

# Tips for Better Mental Health



Life is unpredictable. While we can't always control what goes on in our life, we can choose how to respond when the going gets tough. Learn to bounce back from setbacks with these practical tips.

## Balance pressure and performance

Pressure can be a good thing. It can improve our performance and help us achieve our goals. On the flip side, too much pressure can leave us feeling stressed and overwhelmed. This can negatively impact our performance, as well as our ability to cope, our relationships and in the long term, our health.

Think of it as a balancing act. The secret to success lies in learning to recognise the early warning signs and taking steps to manage your stress before you tip into overwhelm!

## Recognise your stress signals

Identifying and acknowledging your personal stress indicators will help you to intervene early and manage your stress. We all experience stress in different ways. Pay attention to your stress signals - they may be physical or emotional. Watch out for changes in your thinking styles or behavior.

Common stress signals:

- Constantly tired
- Sick and run down
- Headaches or muscle pains
- Heart concerns or palpitations
- Change of appetite (eating more or less)
- Overwhelmed
- Unhappy
- Easily frustrated
- Angry
- Worried
- Irrational, being singled-minded
- Negative
- Constant catastrophising
- Tendency to over-personalise
- Poor concentration and difficulty making decisions
- Withdrawal from social interaction
- Absenteeism
- Increase in caffeine/alcohol intake and smoking
- Conflict or tension with others
- More accidents and injuries

## Manage your stress

There are things you can do to actively reduce your stress levels when you notice that your stress alarm bells have been activated. Some stress relief mechanisms are considered healthy and others are not. For example, taking a holiday is considered a healthy way to relieve stress. Whereas other activities that can provide short term relief can lead to long-term problems such as alcohol, drug dependence or gambling.

Building healthy habits to manage your stress increases your capacity to cope when you're under pressure.

## Move more

- Try a variety of different physical activities to avoid boredom
- Aim to get 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five days a week
- Take the stairs instead of elevators
- Avoid sitting down for too long, stretch regularly

## Practice good sleep hygiene

- Avoid backlit devices for at least 2 hours before sleep (perhaps read instead)
- Aim for 6-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep every night
- Take a warm shower 1 hour before going to sleep
- Keep your bedroom temperature between 18-22 degrees

## Eat a healthy diet

- Increase your daily green vegetable intake
- Reduce your refined sugar intake (e.g. soft drinks)
- Stay hydrated, aim for 2L of water a day
- Avoid coffee or energy drinks within 3 hours before the end of a shift

## Take a break

- Take regular holidays or 'staycations'
- Get out into nature (e.g. Gardening, bush walking, head to the beach)
- Look over the horizon as often as possible

# Tips for Better Mental Health

*(continued)*



## Challenge negative thinking

Our thoughts determine our feelings, which in turn impact how we respond to situations. If we think more about what we 'say' to ourselves - and reframe these thoughts - we can build our resilience and capacity to view situations in a more realistic and rational way. While we can't choose what happens to us, we can learn to choose how we respond.

Shift your mindset by asking these questions:

- Will this matter in 5 years' time?
- On a scale of 1 to 100 how bad is this?
- What is within my control? What can I do about it?
- How else can I perceive this situation?
  
- Speak with your social support network
- See a Psychologist
- Access your company Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

## Make time for relationships

Why does 'having a shoulder to cry on' help when we are feeling stressed? The research certainly shows that a strong social support network can help us buffer stress and be physically healthier. Connecting with others and having a sense of belonging means you're not left on your own when feeling under pressure.

## Practice psychological first aid

When someone at work appears to be struggling, you're not expected to be a counsellor or a psychologist, but you can take steps to help.

The aim of psychological first aid is to support people to help themselves recover by assisting them to identify their immediate needs, their own strengths and their ability to cope.

There are four important things you can do: Observe, Inquire, Listen and ACT.

### Psychological First Aid (O.I.L. & Act)

- Observe: What is going on?
- Inquire: Are they Ok?
- Listen: Explore and challenge as required
- Act: Develop next steps - offer support

While it's not your role to fix the problem, you can guide a person towards a solution or further assistance. Your aim is for them to agree on the next steps. This might involve them seeing their doctor, talking to their manager or calling the Employee Assistance Program. Make sure you follow up later to see how they're tracking.