

# Health guide for MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



MINISTERIO  
DE INCLUSIÓN, SEGURIDAD SOCIAL  
Y MIGRACIONES

SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO  
DE MIGRACIONES

DIRECCIÓN GENERAL  
DE ATENCIÓN HUMANITARIA  
Y DEL SISTEMA DE ACOGIDA DE PROTECCIÓN INTERNACIONAL



Cofinanciado por  
la Unión Europea



Catálogo de publicaciones de la Administración General del Estado

<https://cpage.Vmpr.gob.es>

© Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones

Madrid, 2024

Autor: Subdirección General de Centros y Emergencias del Sistema de Migraciones

Edita y distribuye: Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones

José Abascal, 39, 28003 Madrid

Correo electrónico: [coordinacion.centros@inclusion.gob.es](mailto:coordinacion.centros@inclusion.gob.es)

NIPO PDF: 121-24-035-8

NIPO Papel: 121-24-039-X

Depósito Legal: M-25723-2024

Diseño, maquetación e impresión: ALKALINORD

Impreso en reciclado libre de cloro

# Contents

1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
2. HEALTHY HABITS .....	6
2.1. Healthy, balanced diet; food safety .....	6
2.2. Body care and personal hygiene sexual health.....	10
2.3. Sleep habits and how to achieve restorative sleep.....	11
2.4. Physical activity .....	11
3. MOTHER AND CHILD HEALTH.....	13
4. MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING .....	16
5. HEALTH IMPACTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.....	18
6. ADDICTION: SUBSTANCE ABUSE, SCREEN TIME, SOCIAL MEDIA.....	20
7. WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR.....	23
8. ACCIDENT PREVENTION.....	25
9. GUIDELINES FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE.....	27
10. GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....	28
USEFUL RESOURCES .....	30





# 1. Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. That’s why in this guide we want to talk to you about health: your health, and also the health of your family, if they are with you.

The desire to be healthy is something all people share, regardless of their nationality, culture or religion. But staying healthy – and even improving our health – is particularly important for people like you, who have arrived in a new country and will have to deal with a different environment, customs, circumstances and way of life.

Your constitution and your innate resistance or vulnerability to certain diseases are inherited from your family. At present, these things can’t be changed. However, your environment and your behaviour can be changed and improved, in order to increase your chances of staying healthy.

A healthy and appropriate environment is beneficial to your health. For example, the hygiene conditions and cleanliness of your home or room, or the monitoring activities carried out by the health authorities in each country in order to control air pollution, water quality, and to make sure the food sold is in good condition.

Try to make sure that wherever you are, the conditions are suitable and do not pose any risks to your health and safety. If this is not the case, ask for the problem to be addressed.

Your behaviour and living habits play a very important role in your health. People may have healthy or unhealthy customs and lifestyles; ultimately, however, your habits depend on your knowledge and your will, and that means you can modify and improve them.

In this guide we’re going to talk about customs, habits and lifestyles that can help you stay healthy. Try to acquire these habits and teach your children to embrace them from a young age.

Remember that being well-informed is important for your health and well-being. Make an effort to ensure you’re suitably informed about the healthcare, medical assistance and citizen services available to you, depending on your legal status.

The institutions and places where you can get information on this subject include: your Refugee Reception Centre (if you’re a refugee); the Immigrant Resource Centres in the Autonomous Region of Madrid; the ministries of health and social services in the autonomous region you’re staying in; and the medical centres for primary healthcare or the local government departments of health and social services in the municipality you live in.

If, due to your current circumstances, you’re in contact with a social worker or other professional who is responsible for your case, they’re the best person to go to for information.

Learning the language and finding out about the local customs and people will help to improve your stay in your new place of residence, and will make the daily lives of you and your loved ones much easier.

**Welcome!**

## 2. Healthy habits



### 2.1. HEALTHY, BALANCED DIET; FOOD SAFETY

#### HEALTHY, BALANCED DIET

Feeding ourselves is one of the most important things we do each day. A healthy diet is one that gives a person all of the food they need to cover their nutritional requirements throughout the different stages of their life. Having a correct diet is essential not only to children's growth, but also to maintaining physical health and energy levels in adults. Nowadays, we also know that having a balanced diet plays an extremely important role in preventing *illnesses* such as *heart disease* and cancer. Each person has different nutritional needs depending on their age, gender, level of physical activity and state of health.

In order to meet all of our nutritional requirements, our bodies need substances called *nutrients*, which are found in food. However, there is no one type of food that contains all of these nutrients. That's why a healthy diet is above all a complete, adequate, balanced, satisfactory and safe diet which includes different types of food that provide carbohydrates, proteins, fats, minerals, vitamins and water. Remember that it's what you eat, as well as how much you eat, that's important. These nutrients should mostly come from fresh, plant-based *food* that is *unprocessed or lightly processed*.

