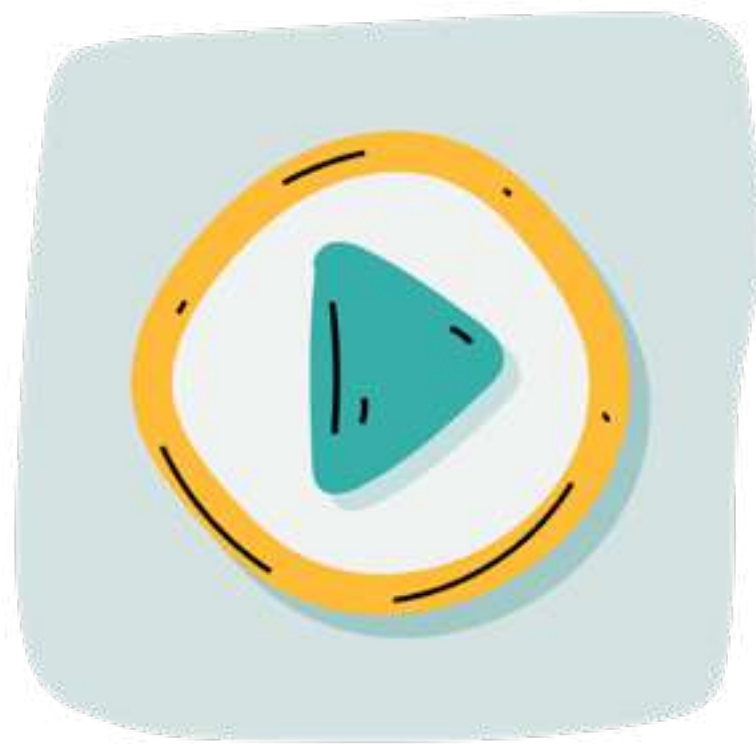


Welcome to this introductory online publication

Please take note of the following when navigating through this resource:

- This is an integrated text consisting of links to different webpages, videos and other third-party resources.
- Look out for the following icons:
- To enrich your learning experience, we suggest that you keep a journal reflecting on your own knowledge and experience while engaging with the resource.
- Remember this is not an exhaustive resource – please feel free to add your own strategies.
- This is not a once-off read and should form part of your overarching strategy in managing your digital wellbeing.



Video



Webpage / blog



Self-reflective activities



“The purpose of this publication is to encourage you to be continuously cognisant of the importance of our relationship with our digital devices. It is only by critically reflecting on the positive and negative aspects associated with the status of digital devices in our lives that we will be able to adapt to a rapidly changing world.”



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Entering the World of Digital Wellbeing: An Introduction

Introduction

Human beings have been searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for many centuries. Philosophers such as Aristotle and Confucius have published numerous writings about 'the good life' and what it is supposed to consist of. Experts are still conducting extensive research with the hope to create the perfect model for ultimate happiness and success. However, it seems that this is a never-ending exercise with frequently inconclusive results.

Ed Diener, the world's number one researcher of *subjective wellbeing* – aka *happiness* – declares that there are no exact prescriptions or recipes for how to experience 'the good life'. He is of the opinion that everyone should be able to make cognitive and affective judgements about their own life in order to determine the level of their own perceived happiness, and, based on that, design their own pathway to happiness (Diener, 2009; Diener, Shigehiro & Tay, 2018).



(VandenBos, 2015:1154)

Adding to the challenge of establishing what 'the good life' or 'happiness' entails and how to attain it is the fact that you must constantly adapt to the demands of the rapidly evolving world that you live in. With each new development in your world, you need to learn new skills to adjust to it. This will ensure that you do not only survive but that you also flourish and thus experience higher levels of wellbeing.

The rapid growth of digital technologies is an example of a development that can promote your wellbeing, but it may also pose several risks. It is imperative that you acquire insight into and knowledge about the effect of these technologies on your own wellbeing and that you continuously develop skills to manage yourself effectively in the digitalised realm that you live in. In the rest of this chapter, we will explore the concept 'digital wellbeing', how technology and digitisation can complement your wellbeing and how it can interfere with your wellbeing.

We will introduce the concept 'digital flourishing', and you will be able to complete your own digital flourishing profile.

