

COMBAT STRESS

Autumn 2018
Issue 01



The Self-Care Issue

The Self-Care Issue

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Combat Stress

We want to say a big thank you to all who contributed to this issue.

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Editor's letter

WELCOME!

As a charity that's been supporting veterans' mental health for almost 100 years, we know how to help people when they're going through a tough time. *Combat Stress* magazine is our way of sharing our knowledge, so that we can help anyone who might be struggling with their mental health to live as fulfilled a life as possible.



Our first issue is about self-care. From getting a good night's sleep to reading a book to unwind – self-care is vital for our wellbeing.

For me, doing yoga regularly gives me the time I need to relax. It makes me happier, helps me worry less and enables me to be more present.

But the things we do to look after our bodies and minds are unique to us all, which I hope this issue reflects.

On **page 22** we speak to author Emily Reynolds about @everydaycare, the Twitter bot helping people look after themselves. On **page 14** we hear from Army veteran Craig about 'me' time and how it's been crucial for his recovery from PTSD. And on **page 24** we chat to TV presenter Susanna Reid about how she finds balance and takes care of herself.

Summer might be behind us, but the autumn and winter months promise hearty food, crisp walks and, let's not forget, Christmas! So enjoy the moment, spend time with loved ones and most importantly, take care of yourself.

See you in spring!

Sally

Sally George
Editor

Autumn

NEWS & VIEWS

There But Not There

‘There But Not There’ is the 2018 Armistice project for military charity Remembered. Life-size silhouettes of ‘Tommies’ are being installed across the nation to represent every name from the 888,246 British and Commonwealth Fallen of the First World War, with miniature ‘Tommies’ also available to buy online. Money raised through the project will go to several military charities – including Combat Stress – to help those injured physically and mentally during service. To find out more about the project and how you can support it, visit therebutnotthere.org.uk



A life-size ‘Tommy’ for the There But Not There project pictured here at the Giants Causeway, County Antrim.

Armistice centenary

Every year on 11 November we commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation.

This year marks 100 years since the end of the First World War, when thousands returned home injured and many more didn’t return home at all. At 11am, church and cathedral bells will ring out in unison across the country before two minutes of silence in remembrance of those who have fallen and those affected physically and mentally by war. To commemorate the

Armistice centenary, we’ll be holding a special lecture on **1 November** called ‘Armistice 1919: The End of the War to End all Wars?’ at Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall. The guest speaker will be military author Rupert Wieloch.

To find out more, visit combatstress.org.uk/events

Raising awareness of mental health

Every year one in four adults will struggle with a mental health problem. World Mental Health Day serves to raise awareness of mental health, and this year it falls on **10 October**. It’s a time for everyone across the globe to be part of a conversation about mental health, banding together against the stigma of speaking out about invisible illnesses.



Some of the greatest joys in life are also the simplest. Here’s a list of small things you could try over the next few months to make you feel good. (We’ve added space for your ideas too!)


 Take an autumnal walk


 Say hello to a neighbour

 Bake a loaf of bread

 Look through some old photos

 Make a healthy meal

 Make a playlist of your favourite songs

 Read a book all the way through

 Water your plants



Dates for your diary

We have a busy season of events coming up – why not join us for one of the following:

04 OCT

Edinburgh

Scotland autumn lecture

Joe Morrow CBE QC



01 NOV

London

Armistice lecture

Rupert Wieloch



12 DEC

London

Festival of Lessons and Carols



For tickets or more information about these events, please contact events@combatstress.org.uk, visit combatstress.org.uk/events or call **01372 587 148**

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Is the scale of PTSD exaggerated?



Dr Walter Busuttil, Medical Director and Consultant Psychiatrist at Combat Stress.

Dr Walter Busuttil is a world-leading expert in the treatment and rehabilitation of people with PTSD. As Medical Director and Consultant Psychiatrist at Combat Stress, he responds to headlines accusing charities of ‘exaggerating’ the scale of PTSD to raise funds. ➔

Back in May, breakfast TV show Good Morning Britain aired a discussion about the scale of PTSD.