Although Spain boasts a great variety of high-quality food, as you're from another country it's possible that some foods, or the way they're prepared, may seem strange to you at first. Try to adapt as well as you can, because if you reject a lot of food options, you'll run the risk of having an unbalanced diet and falling ill.

To ensure a healthy diet, we suggest that you follow these recommendations:

## EAT BETTER

- There are certain types of food that you should eat very often. These include fresh or cooked fruits and vegetables, especially seasonal fruits and vegetables; tubers such as potatoes and sweet potatoes; salads; wholemeal cereals and their derivatives (bread, rice, pasta, etc.); and legumes (chickpeas, lentils, beans, etc.).
- Less frequently, and in smaller amounts, you can eat dairy products, fish and eggs, as well as a small amount of meat (mostly lean white meat, such as chicken, turkey, etc.).
- There are other types of food that you should only eat very moderately (i.e. occasionally and in small amounts), as they're high in fat. These include bacon, butter, cured meats, very fatty meat, sugar, sweets, chocolate, pastries, coffee, tea and energy drinks.
- Don't add large amounts of salt to food. Bear in mind that processed and ultra-processed food (snacks, cured meats, biscuits, sauces, ready meals, etc.) already has salt added, so try to minimise your salt intake.
- Avoid consuming sugar, including sugary foods and drinks, as they're high in calories, are associated with poor-quality diets, and may also harm your health by causing you to reduce your consumption of foods that are better for you from a nutritional perspective. Reducing sugar intake is good for everyone, but especially for children, so they don't get used to sweet flavours. The less sugar, the better.
- Make sure you don't skip breakfast, as it will give you the energy you need to start the day. It's essential that children have a substantial, complete breakfast. Dairy products, fruit, and wholemeal bread or sugar-free wholemeal cereals are recommended.
- To ensure a healthy diet, it's important that you have regular mealtimes. Try to make sure you always eat at roughly the same time. Only eat at mealtimes and avoid snacking in between.
- Staying well-hydrated is essential for your health, all year round and regardless of whether you're doing physical activity. Remember that water should always be your first option. Avoid sugary drinks and, if you drink alcohol, make sure it's only a very moderate amount. Never give alcohol to children. Fruit, vegetables and salads will also help to you keep hydrated. Don't wait until you feel thirsty before drinking.
- If you're from a country where food was scarce, take care when adapting to an environment where it's plentiful. In such situations, some people put on extra weight if they eat more than is necessary.
- In supermarkets you'll have easy access to "treats" such as sweets, pastries, chocolate, etc. Only consume very moderate amounts of these types of food, as they lack many important nutrients and if you abuse them, you can put on extra weight and damage your health.
- If you're female and pregnant or breastfeeding, seek and follow advice from your doctor regarding your diet.
- Some illnesses require special diets: in such cases, the doctor who is treating you should provide dietary advice.

## YOUR DAILY DIET

The table below shows you how frequently you need to consume each type of food in order to maintain a healthy and balanced diet. If you miss out any of the groups, or if you consume any of them a lot more frequently or a lot less frequently than indicated, your diet will not be balanced.

	TYPE OF FOOD	FREQUENCY
	Fresh fruit	At least three pieces a day
	Salad (fresh vegetables and leafy greens)	At least once a day
	Cooked vegetables and leafy greens	Once a day
	Wholemeal cereals and their derivatives (rice, pasta, flour-based products) or potatoes	At least once a day. Two or three times a week they can be replaced with legumes (chickpeas, lentils, beans, peas, etc.)
	Bread (wholemeal)	Moderate amounts at breakfast, lunch and dinner
	Dairy products: milk, yoghurt and cheese	Two or three portions every day. Skimmed or light
	Fish	Two or three times a week
	Poultry or lean meat	Two or three times a week
	Cured meats and fatty meat	Occasionally and in moderation
	Eggs	Three or four times a week
	Vegetable oil (preferably olive oil)	A moderate amount every day, to cook with or dress salads
	Nuts (raw or roasted)	3-7 handfuls a week
	Refined sugar	The less you consume, the better
	Sweets	Occasionally and always in very small amounts
	Water	8-10 glasses a day, in accordance with your level of physical activity, age, physical circumstances and the climate. Drink before you start to feel thirsty



The amounts each person needs to consume will depend on their age, gender and constitution. Moderation is always better. For young children, you should consult a doctor (paediatrician) who will give you guidance in line with the child's age and nutritional needs.

## FOOD SAFETY AND HYGIENE

Most cases of *food poisoning* occur in the home as a result of incorrect *handling* of food by the people who consume it. That's why it's important to know the rules for correct food hygiene and storage:

### ■ Maintain cleanliness:

- Your hands are the main vehicle for the transmission of micro-organisms. Wash them:
  - ◊ Always before and after preparing food, and when you go from handling raw food to food that's ready to eat.
  - ◊ After going to the toilet, coughing, sneezing, touching animals or rubbish, and after using chemical products.
- Wash and disinfect all of the surfaces, equipment and utensils you've used to prepare food.
- Keep food and cooking areas free of insects, pets and other animals. Make sure your food products are stored in closed containers.