Digital wellbeing

The Jisc digital capabilities framework (2019, p.8) defines digital wellbeing as follows:

- The capacity to look after personal health, safety, relationships and work-life balance in digital settings.
- The use of digital tools in the pursuit of personal goals (e.g. health and fitness) and to participate in social and community activities, act safely and responsibly in digital environments, negotiate and resolve conflict, and manage digital workload, overload and distraction.
- Concern for the human and natural environment when using digital tools.
- Understanding of the benefits and risks of digital participation in relation to health and wellbeing outcomes.

Digital technology and digitisation, however, also pose a risk to your wellbeing and it is therefore imperative that you be aware of digital wellbeing in order to manage your own wellbeing optimally.

For instance, Kushlev (2018) suggests that technology and digitisation can *complement* or *interfere with* your wellbeing by referring to the following examples:

How digital technology can *complement* your wellbeing includes the following:

- **A source of positive emotions:**

Watching an uplifting video and reading inspiring texts are sources of positive emotions.

- **A source of basic needs satisfaction:**

Using text messages or phone calls to communicate with friends and family can improve your sense of connectedness.

- **Efficiency and convenience:**

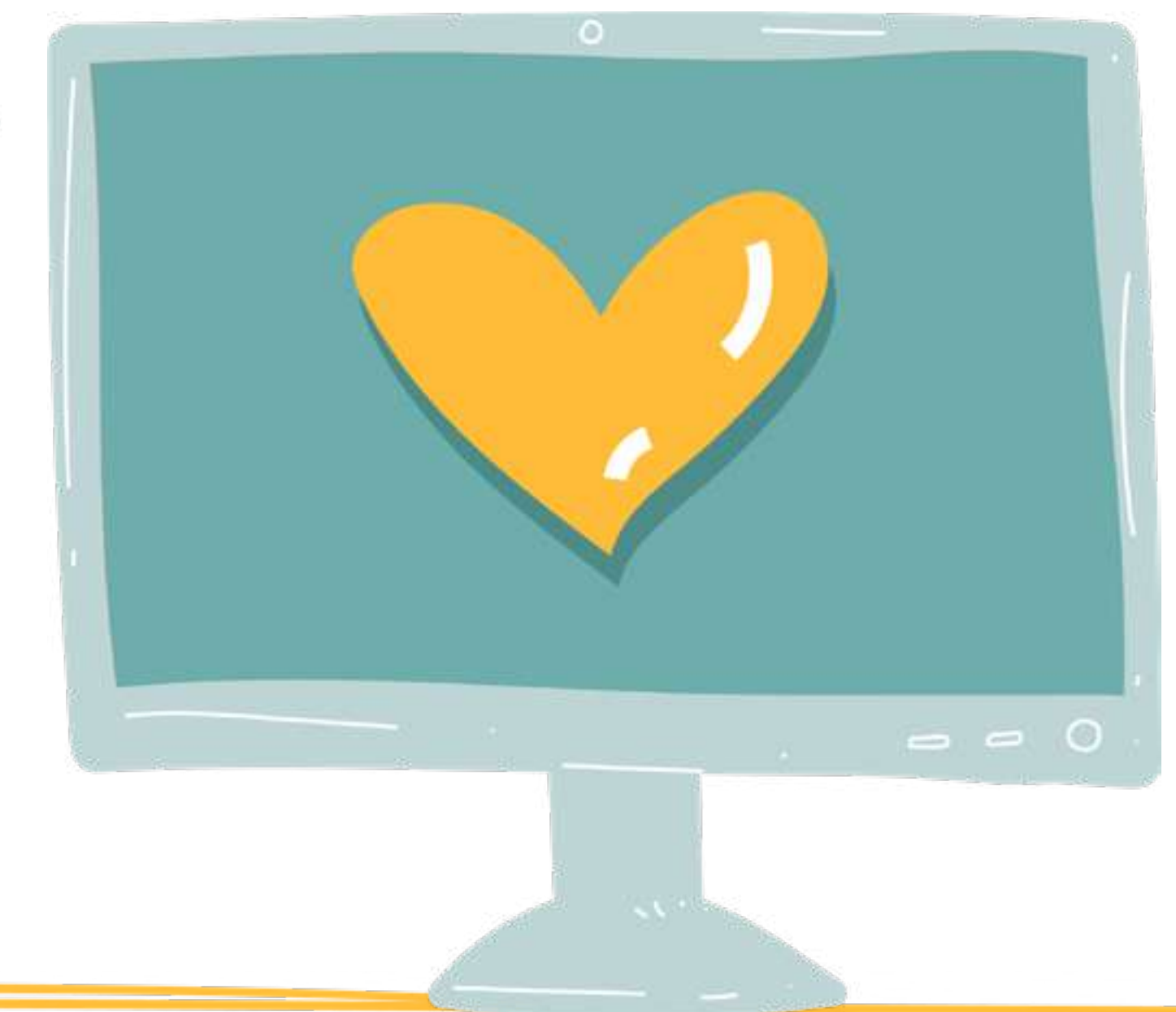
One of the primary goals of technology is to make your life easier, for example using the internet to answer intricate questions or using your smartphone's GPS to reach an unfamiliar destination.