“It’s true that PTSD is talked about a lot more nowadays. But the same can be said for mental health in general. When keeping a stiff upper lip was a big part of our culture, talking about how we felt inside was taboo.

“As times change, mental health is becoming less of a stigma and everyone is talking about it more.

“Combat and military-related trauma are very real and serious conditions. Veterans with PTSD struggle to leave the battlefield behind, reliving their experiences so often that they

find it hard to function. PTSD has an enormous ripple effect; often it tears families apart, destroys relationships and devastates lives. And for the most unwell veterans, suicide can seem like their only option.

“At Combat Stress, we believe former servicemen and women deserve our help in their hour of need.

“An astonishing 80% of veterans who seek help and receive care from Combat Stress have already tried to get help from the NHS or MoD medical staff before leaving the military. This fact alone shows that whatever previous support they received just wasn’t enough.

“Is the scale of PTSD exaggerated? Absolutely not. Speaking out about mental health problems can be one of the hardest things for a veteran to do, so we’re part of a movement to create a climate where veterans can talk.

“Speaking negatively about military trauma and the scale of PTSD will put veterans off asking for help. It could cost lives.

“Over the last ten years Combat Stress, as well as other organisations, has seen demand for its services double. Again, this isn’t exaggeration. The scale of PTSD is growing because there are more veterans reaching out for help than ever before – because thankfully, it’s becoming more acceptable to do so.”

What is PTSD?

To find out more about PTSD and how it affects the brain visit combatstress.org.uk/ptsd



SELF-CARE

Self-care is part of daily life, and can mean something different to us all. It ranges from everyday things like eating healthily, exercising and sleeping well to doing things that support our emotional health – like being out in the sunshine, practicing mindfulness or listening to our favourite song. Simply put, self-care is looking after our bodies and our minds. ➔

FINDING

Christie Alkin is a community occupational therapist at Combat Stress, covering Kent, Sussex and Hampshire. She works with former servicemen and women to help them achieve the right balance in their lives if mental health problems are taking their toll.

We chatted to her to find out more about how we can all find balance and live life to the full. ➔

What does a balanced life look like and what's the role of self-care?

A balanced life to me means everything in moderation. To find this balance through occupational therapy, we look at three areas: productivity, leisure and self-care.

Productivity is your input towards society, whether this is through paid or unpaid work (for example volunteering). Leisure is taking part in hobbies and occupations that reflect your interests and offer you opportunities to socialise. Self-care is the everyday tasks like washing, feeding, dressing and looking after yourself emotionally.

In my experience, it's often the self-care components that get forgotten about when people endure a lot of stress and poor mental health; people stop eating, drinking, washing and neglect their emotions, which leads to an impact on the other areas of their life.

There are clear parallels with physical and mental health. If you're not looking after yourself physically, it's likely that you won't feel well mentally and vice versa.

As an occupational therapist, I spend time working with veterans to evaluate their productivity, leisure and self-care needs and what can be done to improve them.



“If you’re not looking after yourself physically, it’s likely that you won’t feel well mentally and vice versa.”

How can you tell when your life or someone else’s is off balance?

There are often extreme cases, either people who get out of routine and struggle to get out of bed in the morning and those who work so hard, doing long hours and then find it difficult to look after themselves or have time for their hobbies.

In other cases, people can lose motivation and interest in things they have previously enjoyed because of physical or mental health problems.

It’s often the people closest to you that pick up on it first. If you hear ‘isn’t it time you took a break?’, this could be an indicator of too much time spent working.

Similarly, you may hear ‘have you eaten today?’ or ‘when was the last time you got a decent night’s sleep?’ if people are concerned about your self-care. It’s very easy to get on to the ‘treadmill of life’ and keep doing things the way we know.

