Your Health

Health Partners

NOVEMBER 2026 MAGAZINE

Movember

and the importance of knowing your normal

plus

Why self-optimisation may be adding to our stress

Know your normal:

a Movember message that can make a real difference

With November upon us once again, it's likely you know someone who's currently in the process of growing a moustache or preparing to take on some other fundraising challenge in aid of Movember.

This annual campaign aims to shine a spotlight on some of the biggest issues affecting men's health, including prostate cancer, testicular cancer and suicide. As well as raising money for vital research and work in these areas, a key focus of Movember is building awareness, particularly around the importance of recognising early warning signs of ill health.

Why knowing the symptoms and what's normal for you matters

Health problems don't always appear suddenly. More often, they develop gradually, meaning symptoms can be easy to overlook or explain away.

Knowing the symptoms and what's normal for you and your body means you're more likely to notice changes that deserve attention, rather than dismissing them as something that will eventually sort itself out.

While most symptoms won't turn out to be serious, seeking advice early on can provide reassurance and, where treatment is needed, often leads to better outcomes.

This is especially true when it comes to prostate and testicular cancer.

Understanding prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common male cancer in the UK – around one in eight men will be diagnosed with the condition during their lifetime, increasing to one in four Black men.

One of the challenges is that, in the early stages of prostate cancer, symptoms may not always be obvious. When symptoms do appear, they can be very similar to those caused by other benign prostate conditions which become increasingly common as men age.

Possible signs of prostate cancer include:

- Needing to urinate more urgently or more frequently, particularly at night
- Difficulty starting to urinate
- A weaker flow of urine
- Feeling that your bladder has not emptied properly

These changes don't automatically mean cancer, but if they're persistent, it's important to have them assessed rather than assuming they're simply part of getting older.

Taking notice of your usual urination patterns will help you identify when something isn't quite right and may need checking out. For most men, it's normal to:

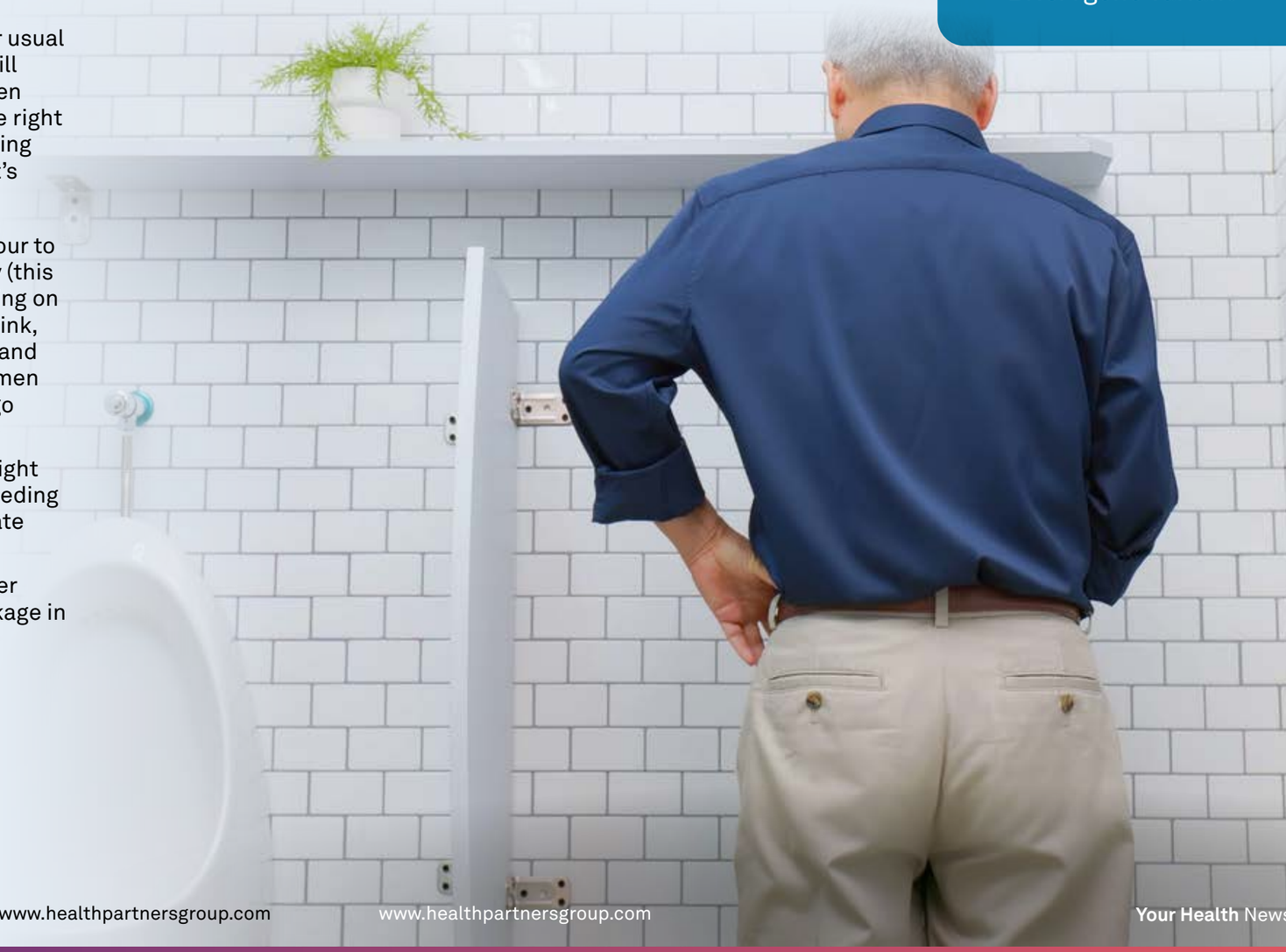
- Urinate around four to eight times a day (this can vary depending on how much you drink, your medication and your age – older men tend to need to go more frequently)
- Sleep for six to eight hours without needing to get up to urinate more than once
- Empty the bladder fully without leakage in between