How does digital technology currently complement your wellbeing?

Technology and digitisation can *interfere* with our wellbeing in the following ways:

- **Concurrent attention costs:**

People have limited cognitive capacities. This implies that if you carry out more than one activity at the same time, for example attending a lecture, surfing the internet and checking Instagram all at once, you can limit the cognitive resources that should be dedicated to a specific task. You will use the same cognitive resources, namely attention and working memory when you perform these activities.





Attention is a “state in which cognitive resources are focussed on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others and the central nervous system is in a state of readiness to respond to stimuli”

(VandenBos, 2015, p.87).

Your working memory is “the short term maintenance and manipulation of information necessary for performing complex cognitive tasks such as learning, reasoning and comprehension”

(VandenBos, 2015, p.1162).



Although you may believe that you can successfully perform all three activities at once, it is impossible. According to Napier (2014), research has proven that the phenomenon of **multitasking** does not exist. What happens is that you switch from one activity to the other in a very short time span. Each switch, however, needs to utilise your working memory and attention. This puts your cognitive resources under increased stress.

Limited research is available about the exact impact of distraction caused by digital technology and digitisation on your wellbeing. Kushlev, Proulx and Dunn (2017) instructed research participants to spend one week with their smartphones within their immediate reach and with notification alerts switched on. During another week, the same participants were asked to put their smartphones away where they could not reach them easily and they were also instructed to switch the notifications off. Can you guess the results and findings of this study? The participants indeed reported that they experienced higher levels of inattention when the alerts were turned on and when it was quite easy for them to reach their phones. The higher levels of inattention correlated with lower levels of psychological wellbeing.

A challenge for you

1. Switch off all notifications on your cell phone for one week
2. Place your cell phone somewhere where it is not immediately accessible to you – at home but also when you are socializing
3. After the week, reflect on your levels of attention and mindful living during this week

In another study by Lepp, Barkley and Karpinski (2014), the usage of digital technology was linked with negative academic outcomes in university students. This low academic performance had a negative impact on their subjective wellbeing, and they reported high levels of anxiety.

● Delayed attention costs:

Digital technology can limit your attention span even when you are busy with activities that do not involve using such technology. This implies that due to your prolonged exposure to technology, your ability to pay and sustain attention for longer periods of time even while you have switched off all technology may be significantly affected. An example is when you need to pay attention during a 50-minute lecture. Bhat (2017, n.p.) explains it as follows:

In the current age of fast-paced modern technology and social media, it's no wonder that adults—let alone children—are unable to focus their attention easily. Think about how much stimulation we're exposed to daily, and how much it impacts your world. Between smartphones, iPods, email, TV, DVRs, the internet, social media and more, our brain's neurons



Another example is a very thought-provoking article titled "[Is Google making us stupid?](#)" by Nicholas Carr, published in the July/August 2008 issue of The Atlantic, in which he laments unexpected changes in his ability to concentrate and read complex written work. He attributes these challenges to his daily activities on the internet. What do you think about Carr's accusation against the internet?



Also [watch](#) this video by Nicolas Carr (2011):

We acknowledge that researchers still do not know what the exact effect of the prolonged exposure to different forms of digital technology and digitisation is on our brains, but arguments about the possible link to problems with attention do exist. Maybe you should consider becoming involved in some exciting research about this phenomenon in the future!

● **Substitution:**

People may pay an emotional price when they substitute happiness and wellbeing activities that involve interaction with other people with digitalised interactions. An example is when you substitute socialising with friends on a Saturday evening with online gaming or when you substitute enough quality sleep with binge-watching television series.

Reflective Activity

How does digital technology currently interfere with your wellbeing? Can you recall any specific examples?

A dilemma or opportunities to flourish?

Google, one of the largest and most popular technology companies, has the following credo: "[Focus on the user, and all else will follow](#)" (<https://www.google.com/about/philosophy.html>). From a business perspective, this makes sense because it highlights the importance of always keeping the consumer in mind when you develop a product. In the digital realm, this manifests in algorithms, machine learning and artificial intelligence being utilised to tweak every individual user's digital experience according to his/her needs, interests and unique behaviour.