“You might think it’s better not to ‘burden’ people with your problems, but people want to help.”

As an occupational therapist I find it’s important to encourage people to reflect on their emotions and day-to-day lives and ask if they’re happy or if this is how they imagined their life to be.

Creating a schedule is a good way to look at your daily and weekly routine to increase awareness around which areas you’re participating more or less in. Goals can then be set to change the imbalance and how you’re living your life.

What’s the one thing that you do to improve your mental wellbeing?

Talk. If something’s troubling me, I talk about it with a friend or my family.

I know this can sometimes feel like the hardest thing and you might think it’s better not to ‘burden’ people with your problems, but people want to help. A problem shared really is a problem halved, whether that’s a cup of tea and a chat with a friend or a call with a healthcare professional. Talking is the best place to start.

Feeling off balance?

Try keeping a journal. You’ll soon notice the areas in your life that may need some care and attention.

TAKE A MINUTE

Mindfulness can help to manage anxiety and stress, which is something we can all benefit from.

A key part of mindfulness is noticing what you’re experiencing in the moment and focusing on it.

If you’re struggling with your emotions, caught up in the past or worrying about the future, mindfulness can help bring you back to the present.

Why not try this short mindfulness exercise from Dr Martyn Bignold, Psychologist at Combat Stress. →



MOVE FOR YOUR MIND

Physical activity might seem like the last thing you'd want to do when you're going through a tough time, but it can do wonders for your mind. Exercise has been proven to help people with some forms of depression, with GPs sometimes prescribing it instead of antidepressants. →

Being active reduces stress and anxiety levels. It can also help us feel more confident in ourselves.

Exercise can slow down racing thoughts and help stop us from overthinking. It also helps us sleep better and gives us a good opportunity to make friends and socialise if we join a gym or take part in an exercise class.

There's no right or wrong way to be active. What's important is finding something you enjoy, so that you see exercise as a fun way to take care of your wellbeing.

If you want to release stress or anger, a high-energy gym class might help.

If you're feeling low, a creative physical activity like gardening can be therapeutic.

If you're feeling anxious, walking as you pay attention to your surroundings can keep your mind focused on the present.

Here are some exercises you can try in the comfort of your own home:

Squats



Bend down as though you're sitting in an invisible chair, then come back up to a standing position. You could even do these while you're brushing your teeth!

Press-ups



With your arms shoulder width apart and your legs straight out behind you, lower your chest as close to the floor as you can and then push yourself back up. You could start by doing these on your knees, which will make them a bit easier.

Crunches



Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the ground, keeping your legs hip width apart. Use your stomach to pull your upper body off the ground, always keeping your feet on the floor. Lie back down and repeat as many times as you like!

British Military Fitness

If you've decided to try a new physical activity, we know the hardest part is taking the initial plunge – which is why British Military Fitness (BMF) has beginner-friendly classes for anyone wanting to learn the ropes gradually.

BMF runs outdoor exercise classes for people of all abilities and fitness levels across the UK. Instructors are former or serving members of the military who use their knowledge to deliver 'civilian-friendly' boot camps that help people get fit fast.

A military-style boot camp might sound terrifying, but BMF classes are designed to be fun, friendly and supportive.

And for anyone worried that the classes may be too intense, BMF run Walkfit – a fun, slightly less sweaty version of the original BMF workout. Walkfit is a great option for anyone wanting to exercise without putting lots of impact on their bones and joints.

Want to get started for free?

BMF knows the value of exercise for mental wellbeing. This is why BMF offers its classes to veterans and those currently serving **free of charge**. To find out more, visit britmilfit.com/fitness-for-veterans

Fancy a challenge?

If you sign up to a Combat Stress challenge event you'll get two weeks of **free BMF classes!** To find out more visit combatstress.org.uk/support-us/challenge-events and to check out what BMF has to offer, visit britmilfit.com

If it's been a while since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

ME TIME

Craig's Story

We often hear the phrase 'me' time, but how many of us realise how important it is for our wellbeing? Veteran Craig talks about the value of helping others and taking 'me' time for his self-care after treatment for PTSD. ➔



Craig on his motorbike in Newcastle.