### ■ Separate raw and cooked food:

- Always keep raw food separate from food that has been cooked and is ready to eat.
- Use different equipment and utensils (e.g. knives and cutting boards) to prepare meat, chicken, fish and other raw foods.

### ■ Make sure food (particularly meat, fish and eggs) is cooked at a sufficiently high temperature. A sufficient level of heat (70 °C) will kill harmful micro-organisms. When reheating food that was cooked earlier, make sure it's heated all the way through, in order to kill any micro-organisms that may have grown while the food was stored.

### ■ Keep food at a safe temperature. Generally speaking, most food products shouldn't be kept at room temperature.

- Don't leave cooked food at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Meat, poultry, fish, pre-cooked dishes, sauces, semi-preserves, dairy products and pastries need to be refrigerated (5 °C).
- Don't defrost food at room temperature.

### ■ If you're going to consume vegetables and leafy greens raw (e.g. in a salad), wash them in plenty of running water. Peel fruit before eating it.

In Spain, many food products are sold in packaged form (preserves, semi-preserves, pre-cooked dishes, etc.). If you can read Spanish, before buying these products make sure you read the expiry date and the storage and preparation instructions on the label. The expiry date is the date up until which you can safely consume the product without any risk to your health.

## 2.2. BODY CARE AND PERSONAL HYGIENE SEXUAL HEALTH

Keeping our bodies clean and well-cared for helps to improve our physical appearance, makes us more pleasing to others and plays a very important role in preventing disease and *illness*.

Some habits can harm our bodies, which is why we must avoid them.

Below we provide a series of recommendations, most of which you will already know and may even already follow. In any case, they're worth highlighting.

**Hand hygiene:** Hands carry a multitude of germs that can cause us to become ill. That's why you must remember to wash your hands before and after every meal; after going to the bathroom (to urinate or defecate); after touching an animal; after touching soil or the ground; after cleaning and attending to children, the elderly or people who are ill; before cooking; and, of course, when your hands feel or look dirty.

Don't forget to clean your nails and make sure they're kept short, as lots of dirt and germs can accumulate under them.

**Bodily hygiene:** Ideally, you should shower every day, or at least every other day, in lukewarm water with a pH-neutral soap. After showering, dry your body well, paying special attention to areas with skin folds (e.g. underarms and groin). You can use deodorant on your feet and underarms, and afterwards you should put on clean clothes. We also recommend that you air your shoes overnight.

Due to their location, you need to pay particular attention to your genitals. Washing your genitals too much or too little can be harmful, and you must also dry this area after washing it, in order to prevent fungal infections. Panty liners or sanitary towels mustn't be worn every day, as they keep the genital area damp.

**Hair hygiene:** You must wash your hair at least two or three times a week, using shampoo suitable for your hair type.

Sometimes, parasites such as *head lice* can infect our hair, and especially children's hair. If this happens, you'll need to go to a pharmacy, buy a product to treat these parasites and apply it, making sure you follow the product's instructions. During the days following applying the treatment, you should check the child's hair to make sure there are no eggs (nits) and if you find any, remove them.

**Oral hygiene:** You should brush your teeth three times a day and your tongue once a day. You must use toothpaste and a soft toothbrush. Ideally you should brush after every meal, including dinner. You can use dental floss to clean in between your teeth.

You should try to instil these hygiene habits in your children, as you are an example to them.

### SEXUAL HEALTH

Sexuality is part of being human and contributes directly to personal well-being.

Safe, healthy sex is a good indicator of a population's health; however, a careless approach to sex is the cause of many sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, human papillomavirus infection (which is linked to cervical cancer), hepatitis B and C, genital herpes, syphilis, and other diseases that can lead to serious complications.

Our recommendations to help you improve and maintain good sexual health are as follows:

1. Maintain healthy habits in your daily life and take care of your intimate hygiene. These are important to achieving a healthier and more enjoyable sex life.

2. Don't engage in risky behaviour when having sex: using condoms helps to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.
3. Manage your emotions and stress levels. In order to enjoy sex, it's very important that you love yourself and accept yourself for who you are.
4. Make sure you're well-informed and educated about sex. Numerous studies show that young people who receive sex education at a young age make better decisions, know and respect their bodies more, have healthier relationships with other people and acquire more flexible roles. Sex education benefits not only those who receive it, but also society in general, and can help to prevent many cases of sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

### 2.3. SLEEP HABITS AND HOW TO ACHIEVE RESTORATIVE SLEEP

We need to sleep because while we sleep, our bodies recover physically and mentally, our memories are filed away, our *cells* are regenerated and the toxins and waste materials we've accumulated during the day are eliminated. Plus, restorative sleep improves our state of mind, aids growth and helps to prevent certain diseases and infections, as it increases the production of *antibodies*.