In the recent documentary-drama *The Social Dilemma* (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020), the rise of social media and its potential damage to society is explored. The movie paints a picture of doom and gloom in which the financial exploitation of users, the rise of addiction, the role of social

media in the distribution of false news and its deleterious effect on mental health are discussed by people who are or were employed by social media giants.

Reflective Activity

Watch the trailer of the movie [The Social Dilemma](#) (Rhodes & Orlowski, 2020).

In your own words, explain what you

Reflective Activity

Before we discuss each one of the domains, we would like to invite you to complete the [Digital Flourishing Survey](#) (Hersher et al., 2020, p. 23):

Are you flourishing or are you languishing?



Read further to see how you can adjust your practices from languishing to flourishing, and/or maintain your current flourishing wellbeing.

Mental health

Excessive use of digital technology and social media can have a debilitating effect on your mental health. It can potentially aggravate the symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress, and it can cause mood and anxiety disorders.

Professor Larry Rosen (2012), an expert on the psychology of technology, coined the notion of '**iDisorder**'. He argues that the constant and excessive influx of information via our

digital devices is more than what our human minds can handle. Because of this information overload, an increasing number of people present with debilitating symptoms such as obsessive-compulsive behaviour, difficulty with maintaining focus or hyperfocusing, distractibility and addiction.

Reflective Activity

How has social media affected your happiness during the past week?

People who are flourishing in the mental health domain of the digital flourishing wheel are controlled and intentional in their use of digital devices, applications and social media. They do not expose themselves to negative social online comparisons, and they do not experience an almost constant fear of missing out. These individuals do not use digital technology to escape reality.



Tips to protect and promote your mental health:

- Identify and befriend people on social media who support you and whose social media posts generate positive and constructive experiences.

- Unfollow those who can potentially harm your mental health.
- Actively reinforce feelings of self-worth by posting about positive experiences and achievements.
- Contribute to others' wellbeing by sharing words of encouragement, gratitude and praise.
- Join an online mental health support group.
- Take active control of the time that you spend with technology. Remember that it is not only about the amount of time that you spend interacting with technology. How you spend this time is also an important predictor of the influence of technology on your mental health.
- We are receiving news faster than ever, and we consume more news than ever. There can be pressure to be up to date on all the current tragedies all around the world. This

Physical health

People who spend many hours with their digital devices can experience worrying physical symptoms, an indication that their physical health may be at risk. Carpal tunnel syndrome, neck and back pain, eye strain and sleep problems are positively related to digital overuse (Loos, 2017).

Have you heard about 'tech neck'? Watch this [video clip](#) by Bridget Carey (2017) to learn more about it, including how to prevent it.

People who are flourishing in the **physical health domain** of digital wellness are aware of the importance of a healthy body posture while they are using their digital devices. They also take special care of their eye and sleep health.



Tips to promote your physical health:

- Always observe good body posture.
- If you often experience aches and pains in your body, it may help to
- hold your phone or tablet at eye level when you are reading a text;
- use a standing desk when you work on your computer or laptop;
- alternate between standing and sitting in front of your computer or laptop; and

- do body stretches or go for a walk after 90 minutes of sitting behind a screen.
- Take regular screen breaks.
- Switch digital devices off at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Are you inclined to check your cell phone just after you wake up? Rather have a charging station in a separate room (e.g. kitchen) so that you can start your morning with a positive waking-up routine that excludes looking at your digital devices for at least the first 15 to 30 minutes of screen, look for 20 seconds at something that is 20 meters away from you.
- Do not take your digital devices on a lunch date. It is much more fun to enjoy nice food with friends and family around the table.
- For those who have to spend extensive periods of time working at a desk, it is beneficial to consider the ergonomics of your desk setup. For example, invest in a chair that will support your back, if you work on a laptop consider getting a laptop stand and a separate keyboard, so that you can keep your hands on your desk, while keeping your head upright.

Productivity

People who can focus for longer periods of time on one specific task or project, who can limit distractions and interruptions and who

can maintain a work-life balance flourish in the **domain of productivity**.

Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, once said, "Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work in hand. The Sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus." Although digital technology has evolved over the years to improve individuals' and companies' productivity significantly, it also poses a direct threat to it. One of the main reasons is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to focus on a single task while emails, texts and push notifications are constantly the day. Rather write in your journal or go for a walk in nature.