It's also important to visit your GP if you experience any of the following symptoms, either alongside changes in your urination or on their own:

- Blood in your urine or semen
- Pain or difficulty when urinating or ejaculating
- Problems getting or keeping an erection
- Pain in your back, hips or pelvis that doesn't go away

Who's at risk?

- Prostate cancer mainly affects men over 50
- Black men, and men with mixed Black ethnicity
- Men with a family history of prostate cancer or where there is a family history of a BRCA gene variant



Recognising the signs of testicular cancer

While prostate cancer is more common in older men, testicular cancer tends to affect younger age groups.

In fact, it is the most common cancer in men aged 15 to 49. The positive news is that testicular cancer is highly treatable, particularly when diagnosed early.

Possible signs include:

- A lump or swelling in a testicle
- A change in shape, size or firmness
- A feeling of heaviness in the scrotum
- Persistent discomfort or pain

Again, knowing what's normal for you can help you spot these changes more easily. For most men, your testicles should feel smooth and firm but not hard, and it's common for one to be slightly bigger or hang lower than the other. Becoming familiar with the usual look and feel of your testicles through regular self-checks will mean you're more likely to notice any changes.

Not sure how to check?

Watch this short NHS video explaining what to look for

If you notice something unusual with your urination, sexual health or testicles, or something just doesn't feel right, don't hesitate to make an appointment with your GP.

While it can feel embarrassing discussing intimate health concerns, remember that healthcare professionals deal with these issues every day. It is always preferable to assess a harmless symptom early on than discover a serious problem later on.

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Looking after your mental health

Movember isn't only focused on physical health issues. It also shines a light on men's mental health and suicide prevention.

In England and Wales, around three-quarters of registered suicides are male and suicide is still the leading cause of death in men under 50. While the reasons for this are multifactorial, a contributing factor is that men are often less likely to seek help with emotional or psychological challenges and may wait until problems worsen before reaching out for support.