Getting enough sleep is vital to maintaining our health. Adults need to sleep between seven and nine hours a day, while children need to sleep a little longer. The younger the child, the more sleep they need.

Arriving in a new country with a different time zone, customs and way of life can interfere with your sleep. That's why we've provided some suggestions below to help you achieve restorative sleep:

1. Make sure you have a regular routine, i.e. get up and go to bed at the same times.
2. Exercise every day, but not right before you go to bed.
3. Only use your bed for sleeping in. Don't spend the day in bed.
4. Avoid tobacco, caffeinated drinks and alcohol.
5. The area you sleep in should be comfortable and relaxing.
6. If you take naps, make sure they're short (no more than 30 minutes).
7. Don't eat or drink before going to bed, but don't go to bed hungry.
8. Don't work, use your mobile phone, computer or tablet, or play video games before going to bed.
9. Read before going to bed.

### 2.4. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Leading an active life improves your health (both physical and mental), well-being and quality of life, and also helps to prevent *chronic disease* in the future.

To look after your health, you must:

- Be less *sedentary* and do more physical activity.
- Make physical activities that are good for your health part of your regular routine.

- Go for walks, use the stairs, and get off the bus or metro one stop earlier. You can also go running and, if you have the option, go for bike rides or swim.
- Adults need to do at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity every week.
- Children and adolescents need to do at least 60 minutes of moderate or energetic physical activity every day.
- It's vital that you acquire the habit of doing physical activity from a young age, as it will then be easier to continue this habit as an adult.

Physical activity that's beneficial to your health includes everyday activities (e.g. walking, strolling, going up the stairs, etc.) as well as physical exercise designed to improve and maintain your physical condition (e.g. sports such as basketball, football, etc.).

#### THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL EXERCISE:

- It reduces *stress* and *anxiety* and improves the quality of your sleep.
- It helps you to control your weight.
- It lowers the risk of depression.
- It helps to boost your self-confidence.
- It benefits your social relationships (especially if you play team sports).
- It lowers high blood pressure.
- It lowers the risk of suffering type 2 diabetes, heart disease, breast and colon cancer, etc.

If you lead an active life and move around more, your health and well-being will improve.

### 3. Mother and child health



#### CONTRACEPTION (FAMILY PLANNING)

All women face difficulties, but you're in a particularly delicate situation in a new country, dealing with different customs and new problems. Therefore (as far as possible) your pregnancies should be planned. To prevent unwanted pregnancies, you can use contraception methods such as condoms, contraceptive pills, IUDs, etc.

Condoms don't require you to have medical check-ups, and can prevent sexually transmitted diseases that are very common and often serious (gonorrhoea, syphilis, AIDS, hepatitis, for example), as well as unwanted pregnancies.

#### REGULAR MEDICAL CHECK-UPS

Medical check-ups are recommended:

- If you use conception methods such as contraceptive pills or an IUD, you should do so under the guidance of a doctor.



- If your experience changes in your menstruation or stop menstruating.
- If you have symptoms that suggest you need to see a doctor:
  - If your vaginal discharge increases significantly or changes its colour or smell.
  - If you have an itching or burning sensation, fever, or pain in your ovaries.
  - If you experience abnormal uterine bleeding, especially if you're going through the menopause.
  - If you find any lumps in your breasts.

## PREGNANCY MONITORING

Whether you want to get pregnant, are pregnant or have recently been pregnant, we recommend that you see a doctor. They will advise you on how to monitor your situation in order to protect your health and that of your child.

## CHILD HEALTH

Your children also need time to adapt to this change. You, the parents, must look after them and accompany them during this process.

Below are some basic care measures you must bear in mind:

- With regard to **feeding** your baby, if possible you should *breastfeed* them, at least during the first six months of their life, as breast milk not only provides nourishment but also prevents many diseases and infections. If you're unable to breastfeed your baby, you can give them *baby formula* (never give them cow's milk). Make sure you prepare the bottle using mineral water with a low mineral content, or tap water you've boiled beforehand.

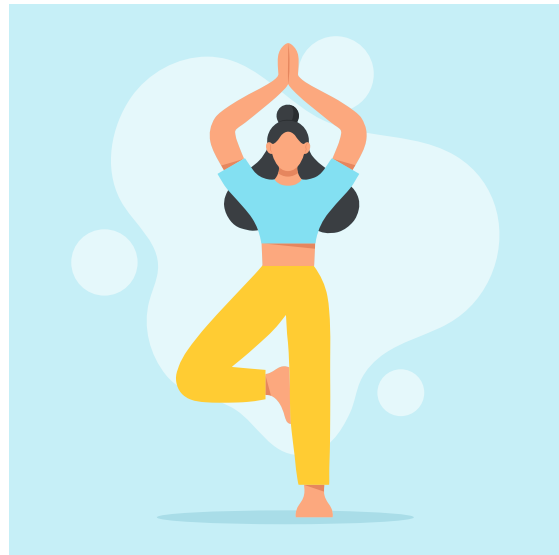
After six months, your baby can start to consume other types of food. Follow the advice given by the nurses/paediatric unit at your medical centre, they'll tell you the right steps to take. During your child's health checks, they'll also administer the necessary vaccinations.