A huge part of my recovery has been helping others. It makes me feel good to know that I'm supporting other people who are going through a rough time."

Craig joined the Territorial Army when he was 17. He served in the British Army for 28 years, with tours to Belize, Bosnia and Iraq.

"There was an incident in Bosnia that changed me completely. For years after I felt like I was reliving it daily. My mood and behaviours changed – I wasn't me anymore."

It wasn't long before Craig was diagnosed with PTSD. He had been referred to different talking therapies through the NHS, but still struggled. A therapist eventually referred Craig to Combat Stress for help.

"I started going to occupational therapy groups, where I could talk openly with other veterans about my experience. What first struck me was how helpful it was to be with like-minded people. We'd been on similar tours and found it easy to connect.

"We gave each other great support. I learnt practical ways of taking better care of my mental health, as well as how to use mindfulness to bypass bad thoughts."

"I went from strength to strength, and in November last year I volunteered to help coordinate the Combat Stress support groups near me. Peer support groups give veterans like me an opportunity to get together, talk about

“Me” time is different for everyone. Taking pleasure in the things you enjoy in life is key to staying in the present.”

From left to right:
Craig's walking boots,
Craig spending time on
his motorbike, items from
Craig's time in service.

their experiences and give each other encouragement. It makes me feel good to know that I'm putting something back into a charity that's done so much for me.

"But I know that I can't help others unless I look after myself. That might sound obvious, but taking good care of yourself can be one of the most difficult things to do if you're in a bad place. Self-care can make a world of difference to the way you feel, and often life moves so fast that it can be easy to forget all about it.

"I worked out that having 'me' time is massively important. You can't always plan for it – especially when you have

other things in life like work, children and other bits and bobs – but it's important to savour the moment and enjoy the time you have to yourself, even if means just a few minutes of quiet reflection.

"My 'me' time is when I'm doing what I love – whether that's being out on my motorbike or walking up hills and mountains.

"Being on my bike makes my mind feel clear. When I'm having a bad day and need to get out of the house, I'll go for a ride on my motorbike and stop off for a coffee somewhere. It relaxes me and, because I have to think about what I'm doing, it keeps me in the present moment."

"I also love hill-walking. Being out in the open air and countryside makes me feel good. Walking up hills and mountains really takes it out of me physically, which helps to take my mind off the other things in life – even the things that can stress me out. It doesn't matter if it's rain, wind or sunshine, the whole experience grounds me.

“Me’ time is different for everyone.
Taking pleasure in the things you enjoy
in life is key to staying in the present.”

We're here to help

If you know a veteran who may be struggling with their mental health, tell them about our 24-hour Helpline. Our Helpline provides confidential mental health advice for veterans, their families, friends and carers. They can call us on **0800 138 1619**, text **07537 404 719*** or email **helpline@combatstress.org.uk**

**Standard charges may apply for texts, please check with your provider.*



READY, SET,



Get involved

Physical activity makes us feel good inside and out. Taking part in a challenge event is a great way of doing something for ourselves and helping others at the same time. Here's a list of challenge events you could get involved in over the next few months to help Combat Stress support veterans with mental health problems. →

6 and 7 October 2018

Windsor Spartan Race

13 and 14 October 2018

Bristol Rough Runner

4 November 2018

Edinburgh Men's 10K

5 December 2018

Santa in the City 5K

21 January 2019

Farnborough Half Marathon

28 January 2019

Longleat 10K

24 March 2019

London Landmarks Half Marathon

14 April 2019

Brighton Marathon

6 June 2019

D-Day 44 Challenge

Various dates

Dog Jog 5K

Various dates

Big Fun Run 5K

Feel inspired?