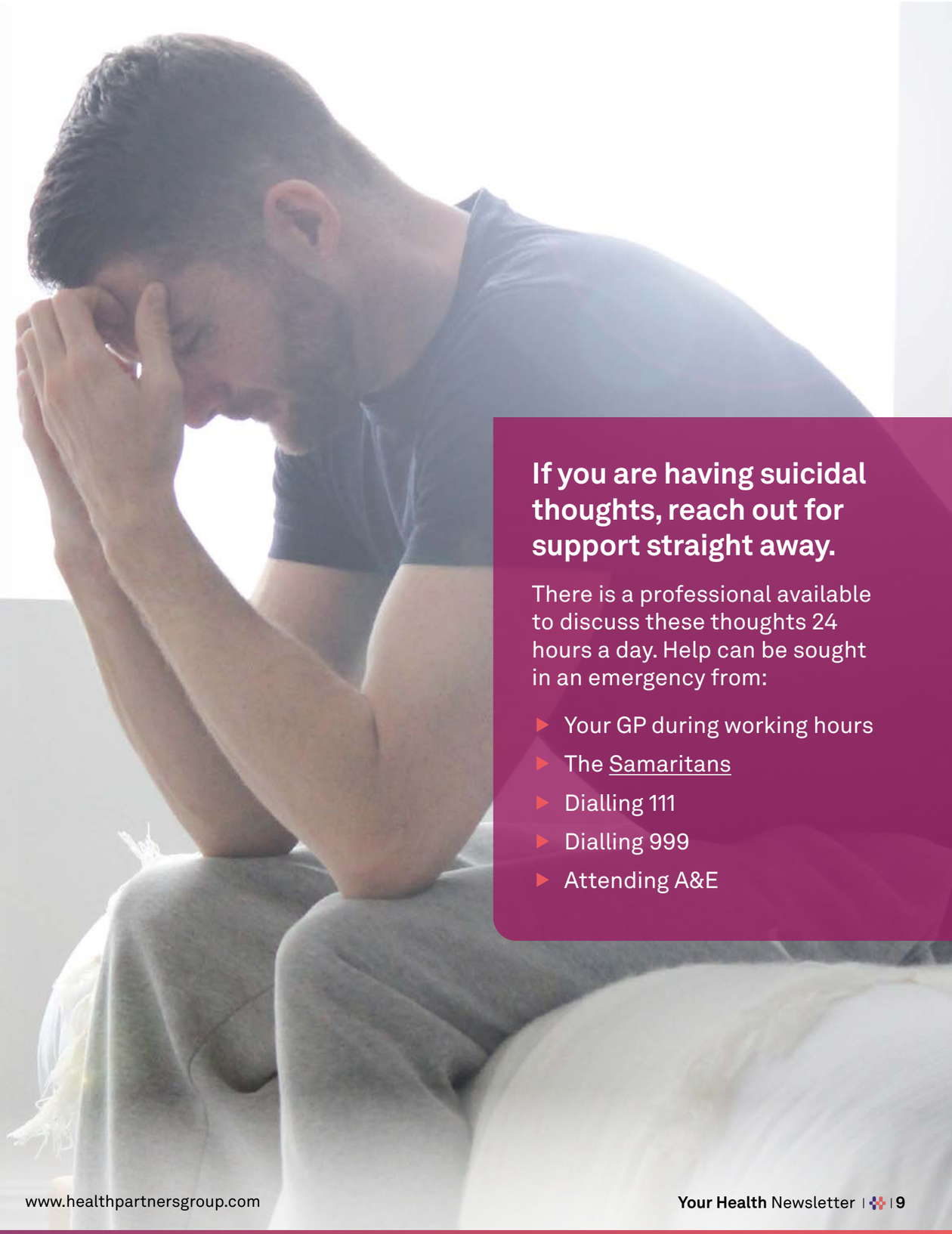
We all naturally experience fluctuations in our mental health. These can be influenced by a range of factors, such as work pressures, tiredness, illness, major life events or simply the demands of everyday life. Checking in with yourself regularly about your mood and how you're feeling can help you recognise whether any changes are normal for you or a sign that you might need to seek additional support.