If your child is over two years old, they must have a balanced and varied diet that includes fruit, legumes, vegetables, fish, dairy products, meat, etc. You must teach them not to habitually consume unhealthy products (biscuits, snacks, soft drinks, for example), as these have little health benefit for either children or adults.

- In terms of **hygiene**, children must be washed or bathed every day, or at least every other day, using pH-neutral soap. Afterwards you must dry your child well, especially the areas with skin folds (underarms, groin, neck, etc.). When your child's teeth appear, and up to the age of three, you must clean their teeth. At first, use only water; later you can use toothpaste suitable for their age. From the age of three you can supervise them to brush their own teeth.
- Regarding **sleep**, every child has their own sleep and activity patterns, which are influenced by tiredness, hunger and other needs. Newborns can sleep for up to 18-20 hours a day, and as the child grows their periods of activity will become increasingly longer. When they reach six months, they can sleep through the night.

- In Spain, **accidents** are the most common cause of death in young children. Children aren't aware of the dangers present in their surroundings. That's why it's very important to take care in the situations that form part of the child's daily life, as the majority of these accidents are preventable. During the first three years of the child's life, these accidents nearly always happen in the home. Falls and burns are the most common, followed by poisoning, *drowning* and *choking*. Outside the home, the most frequent accidents are caused by vehicles (see the section on Accident Prevention.)
- When they're born, children are defenceless and entirely dependent on you. Little by little, they will start to interact with their surroundings. Family is essential, as it gives a children a place to socialise and learn to live with others. For this reason, you play a vital role in the construction of your child's habits, values, attitudes and beliefs. You're also responsible for helping your child to gradually become **independent**, so that they're able to do things for themselves.

## 4. Mental health and emotional well-being



Going through difficult and stressful situations such as forced migration can have a variety of negative effects on people. It may be challenging and overwhelming, and it's normal to experience certain problems, such as:

- Anxiety and depression. Sudden changes in your surroundings, uncertainty about the future and adapting to a new culture can produce feelings of worry and sadness.
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, backache, fatigue and gastrointestinal issues. These symptoms may be a response to the emotional and mental stress experienced during the process of migration.
- Difficulty sleeping. Concentration and memory problems.
- Social isolation and loneliness. Tension and conflict within the family.

As human beings, we have the capacity to face and overcome difficult situations, and you must trust in your own resources and strengths, which have helped you get to this point. You have the right to enjoy a full and balanced life. Below we offer a series of recommendations to help you look after your mental health and boost your emotional well-being:

- Get to know your emotions: Pay attention to your emotions and allow yourself to feel them. Recognise when you feel happy, sad, angry or anxious. Accept your emotions as part of being human, and find healthy ways to express them.
- Seek social support: Maintain and strengthen your social relationships. Seek support from friends, family and people you trust. Share your worries, joys and problems with them. Social support can help you to face your challenges and improve your emotional well-being.

- Practice relaxation and stress-management techniques: Stress is part of life, but learning to manage it in a healthy way is key. Explore relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation or yoga, or do activities that help you to switch off and relax. Find the solution that works best for you and regularly dedicate time to these practices.
- Establish a healthy routine: Dedicate time to activities you enjoy and which make you feel good. This can be anything you enjoy doing: reading, listening to music, painting, cooking, practising sports, etc. These activities will help you to release stress, find moments of enjoyment and maintain a positive state of mind.
- Seek professional help if you need it: Don't hesitate to seek professional help if you're dealing with more intense emotional or mental problems. Mental health professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists are trained to give you appropriate support and guidance.

Remember that your mental health and emotional well-being are just as important as your physical health. Looking after your emotions and seeking balance will help you to take on challenges with increased resilience and live a full life.

## 5. Health impacts of gender-based violence



uffering gender-based violence means experiencing (or having experienced) a situation involving physical, psychological, financial, social or any other type of abuse. It can also mean being the victim of female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour crimes, etc.

There are many types of abuse, but they all have significant impact on your physical, emotional and social well-being. That's why the following is very important:

- **Recognise if you're experiencing gender-based violence:** It's vital to understand that gender-based violence encompasses different forms of abuse such as domestic violence, sexual violence, harassment and exploitation. It can happen in any context and affect people of all ages, genders and cultures.
- **Effects on health:** Gender-based violence can have a serious impact on your health. It can cause physical injuries, mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders, as well as emotional and social problems. It can also affect your self-confidence, your ability to relate to others, and your quality of life in general.
- **Seek support:** If you're experiencing gender-based violence, remember that you're not alone and there are resources available to help you. Seek support from organisations that specialise in gender-based violence, victim support centres, health services and telephone helplines. These organisations can offer you advice, emotional support and information about your rights and options for protection.



