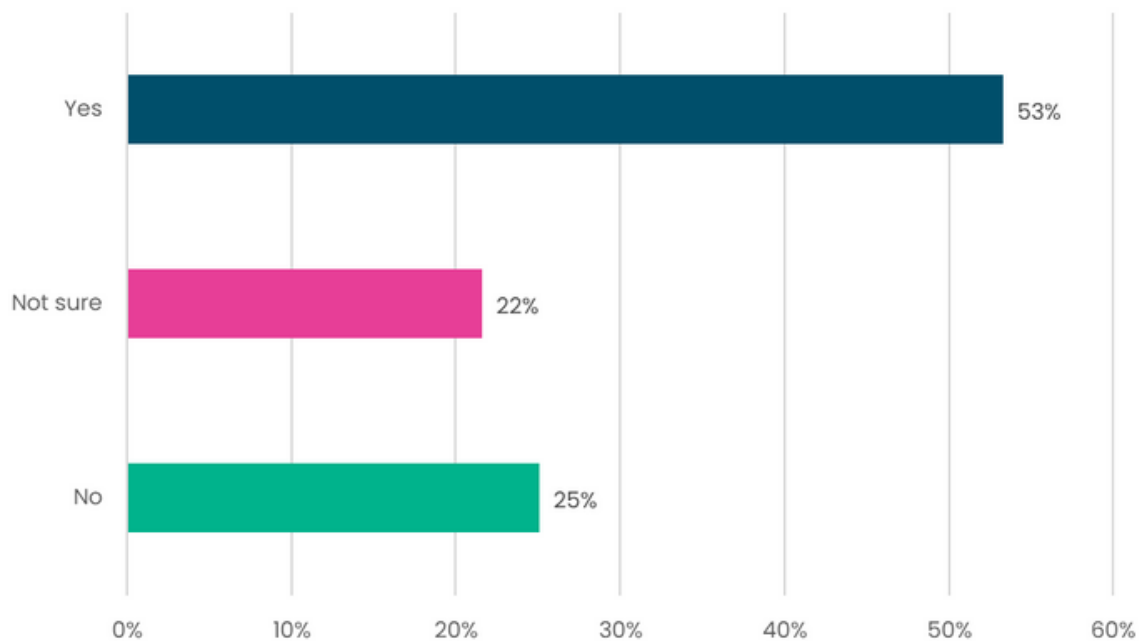
95% of the women said that they consider their future health sometimes or do everything they can to take care of their future health.

This map shows the average level of women's health and wellbeing confidence by postcode areas based on the responses Healthwatch received. The darker the colour the higher level of confidence (Graded from 1-4).

- Grade Key:
- 4 – Very confident
 - 3 – Quite confident
 - 2 – A little confident
 - 1 – Not confident at all



Q. Do you prioritise your mental well-being as much as your physical health?



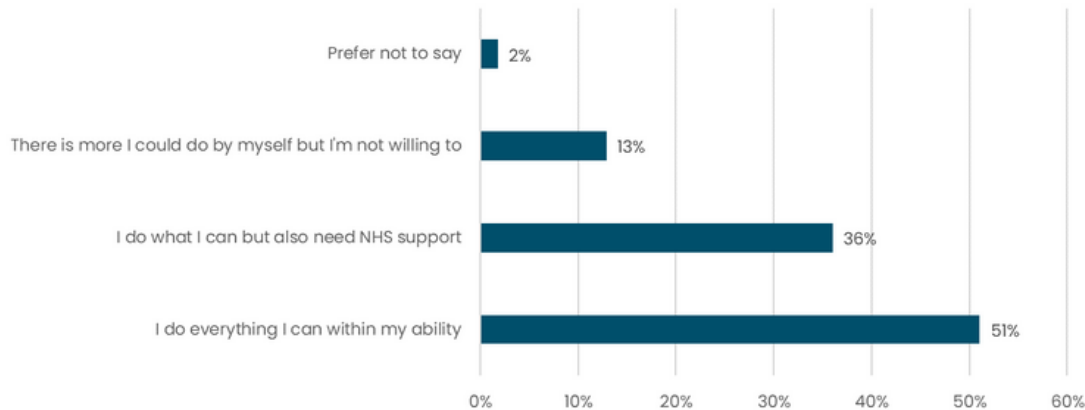
The graph above shows that the majority of respondents prioritise their mental as much as their physical health. However, a quarter of respondents said they did not.