Some signs that support may be helpful include:

- Feeling persistently low, irritable, anxious or overwhelmed
- Becoming withdrawn from friends, family or colleagues
- Losing interest in activities you would normally enjoy
- Changes in sleep, appetite or energy levels that don't go away
- Finding it increasingly difficult to cope with everyday demands

It's also worth paying attention to changes in habits or behaviour. For some people, struggling with their mental health can present with taking more risks than usual, or relying more heavily on alcohol or other unhealthy coping strategies.

If you do notice changes like these, it's important to reach out and seek support, whether that's speaking to a GP, using an employee assistance programme, contacting a mental health support service or confiding in someone you trust. You don't need to wait until things reach crisis point. Early conversations can help prevent problems from becoming harder to manage.



If you are having suicidal thoughts, reach out for support straight away.

There is a professional available to discuss these thoughts 24 hours a day. Help can be sought in an emergency from:

- Your GP during working hours
- The Samaritans
- Dialling 111
- Dialling 999
- Attending A&E

Noticed a change in someone else's normal?

When it comes to mental health, sometimes the people around us pick up on changes before we do ourselves.

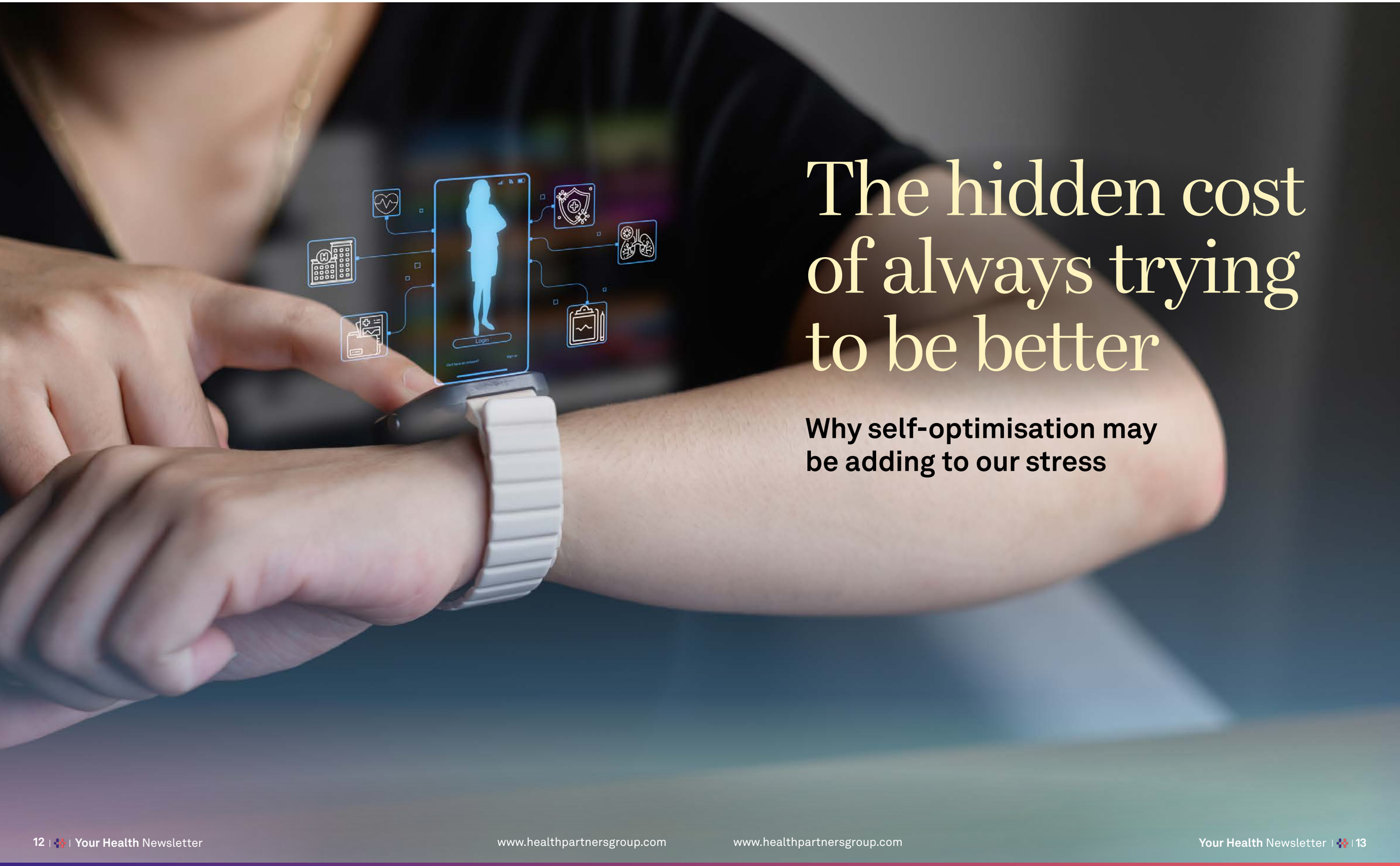
If you notice that a friend, family member or colleague seems different from usual, take some time to check in with them. You don't need to have all the answers. Simply asking how someone is, giving them space to talk and letting them know you're there to listen can make a big difference and make it easier for them to seek support.