- **Prioritise your safety:** If you're experiencing gender-based violence, your safety is your priority. If possible, find a safe place and consider applying for a restraining order or reporting the abuse to the appropriate authorities.
- **Look after your health:** If you're experiencing gender-based violence, it's important to look after your health. Seek medical attention if you've been physically injured, and don't hesitate to talk to medical professionals about the emotional and psychological challenges you're facing. Medical and therapeutic support may be essential to helping you recover.

Remember that gender-based violence isn't your fault, and that you deserve to live a full life, free of violence. Don't hesitate to seek help and support, and remember there are people and resources available to help you recover and restore your well-being.

## 6. Addiction: substance abuse, screen time, social media



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), addiction is a physical, psychological and emotional disease that creates a dependency on or need for a substance, activity or relationship.

Addiction can take two forms:

- **Chemical or substance addictions:** These are related to certain substances (drugs), such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, cocaine, etc.
- **Behavioural or non-substance-related addictions:** These are disorders that develop when a person becomes dependent on a particular activity and does it to excess. Examples include excessive use of social media, mobile phones, online gaming, shopping, eating, etc.

### CHEMICAL OR SUBSTANCE ADDICTIONS

The majority of addictions have negative impacts on our bodies (for example, on our ability to rest), our relationships with family and friends, our work, and our academic performance.

In Spain, all drugs including alcohol are illegal for people aged under 18. For people over 18, drugs are also illegal with the exception of alcohol, which is subject to special regulations. People who consume drugs may incur a *fine* as a result.

## BEHAVIOURAL OR NON-SUBSTANCE-RELATED ADDICTIONS

Although these types of addictions have been less well-known until now, they have the same consequences as other addictions.

Often, our children ask us if they can use mobile phones or tablets. In such cases, if you're not sure what to do, below we offer you a series of recommendations:

- Control screen time and agree limits on use.
- Spend time with other people: friends, family, associations.
- Seek out other leisure and entertainment activities.
- Set an example for your children with your behaviour and encourage balanced use.
- Learn about the apps and social media they use and the games they play.
- Make sure there's communication and dialogue within the family.
- Gain their trust and make sure they know that if they have a problem, they can come to you.

In terms of screen time for different age groups, experts recommend the following:

- Up to 3 years old: NEVER USE SCREENS.
- FROM 3 TO 8 YEARS OLD: No more than 15 minutes at a time.
- FROM 4 TO 12 YEARS OLD: Never more than 1 hour in total.
- FROM 12 TO 18 YEARS OLD: Never more than 2 hours at a time per day.

*Remember that adults as well as children can develop problems related to screen time. If you feel you have a problem, there are professionals who will be able to help you.*

## ALCOHOL

In many societies, *alcoholic drinks* are socially acceptable and deeply rooted in our customs. They're present at many parties, celebrations and social events; ultimately, however, they're legal drugs (they may only be consumed by people over 18) and can cause dependency, as well as other health problems.

Although alcohol may seem to cheer us up and bring joy, in reality it's a depressant drug that reduces our capacity to respond, attention span, ability to concentrate, and more.

The effects of alcohol depend on how much is consumed and the age, weight and *gender* of the person consuming it.

Alcohol consumption increases the risk of accidents while driving or at work, and of getting involved in violent arguments.

Consuming alcohol is not a good idea if you've taken other drugs or are taking medication.

## TOBACCO

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco use is the world's leading preventable cause of disease, disability and premature death.

Nicotine, one of tobacco's main components, is extremely addictive and is the element that causes dependency. When it's burned, tobacco produces more than 4,000 different toxic substances.

It's been shown that passive smokers, i.e. people who don't smoke but breathe air contaminated by tobacco, are also at risk. Be careful when smoking if you live with pregnant women or children.

Additionally, you should also take care if:

- **You're pregnant or breastfeeding:** Nicotine crosses the placental barrier that protects your foetus, and also passes into breast milk.
- **You have an illness:** Particularly a respiratory or cardiovascular illness, or allergies. Using tobacco can make them worse.
- **You live with children or adolescents:** You're not only exposing them to smoke, but also setting an unhealthy example for them.
- **You're in a small, poorly ventilated space.**

## 7. When to see a doctor



Generally speaking, you should see a doctor whenever you have pain, discomfort or an *abnormality* that persists for more than a few days.

There are also certain situations such as pregnancy where you must see a doctor (see the section on Mother and Child Health).

It's very important that you follow the doctor's instructions diligently, especially regarding medicines: make sure you take the correct dosage and at the correct times or intervals. In smaller and larger amounts, medicine can be ineffective or even harmful.