“I attend counselling sessions (now irregularly) to maintain my mental health as well as cold showers as I find this helps with my dopamine levels. I try to exercise regularly but I am lazy with this (I attend the gym, walk and swim). I have recently cut down my alcohol consumption to only drinking on a weekend and this helps me a lot. I am very open with my friends about my emotions and I have a couple of hobbies that I prioritise for my mental wellbeing. I also put a lot of effort into drinking more water.”
(Calderdale, age 18-24)

“I’ve started attending a weekly yoga class. I’ve been able to ask for referrals for assessments for ASC and ADHD and can now access medication for ADHD. I’ve asked for advice from my GP for anxiety; I attended talking therapy and, more recently, got medication for this. I try to eat healthily. I don’t drink alcohol.” (Kirklees, age 50-64)

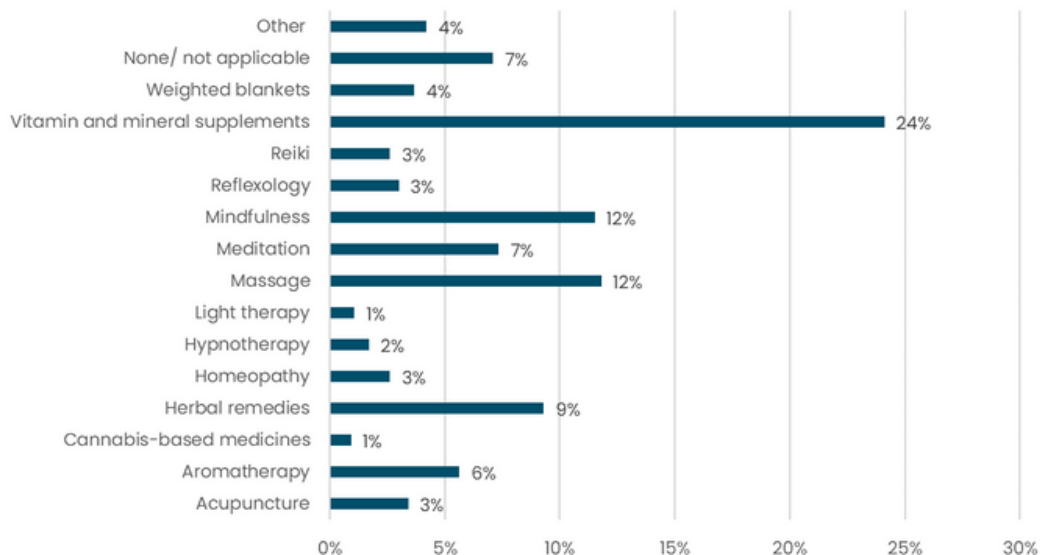
Women's ability to manage their own health

Q. Do you feel like you do enough yourself to maintain or improve your health?



51% of the women surveyed considered that they do everything in their ability to maintain and improve their health. 36% of women mentioned that they do what they can but need the NHS to provide them with support.

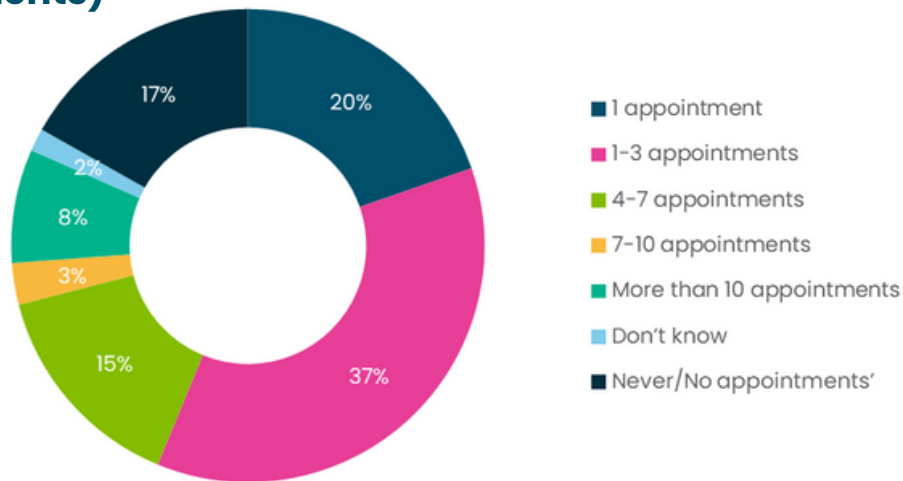
Q. If any, which alternative remedies/holistic therapies do you use?



A quarter of women mentioned that they use vitamin and mineral supplements as alternative therapies.

How women are accessing GP services

Q. How many GP appointments have you had at your GP practice in the last 12 months? (Both face-to-face and telephone appointments)



This graph shows that 57% of the women surveyed have gone to their GP practice 1-3 times in the last 12 months. 17% of the women mentioned they did not have any appointments in a year.

Q. Which of the following would you do when experiencing a non-urgent health issue or a change to your health?



A fifth of the women surveyed mentioned that they use over the counter medication to manage their symptoms. 19% of the women surveyed mentioned they use self-care solutions and 13% use the internet to find information around diagnosis and self-management of health.

Next steps

Healthwatch will share this information with service providers and commissioners (the people who buy services in Kirklees and Calderdale). We'll ask them how they can improve the services for women, empowering them to take care of their health and wellbeing, whether they're just starting or continuing their health journey.

To learn more about our engagement with women, you can see our reports on health inequalities, mental health and local findings in Kirklees and Calderdale on our website.



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