

4 REASONS CRAFT IS GOOD FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

How making could change your life

Craft can alleviate the symptoms of anxiety, depression, loneliness and even dementia, according to research. Here are some ways in which making can help heal the mind.

1. Engaging with the arts boosts mental wellbeing

Recent research published by University College London's MARCH mental health network – formed in 2018, with members including the Crafts Council and the Museums Association – shows that engaging with the visual arts can reduce reported anxiety, and that visiting museums can protect against dementia's development. 'Cultural activities encourage gentle movement, reduce social isolation, and lower inflammation and stress hormones such as cortisol,' says the report's author, Dr Daisy Fancourt. 'The arts are linked with dopamine release, which encourages cognitive flexibility, and they reduce our risk of dementia.'

Craft's particular benefits for mental health are backed up by [the results of the BBC Great British Creativity Test](#), published this month. Textile crafts such as embroidery, crocheting and knitting have [the highest participation rates of all the arts](#)– more than music and painting– according to the government's Taking Part survey, which shows the potential impact that making could have.

2. Craft has been helping soldiers recover from stress for over 100 years

Craft courses have been prescribed to patients since the dawn of occupational therapy in the late 19th century, with basketry used to relieve anxiety and physical ailments in soldiers during the first world war. They continue to be used today, with groups such as Combat Stress, the UK charity for veterans' mental health, offering pottery classes. [Craig Mealing](#), an ex-soldier from Essex suffering from PTSD, turned pottery into a career after an introductory course through the charity: 'Working with clay is the ideal distraction for keeping me off the drink,' he says. 'It's hard to throw a pot with a can of Fosters in my hand. I find it relaxing and it helps to reduce my anxiety.'

3. It brings people together

[Respondents to a study by Sinikka Hannele Pöllänen, from the University of Eastern Finland](#), revealed that textile craft helped them cope with depression and negative feelings, while offering social support and positive relationships. In the UK, craft clubs are emerging that are specifically aimed at boosting mental health, such as Woolly Wellbeing, a club in Liverpool that teaches skills such as knitting and crocheting. 'It's really the only place I go,' said one member who had been suffering from social anxiety and depression. Another noted: '[Joining the Woolly Wellbeing group](#) has literally saved my life and allowed me to gain a sense of purpose and belonging.'

4. There are positive links between craft and the cognitive skills of stroke and dementia patients

Anthropologist Stephanie Bunn has been working in hospitals to study how basket-making's spatial and gestural practices are important for the development of cognitive skills. 'In the case of stroke recovery, which I've been studying at Raigmore Hospital [in Inverness], basketwork can re-establish neural pathways and improve brain plasticity,' she explains. 'Basketwork can do the same things for people with dementia, as well as trigger hand memories, which is something that I've been working on in a project in Lewis.'