Don't take medicine that hasn't been prescribed for you by a doctor.

Below, we describe a number of symptoms and abnormalities. If you have any of them, you must always see a doctor:

- If you were being treated for any kind of illness in your country of origin.
- If you find lumps on your breast or anywhere else on your body.
- If you have a pain in your chest.
- If you have difficulty breathing for an extended period of time.
- If you have severe abdominal pain.
- If you have diarrhoea that doesn't go away within 48 hours. In the case of severe diarrhoea in children under 3, take them to the doctor immediately.



- If your bowel movements contain blood, worms or parasites.
- If you vomit blood.
- If you're constipated for an extended period of time.
- If you experience difficulty or pain when urinating.
- If any part of your body becomes inflamed.
- If you have a high fever.
- If you experience earache or hearing loss.
- If you experience changes in your vision.
- If you have a sudden headache.
- If you suffer a hard blow, particularly to the head.
- If you have a deep or large wound, or a wound that is taking a long time to heal. You should also see a doctor if you suffer extensive or severe burns.
- If persistent marks or alterations appear on your skin.
- If you have a cough that hasn't gone away after a week, or if you cough blood.
- For women, see a doctor if you stop menstruating, or if you lose blood when you're not on your period.
- You should visit the dentist at least once a year.
- If you're tired, fatigued or lose weight for no reason.
- If you've felt sad, hopeless and like you don't want to do anything for some time.
- If you experience a sudden loss of strength, mobility, feeling, vision or the ability to speak.

There may be other symptoms that you consider to be abnormal, in which case make sure you consult a doctor.

In some cases, urgent hospital care may be required.

## 8. Accident prevention



Ignorance of danger, curiosity, the urge to be independent and high levels of activity are factors that explain the high number of accidents among children. That's why it's important to monitor and supervise their daily activities. Also, it's very likely that their environment will have changed a great deal, and as a result they can suffer falls, knocks and accidents that are easy to prevent. Below, we offer some advice to help you do so:

■ To prevent knocks and falls:

- It's important to ensure spaces are well-lit. Avoid using floor polish and floor wax.
- Be careful around stairs and windows! Install safety barriers.
- Always supervise children when they're in the bath and use a non-slip bath mat.
- Install safety rails on the child's bed.

■ To prevent cuts, wounds and bleeding:

- Take care when using sharp and pointed objects (knives, scissors, razors, pins, etc.).
- When dressing or undressing your children, take care with zips, as they can snag on the child's skin and cause significant injuries.
- Watch out for the edges and corners of furniture. Consider installing rounded silicone protectors.

- To prevent burns:
  - Don't allow small children to enter the kitchen while you're cooking.
  - While you're cooking, make sure the handles of pots and pans are facing the wall.
  - Check the temperature of food and drink.
  - Watch out for plug sockets; consider installing protectors.
  - Always protect your and your children's skin from the sun, even if you're dark-skinned.
  - Don't leave candles burning.
- To prevent suffocation and choking:
  - Make sure small children are always supervised by an adult when they eat.
  - Be careful with small toys, nuts, and certain fruits and food products.
- To prevent poisoning:
  - Cleaning products and medicines must be kept out of the reach of children.
- To prevent traffic accidents:
  - When travelling in a vehicle, even for short journeys, children must ALWAYS be secured in a special seat that's appropriate for their age group and weight.
  - When they're in the car, children must remain seated; it's not a place to jump around or throw things in.
  - Activate the child lock on the car's rear doors.
  - Walk on the pavement, not in the road.
  - Set an example.

If in doubt, see a doctor. **Remember that all children, regardless of their legal status, have the right to receive care from the National Health Service. Demand care on their behalf.**

## 9. Guidelines for a healthy lifestyle

1		Eat healthily. Make sure your diet includes lots of fruit, vegetables and legumes, and only very small amounts of fat, sugar and processed food
2		Do at least 150 minutes of physical exercise every week
3		Control your weight
4		Drink water to stay hydrated. Your body needs around eight glasses of water a day
5		Don't consume <i>toxins</i> , such as tobacco, alcohol and other drugs
6		Make sure you get seven to nine hours' sleep every night.
7		Maintain a good level of hygiene. Shower every day, brush your teeth, and wash your hands before eating and after going to the toilet
8		Look after your emotions and love yourself Social relations and leisure activities are important for your mental health
9		Spend less than two hours a day playing video games, using the internet and watching television
10		Take care of your health in order to remain strong and healthy, and see a doctor when you need to

