

Prioritize your mental health

We often measure our fitness by our physical health, but our mental health is just as important. Mental health distress and illness can negatively impact your safety and wellbeing, putting yourself and those around you at risk. Prioritizing your mental health can be challenging, especially during stressful or difficult times, but it is a crucial step in ensuring a safe environment for you, your co-workers and loved ones.

KNOW THE WORKPLACE RISKS

Though mental health concerns can feel overwhelming, they may not seem like a risk to you or your co-workers. However, they can pose dangers, such as:

- Increased fatigue, a common symptom of some mental health conditions, which can make you more prone to injuries, car crashes and poor work performance; fatigue itself can also lead to mental health concerns
- Distraction, either as a result of mental health distress or mental illness, or due to worry about a loved one experiencing these issues
- Poor risk recognition and worker actions, both on and off the job

Rather than trying to ignore or work through the issues that are weighing on you, it's important to recognize when they may be affecting your safety.

WATCH FOR SIGNS

Signs of mental distress may not show up for weeks or months after a stressful situation. Regardless of the timing, if you aren't feeling like yourself, don't ignore it. Signs of mental health distress and illness can include:

- Feelings of being physically or mentally drained
- Feeling sad, lonely, numb or worried
- Difficulty focusing or making decisions
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Arguing more or becoming more easily frustrated with family, friends or colleagues
- Increases in alcohol or drug use

Everyone experiences stress and trauma differently, so take these or similar signs seriously. It is not wrong to be having these feelings, but if you are having them frequently, it is a sign you should seek additional help.

SEEK OUT ASSISTANCE

Mental health distress and illness can make you feel powerless, but there are resources available to you. If you are not sure where to begin, reach out to your Human Resources representative or supervisor. If available, you can also contact your organization's Employee Assistance Program, a confidential service which can help connect you with a counselor or other professional services.

There is no shame in asking for help or seeking counseling. Counseling helps with stress and mental health issues, as well as provides support on a variety of practical problems such as money, marriage, family violence, legal issues, and child and elder care concerns. This counseling can often be done through phone calls and/or video sessions, making it easier to use them around your own schedule.

There are additional proactive steps you can take to reduce stress and anxiety. You can:

- Lean on your support systems, like friends and family; it can sometimes help just to speak your worries out loud to someone you trust
- Take regular breaks from the news and social media
- Use your time off; time away from work can help you recuperate, even without plans to travel or visit anyone
- Utilize healthy coping mechanisms; find time for hobbies and activities that bring you joy and limit those that have the potential for harm or misuse, such as alcohol or other drug use
- Practice physical self-care; healthy eating, regular exercise and 7 – 9 hours of sleep each day can all help to reduce stress and anxiety
- Call your health care provider, describe what's wrong and ask for ideas on how to make positive changes

Safe workers create a safe workplace, but this begins by taking care of yourself. Never be afraid to raise concerns, ask for assistance or take time for self-care. When you feel mentally healthy and supported, you can help ensure the safety of everyone else around you.