-

- Check your email at specific times of the day.
- Put your phone away while you are working on an assignment or project.
- Set special times to check your social media feeds.
- Can you think of any apps that could assist you in managing your productivity and encourage you to take regular breaks?

Relationships

Introducing social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram greatly affected the **world of relationships**. Social media usage can have positive and negative influences on the quality of relationships. One of the positive outcomes of social media is that it allows us to establish relationships with people who do not live near us and with whom face-to-face interactions are not always possible. Social media makes it easy to connect with people at almost any time of the day without having to make the effort to meet in person. However, researchers (Butler & Matook, 2015; Sherrel & Lambie, 2016) found that social media could also impact relationships negatively in a variety of ways. Conflict, jealousy and bullying can be the result of destructive behaviour on social media networks.

Remember that individuals who experience flourishing relationships usually try to pay uninterrupted attention to others during face-to-face interactions. Their online interactions are also characterised by meaningful and positive reflective content.



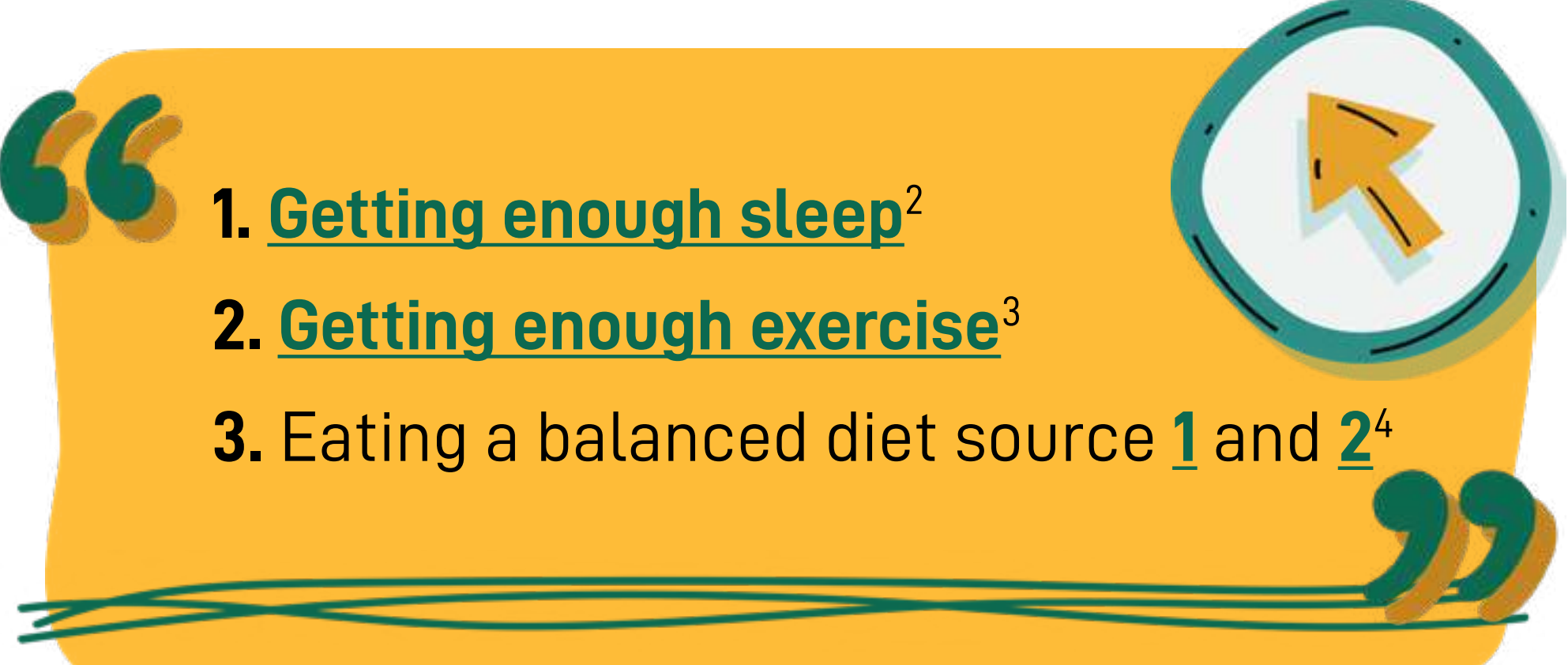
Tips to improve your online relationships:

- Be authentic and positive in your online interactions.
- Join friends online whom you can trust and share interests with.
- Unsubscribe from or unfollow online friends, groups or pages that are not conducive to your quality of life.
- Start a family or friend gratitude practice by daily posting and sharing with each other three things that you are grateful for.