## 10. Glossary of terms

- **Processed food:** Food that has been altered by adding or introducing substances (e.g. salt, sugar, oil, preservatives and/or additives) that change the nature of the original food product, in order to make it last longer or appear more pleasant or attractive.
- **Unprocessed food:** Food that doesn't contain added substances such as sugar, salt, fat, colourings or additives.
- **Abnormality:** A biological change or deformity, whether congenital or acquired.
- **Anxiety:** A mental state characterised by extreme worry, intense agitation and severe insecurity; or a feeling of distress.
- **Antibodies:** Substances produced in living organisms due to the presence of an antigen which specifically react against the action of the antigen. Antibodies are proteins that form part of our immune system and circulate in our blood. When they recognise substances that are foreign to our bodies such as viruses and bacteria or their toxins, they neutralise them.
- **Drowning:** A situation that occurs when a person has difficulty breathing due to immersion in water or another liquid.
- **Breathing:** The act of drawing air or another substance into your lungs. If that substance is water, drowning can occur.
- **Alcoholic drinks:** Drinks that contain ethanol (ethyl alcohol) as part of their composition.
- **Cell:** The fundamental building-block of living organisms, capable of independent reproduction and formed of cytoplasm enclosed within a membrane.
- **Illness:** Ailment, infirmity, disease.
- **Heart disease:** According to the WHO, heart disease is the leading cause of death globally. Heart disease is illness affecting the heart and/or blood vessels.
- **Chronic disease:** An illness that lasts a long time and generally progresses slowly. Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability globally. Heart disease, cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease and diabetes are the most common.
- **Stress:** A feeling of physical or emotional tension. Stress can arise from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry or nervous.
- **Gender:** The group to which people of each sex belong (viewed from a socio-cultural perspective rather than a purely biological one).
- **Breastfeeding:** The process by which a mother feeds her newborn baby using her breasts, which start producing milk immediately after childbirth.
- **Baby formula:** Source of nutrition for babies based on artificial breast milk. These products are designed to replace breast milk with other preparations that are tailored to suit the child's needs, and are as similar as possible to breast milk.
- **Food handling:** This refers to the good hygiene practices that must be followed when a person is in direct contact with food. Food handling includes the preparation, processing, manufacture, storage and transportation of food.



- **Nutrients:** Chemical compounds (such as proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals) that are part of food. Our bodies use these compounds to function and grow.
- **Head lice:** Sucking lice that are 2-3 millimetres long, live parasitically on humans and other animals and survive by sucking their blood.
- **Sedentary:** A lifestyle where a person does hardly any physical exercise.
- **Food poisoning:** Illnesses resulting from the consumption of food contaminated by pathogenic germs or their toxins. These illnesses are caused by ingesting particular types of bacteria and their toxins, or by ingesting particular viruses or parasites.

# Useful resources

If you need help to improve your health, there are many public health resources you can access, depending on your particular health issue. These resources include:

- Your local **medical centre**, or the hospital nearest to where you live. You can go to hospital when a doctor or paediatrician at your local medical centre has referred you to a specialist, or if you have a serious emergency or a situation that can't be dealt with at your local medical centre.

Both medical centres and hospitals can deal with mental health emergencies.

- **For cases involving addiction**, you can go to your local medical centre or look for support services in the neighbourhood you're living in. You can also contact the social work unit at your local social services.

- **If you're experiencing gender-based violence**, depending on your situation you can go to your local medical centre, a hospital, a National Police or Local Police station, the municipal services for gender-based violence in your local area, your local social services, etc. There are also many associations that provide support to female victims of gender-based violence.

Additionally, you can call 016, or send a WhatsApp to 600 000 016. This is a free and confidential telephone number and can assist callers in 53 different languages.

- **Emergencies**: call **112** for any type of emergency. This dedicated number is used throughout Europe for emergencies related to health, fire, search and rescue, and citizen safety.

This guide is the result of collaboration between Alcobendas Council Municipal Health Service and the Alcobendas International Protection Reception Centre.

#### **MANAGEMENT, COORDINATION AND CONTENT:**

##### **Alcobendas Council Municipal Health Service, which forms part of the General Directorate of Social Welfare within the Department of Families and Social Welfare.**

- Councillor: Concepción Villalón Blesa
- Deputy Director: Adoración Orpez Lafuente
  - Estrella Turrero Pontiel, Head of the Municipal Health Service, General Directorate of Social Welfare, Alcobendas Council
  - Dr Estela Llorente Diaz, Medical Officer for Schools, Municipal Health Service
  - Raquel Ros Macho-Quevedo, Senior Public Health Officer, Municipal Health Service
  - Patricia Cuervo Pavón, Social Educator, Addiction Treatment Centre (CTA)
  - Pilar Morcillo Cruz, Social Educator, CTA

##### **Alcobendas International Protection Reception Centre (CAPI), General Directorate for Humanitarian Aid and the International Protection Reception Scheme, Office of the Secretary of State for Migration.**

- Director: Jose Antonio Miguel Polo
  - Isabel Blanco Sanz, Social Worker, Alcobendas CAPI
  - Ana Isabel Sánchez Blázquez, Psychologist, Alcobendas CAPI

