



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

Mental health summary

healthwatch
Kirklees & Calderdale

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If you require this report in another format, please get in touch with Healthwatch Kirklees on telephone: 01924 450 379 or email: info@healthwatchkirklees.co.uk

Summary

Women aged 16+ and those identifying as female

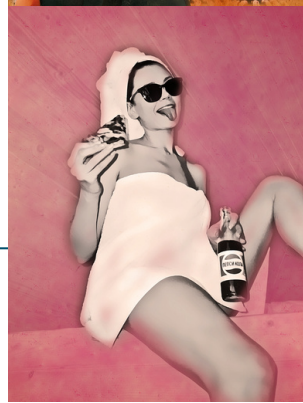
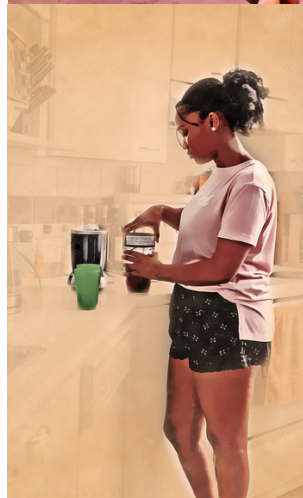
Let's hear it from

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.



TOP 5 ways women look after their mental health

01

TACKLE STRESS

Activities to help relieve stress

"Vitamins, yoga, hiking, general healthy living & avoid the bad stuff (allow a little as treats)."
(Calderdale, age 25-34)

02

FOCUS ON THE GOOD

Spend time with friends and family

"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)

03

STAY ACTIVE

Physical exercise

04

ENJOY LIFE

Hobbies

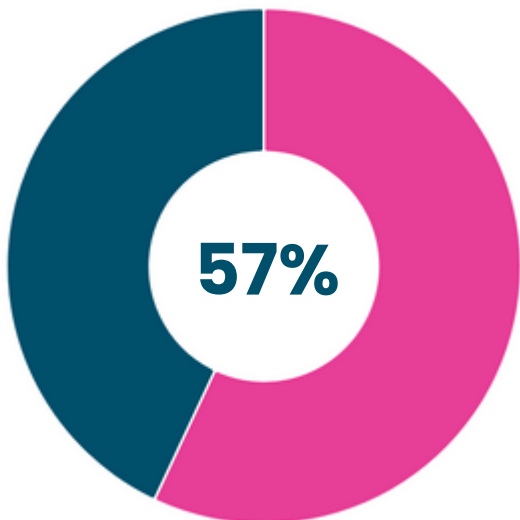
05

ASK FOR HELP

Therapy/support from mental health services

"Use a mental health tracker app, and weekly therapy appointments. I have used medication in the past (prescribed)."
(Kirklees, age 35-49)

Data at a glance



.....

Q. Do you prioritise your mental wellbeing as much as your physical health?

Just over half of women prioritise their mental wellbeing as much as their physical health. The rest either said 'no' or 'don't know.'

.....

9%

Only 9% of women said they turn to therapy or professional support.

.....



7%

Just 7% of women mentioned taking medication for their mental health.

.....

Top 2 alternative or holistic therapies

When asked what alternative remedies and holistic therapies support mental health and wellbeing, the top two responses were meditation (10%) and mindfulness (15%).

Impact of stress or mental ill health on wellbeing

Women talked about how stress and mental health problems can significantly impact their lifestyle choices and ability to manage their wellbeing. When stressed, some women become less productive, neglecting tasks like cooking or cleaning, leading to a deteriorating living environment and increased stress. Some women described how stress can affect their diet, causing changes such as a decreased appetite or making unhealthy food choices, leading to fatigue and a reluctance to engage in activities.

The impact isn't limited to mental wellbeing; it can contribute to physical health issues, with stress possibly contributing to long term health conditions. Lack of sleep is also a common issue associated with stress and mental health challenges.

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

“I eat more and may have sweet treats more than at other times” (Calderdale, age 25-34)

“My rheumatologist feels that acute stress may have contributed to me developing the chronic health issues I have” (Kirklees, age 35-49)

*Stress can lead
to neglect*



How having a caring role can impact on mental health

Having a caring role can be highly stressful, and this stress can affect every aspect of their wellbeing. When women are responsible for caring, whether for children, elderly family members, or others, the demands of this role can create significant pressure. The stress may not only impact their mental health but can also affect their physical health, daily routines, and overall quality of life. Juggling caring responsibilities alongside other life demands can lead to exhaustion, emotional strain, and challenges in maintaining a healthy balance in various areas of their lives.

“It’s a huge pressure and responsibility. I can never really switch off from it. I can easily neglect myself and feel fine with it, but am wracked with guilt if things aren’t perfect for the person I look after. At times, it feels like a thankless task. It’s stressful and draining and feels like it will never end.”
(Kirklees, age 35-49)

People who take care of others often say that they put their own needs on the back burner because they feel the need to prioritise the wellbeing of the people they are taking care of.

“I have two children with disabilities. And their needs overwhelm mine.” (Calderdale, age 25-34)

“I often forget to eat as I am focused on making sure my son is fed. I am unable to leave the house as much as I would like as it is always me watching my son” (Kirklees, age 25-34)



What women want to help them look after their mental wellbeing

10%

“Access to free grief and wellbeing counselling.” (Kirklees, age 35-49)

Some mentioned that they'd appreciate support to go to places as they didn't feel able to go on their own due to anxiety.

“Someone to go with me places and support me with my mental health. I would like help long term to manage my health.” (Kirklees, age 35-49)

4%

4% said that they'd appreciate improved access or more access to mental health services.

“Mental health support while waiting for an assessment. There are surely therapies we can try before we are told the inevitable. Happy with online therapies but need to know where to start.” (Calderdale, age 25-34)

Carers talked about wanting someone to sit with the person they care for so that they can have a break and take some time to do something for themselves.

“Being able to talk to someone- being able to go to groups would help, being able to go on walks on my own with other walkers and have someone stay with the person I care for.” (Kirklees, age 65-79)

A few women mentioned wanting less judgement from health professionals for addictions, and talked about how they would welcome a more compassionate approach from staff in general.

“Less judgement - stop making me feel worthless because I have an addiction!” (Kirklees, age 35-49)

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 and local findings in Kirklees and Calderdale on our website.



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