More than a fundraising campaign

Although knowing your normal is important, it's still only part of the picture. Feeling able to talk about health issues and seek support matters too.

For many people, acting on health concerns often starts with a simple prompt from someone they trust.

So if you're planning to support Movember this year, whether you're 'growing a mo', taking on a sponsored fitness challenge or organising a workplace fundraiser, remember that the conversations you start along the way are just as important as the amount you raise: the conversation that encourages someone to book an appointment, that helps them open up about how they're feeling, or that simply reminds them they don't have to face challenges alone can make a big difference.



The hidden cost of always trying to be better

Why self-optimisation may be adding to our stress

Wake up earlier. Perfect your morning routine. Work out more. Learn a new skill. Use your time more productively.

It seems that we're constantly surrounded by advice telling us how to become happier, healthier and more successful. But, while personal growth can be positive, motivating and rewarding, when the expectation to be or do better never seems to stop, it can quietly become another source of stress in our lives.

With Stress Awareness Day coming up, now is the perfect opportunity to consider whether our pursuit of self-improvement is helping us thrive or simply creating an impossible standard to meet.

From self-improvement to self-optimisation

Self-improvement isn't a new idea. What's changed more recently is the amount of information we're exposed to on how to be our 'best self' and the extent to which we're able to continuously monitor and evaluate our progress.

The modern world encourages us to measure and track almost every area of our daily lives, with wearables and apps enabling us to analyse everything from our daily step count, sleep patterns and nutrition to our screen time, productivity and how well we're keeping up with healthy habits.

These tools can be incredibly useful, helping us make positive lifestyle changes and work towards our goals. However, they can also encourage a self-optimisation mindset that can be difficult to switch off. Gradually, success can become harder to define. Rather than recognising and taking time to reflect on how far we've come and what we've accomplished, we focus instead on the gap between where we are and where we think we should be – and the finish line keeps moving further away. The result of all this is that achievement doesn't always bring satisfaction, but additional, often unrealistic, expectations.

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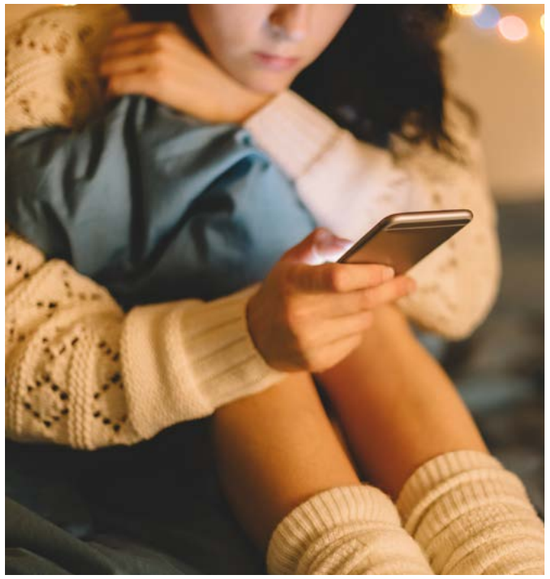
The comparison trap