General wellbeing

People who flourish in the **general wellbeing domain** reflect joy, meaning, growth, self-expression and inspiration in their online behaviour.

Getting enough quality sleep, exercising regularly and following a balanced diet are important components of general wellbeing. Here are some interesting blogs about these topics that you can read:



1. [Getting enough sleep](#)²
2. [Getting enough exercise](#)³
3. Eating a balanced diet source [1](#) and [2](#)⁴

Understanding of self-concept and identity

As mentioned, identity or self-concept is seen as what we think, perceive or evaluate ourselves to be. Is identity then something that is fixed or fluid; in other words, will it remain the same or can it change and develop? Now that we can express ourselves online as well, can we develop an online identity and how does this identity relate to our offline identities?

Internet identity

Internet identity, also online identity or internet persona, is a social identity that an internet user establishes in online communities and on websites. It can also be considered as an actively constructed presentation of yourself.

Offline identity

Offline identity is who you are when you are not connected to the internet, online communities and websites (Self-image and online-offline identities, n.d.).

For both online and offline identities, research has shown that identity is a fluid concept, something that is constantly reworked while striving towards coherence. Identity is multifaceted due to the different roles that we play and the different contexts that influence these roles. Online identity becomes even more multifaceted due to the various platforms that influence online identity development. The most common platforms include the following:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn)
- Blogging
- Membership of an online community
- Gaming
- Streaming sites
- Smartphones

These different platforms can be used for different purposes. On some we can choose to share information within certain limits whereas others offer opportunities to share information on public spaces. Gaming can take place in both individual and socialised (either in person or virtually) settings. With the development of smartphones, the computer need no longer be separate from us but is something that we can always be connected or attached to. These

different platforms thus offer the opportunity to have various online identities, depending on the platform and the purpose that we are using the platform for. Providing only one definition of online identity is therefore challenging (Miller, 2013).

Watch the following two videos that demonstrate how online activity can influence our identity:

- [The Effects of Social Media on Identity](#)
- [Identity SHORT FILM](#)



These videos illustrate that it can be very easy to turn into someone else while online without even realising that you are becoming less authentic. We need to question what impact our online activity will have on our identity development. You should ask yourself the following questions: "Am I presenting a less authentic image/picture of myself online?", "Is my online image damaging to my self-worth?", "Do I possibly send misleading messages to my network and potential network?" and "Is my online identity perhaps offering me the opportunity to explore certain qualities or characteristics that I would like to portray in my offline identity?"

When you create an online identity, aim at being the same person online and offline: a person about whom close friends can comment that what you portray online is the same as how they experience you offline. Try to show a meaningful part of your personality online so that others can see that you have substance, what you are passionate about or what provides you with support. You may think that there are gains/benefits to having a fake online persona, but in the long term, you could be unmasked for the pretender that you are. You run the risk of being exposed and your credibility then being severely damaged.



Remember that the internet is a public space and that once you have posted something online, you automatically waive your right to privacy. In sharing information online, a 'digital tattoo' or 'digital footprint' is created as everything that you post can have a permanent record. Keep in mind that online content can also be shared easily by others. Thus, be respectful in your online activity; for example, do not tag others in embarrassing photos or places and before you post controversial opinions, ask yourself whether this is something that you will want to be remembered for, forever. To read more about your digital footprint or tattoo, please click here: [digital footprint](#).

Be careful of creating a stereotyped personality because of something that you post online, for example being a party person. Stand by your beliefs and values with what you post online. Do not feel pressured by others to portray a certain persona online; be as authentic as possible. However, be careful not to reveal too much about yourself online. Revealing too much about yourself and sharing every thought, problem or photo taken of you can make you vulnerable to the more sinister types lurking on the internet. It could also damage your reputation, both online and offline. Be careful of confronting others on social media. If you are involved in an argument with someone, rather settle it privately.



Let us highlight two key messages:

1. Use social networking wisely and adjust your privacy settings to your own comfort level. Be cautious.
2. However, the second message is just as important: Enjoy the opportunities that come from having an online life. Do not be afraid to participate and connect. Being able to connect with friends and different communities, sharing thoughts and ideas that can have a positive impact on others and having an additional source of finding a sense of belonging can be extremely gratifying.