We have lots more events across the UK and abroad. To find out more visit combatstress.org.uk/challenges, call 01372 587 140 or email challenges@combatstress.org.uk

SLEEP EASY

Good quality sleep is essential for our physical and mental health. Without it we feel cranky and find it almost impossible to stay focused. If we go for long periods of time without getting the sleep we need, we're prone to mood swings and in extreme cases, depression or anxiety. ➔

We're all different when it comes to how much sleep we need. But the general recommendation is between seven and nine hours of sleep a night. While the amount of sleep we get is important, having the right surroundings and bedtime routine are also key to getting some decent shut-eye.

How do you know you've had a good night's sleep? You'll wake up feeling refreshed, clear-minded and ready to take on the day.

Lisa Artis is a sleep practitioner at The Sleep Council. Here are her top tips for getting a good night's sleep:

1 Keep active!

Take more exercise. Regular exercise such as swimming or walking can help relieve the day's stresses and strains. But not too close to bedtime or it may keep you awake!



2 Hot or not

Cut down on tea and coffee, especially in the evening. Caffeine interferes with falling asleep and prevents deep sleep. If you like having a hot drink before bed, have something milky or a relaxing herbal tea instead.



3 Less is more

Don't over-indulge. Too much food or alcohol before bed can play havoc with sleep patterns. Alcohol may help you fall asleep at first, but will interrupt your sleep later on.



4 Relax into it

Try to relax before going to bed. Have a warm bath, listen to some quiet music, do some yoga – all help to relax both the mind and body.



6 Tackle tomorrow

Deal with worries or a heavy workload by making lists of things to be tackled the next day.

5 Up and at them

If you can't sleep, don't lie there worrying about it. Get up and do something you find relaxing until you feel sleepy again.



7 It all adds up

Sometimes you'll have nights when you sleep less – it happens to us all. Keep a sleep diary by noting how many hours of sleep you get per night. If you get less than you need, try making up for it by the end of the week.

Want to improve your sleep?

For more tips and advice about getting a good night's sleep, visit sleepcouncil.org.uk

An expert interview with a...

SELF-CARE GURU

Emily Reynolds is a journalist and author who writes about mental health, technology, science and feminism. →

In 2016 Emily created @everydaycarebot – a Twitter bot sending tips and reminders to help people look after themselves. We had a chat with Emily about @everydaycarebot and why practical self-care is so important.

Can you tell us a bit about @everydaycarebot?

@everydaycarebot is a Twitter bot that automatically tweets a self-care tip to followers every four hours. They're very simple, basic tasks ranging from things like 'write a to-do list' and 'wash your face' to 'drink a glass of water'.

What inspired you to set up @everydaycarebot?

My interest in self-care is personal – I have bipolar disorder, so I often find it hard to look after myself. Sometimes I can't shower, I struggle to leave the house, I don't eat well. I'd seen other self-care bots, but they were vague and, in my mind, not particularly helpful for people with more severe problems. I hope that by reminding people to pay bills or brush their teeth, I'm making their day a little bit better.



What does self-care mean to you?

To me, it's about working on the basic things to look after yourself as well as changing your expectations about what 'achievement' is. If I can't shower but I'm able to wash myself in the sink instead, that's achievement. My approach to self-care is about being kind to yourself.

But it's also about being tough with yourself. Lots of stuff around self-care positions it as something fluffy – like having a bubble bath or treating yourself. For me, it's also about doing tasks that I find difficult. Checking my bank balance is difficult, making phone calls to HMRC is difficult. But they're essential! Trying to make myself do those things is an important part of self-care to me.

What's one thing you do every day to help yourself?

I make the bed! It's the one thing I do at the beginning of every day and even on my worst days it makes me feel that bit better, even if I end up getting back into it.

Why is self-care important?

It's important because it keeps me alive! Struggling with PTSD, with bipolar, with any of these mental health issues...it's really hard. Creating strategies to keep yourself afloat and able to cope is vital.