While the pressure to keep improving often comes from the expectations we place on ourselves, social media can amplify the effects. Even when we know that what we're seeing has been carefully curated and doesn't always reflect the reality behind someone's success – the hard work, frustrations and setbacks – it can still be difficult not to compare ourselves to others and feel as though we're falling short if we're not reaching the same milestones. Instead of asking whether we're making progress on our own terms, we can find ourselves measuring our achievements against an ever-changing, and often unrealistic, benchmark set by our perception of everyone else.



When the pursuit of personal growth starts to affect our wellbeing

Whatever the source, the continuous pressure we feel to endlessly improve ourselves can quickly become exhausting, particularly when it comes on top of already demanding lives – balancing work, family and social commitments, household responsibilities, financial pressures and caring responsibilities.

It doesn't always show up as obvious stress. Instead, it may appear as guilt when we're resting, frustration when we aren't being productive, or a persistent feeling that we should be doing more than we currently are.

The belief that every moment needs to be used efficiently and every aspect of ourselves needs to be improved can also mean that over time, activities that were once enjoyable or restorative can start to feel like another set of goals to optimise.

Instead of simply enjoying a walk, we focus on hitting a step target. Instead of doing a hobby just for fun, we start thinking about how we could turn it into a side hustle. The same mindset can follow us into work, where every task becomes an opportunity to be more productive, develop another skill or stay one step ahead.

The problem is that when we start viewing ourselves as projects rather than people, it's easy to tie our self-worth to our progress and productivity and to feel like we're failing if we can't meet the standards we've set ourselves or internalised from what we see online. This can fuel self-criticism and perfectionist thinking, both of which have been linked to greater stress and poorer mental wellbeing.

Making space for growth without constant optimisation

If self-optimisation encourages us to treat everything we do as something to measure and improve, the alternative isn't giving up on personal growth altogether. It's recognising that growth and wellbeing aren't always the same thing.

People aren't machines. We aren't designed to perform at the same level every day, remain motivated all the time or continually improve in a straight line. Rest and downtime serve a purpose. So do unfinished projects, hobbies that lead nowhere, and periods where simply getting through the week is enough.

A healthy approach to personal growth involves recognising limits as well as possibilities and understanding that our value isn't determined by how productive, efficient or accomplished we are.

Growth doesn't have to mean constantly doing more

Stress Awareness Day comes at a time when many of us are worrying about what we still need to achieve this year while already planning our goals and resolutions for next year. But perhaps what we should be doing instead is asking whether the habits, goals and routines we're pursuing are genuinely helping us live better or, alternatively, presenting more opportunities for worry and unhelpful evaluation.

Personal growth can be rewarding, meaningful and beneficial for our wellbeing, but it should come from a place of curiosity and choice rather than obligation and comparison.

Allow yourself to enjoy the process and accept that we don't always need to be striving for more or asking, "What's next?"

Sometimes, the healthiest thing is to stop focusing on the next milestone long enough to recognise that where we are now might already be enough.

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Resources – Movember

- Changing the face of men's health (Movember)
- Prostate cancer risk factors (Prostate Cancer UK)
- Testicular cancer and prostate cancer symptoms (NHS Essex)
- How to check your testicles (NHS)
- Orchid fighting male cancer (Orchid)
- Men and mental health (Mental Health Foundation)
- How Samaritans can help you (Samaritans)

Resources – Stress awareness

- International stress awareness week (ISMA UK)
- Dealing with stress (NHS)
- The problem with the latest 'optimising' health and wellness trend (The Independent)
- The problem with perfection (The London School of Economics)
- Perfectionism workshop (NHS Talking Therapies)

Our Services

At Health Partners, we offer a range of workplace health and wellbeing services that can help support client employees with the issues covered in this edition of Your Health.

To find out more, visit our website healthpartnersgroup.com

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December 2026

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Meditation