Emily's first book, *A Beginner's Guide to Losing Your Mind*, was released in February last year.



Emily's Top Tips

1 Start small

Find what works for you. Getting out of bed and trying to keep a tidy space is what helps me; for other people cooking a meal or going for a walk might help. Working out what small things can help you is key.

2 Finding a balance

Self-care is about having good balance. Having a bubble bath or putting off chores can make you feel good every now and then, but it's also important to deal with the difficult necessities of life. Paying bills might not be fun, but it's essential in the long term.

3 Stepping stones

If you're feeling very distressed, depressed or anxious, think small. Brush your teeth or get dressed. It's the small steps that can lead to a more stable foundation.

Tweet for self-care

Sign up for self-care tips from @everydaycarebot at twitter.com/everydaycarebot What are your best self-care tips? Tweet us @Combat Stress

LOOKING AFTER ME

Susanna Reid is a TV presenter and journalist who co-anchors TV breakfast show Good Morning Britain. We caught up with Susanna to talk about how she takes care of herself and how she keeps balance in her life. ➔



What’s your usual morning routine?

My alarm goes off at 4am – I always set two alarms to avoid any risk of oversleeping! Then I clean my teeth, go to the studio in my PJs and have a shower at work. The hair and make-up styling department get me ready to go on air at 6am and we have a quick meeting before we go live.

Is your routine different at the weekends?

Yes! I try to lie in but my body clock doesn’t let me sleep much after 7.30am. When I get up, I’ll usually do some exercise. On Sunday morning I’m ready with a coffee for The Andrew Marr Show on BBC One.

What’s your favourite way to relax?

Binge watching Suits on Netflix!

How do you balance everything in your life?

I’m lucky that my work’s finished by the time the children come home from school, so I’m able to spend a good amount of time with them. I always cook them a meal and talk to them about homework or stuff at school. I try to make time to go out with friends at the weekend.

What do you do when you know you need to get the balance back and look after yourself?

I cut down on anything that’s not essential. The most important thing for me is to spend as much time as possible with the children and that I get enough sleep for work – to make sure I can do my job properly. Getting a good night’s sleep and having time during the day to myself is essential for my

peace of mind. I also try to have regular massages and get a little bit of exercise.

What throws you off balance?

Very early starts are part of my working routine, so I’m used to them now. What throws me off balance is burning the candle at both ends. If I do too many events in the evening, I know I’ll feel tired at work and at home the next day.

What’s the one thing you can’t live without?

Coffee in the morning!

What does it mean to take care of yourself and why do you think it’s important?

It’s important to take care of yourself because if you get overstretched it’s not just you that suffers, the people around you can suffer as well. I work hard and spend a lot of time organising my family, but it’s crucial that I get enjoyment out of these things. Giving yourself a break and saying ‘no’ when you need to is vital.

What’s your ultimate comfort food?

Dark chocolate and Chinese takeaways.

What’s the one thing you swear by for your mental wellbeing?

Asking for help. Whether that’s someone who can help me with a pile-up of admin or someone who can help with childcare so I can make time for friends. Having people around you for support is vital.

You can watch Susanna every weekday morning on Good Morning Britain at 6am on ITV.

HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

Your donation can help us provide life-changing treatment and support to veterans with mental health problems.

I would like to give Combat Stress a gift of: £

Supporter no. (if known):

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Or call **01372 587 151**
Or visit **combatstress.org.uk/donate**

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£1 raised
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84P
On veteran
treatment
and support

14P
On fundraising

2P
On raising
awareness and
improving access

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We are the UK's leading charity for veterans' mental health. Our free **24-hour Helpline** provides confidential mental health advice.

You, your family, friends or carers can contact us anytime, day or night, for help and support.

Call **0800 138 1619**

Text **07537 404 719***

Email **helpline@combatstress.org.uk**

Visit **combatstress.org.uk**



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