



# MALE HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

An initiative of the Irish Men's Sheds Association



## Men in the Workplace – Mental Health



Mental Health  
Ireland

Mental health is a vital part of our overall health and affects how we feel, think and behave. Sometimes we take mental health to mean mental illness but these are different. Our mental health is closely linked with our physical health. Mental health is not just about being well, it is about feeling energised and having a positive outlook. Like our physical health, there are lots of simple steps we can take each day to protect and improve our mental health and wellbeing.



## Mental Health is something we all have and we all need to look after.

Our mental health includes feeling good about yourself, about others and feeling that we can contribute to our community, while being able to cope with the typical stresses in life.

We all have times when we feel down, stressed out, fed up or annoyed. This is a natural part of the ups-and-downs of life. Most of the time those feelings pass, but sometimes they can develop into a more serious issue, and this could happen to any one of us. We are all unique and everyone is different so it is important to know when these feelings are becoming too much, or when we need seek help or ask for some support.



## Work and Mental Health

Employment plays an important role in our lives as men. For many men work creates a reassuring sense of belonging and focus. It is important to remember that work is just one aspect of our lives and we need to maintain a good balance between our work and home life. Without us realising work can sometimes over-spill take over our lives.

As work patterns change, we can now spend as much time in work as we do at home. This can affect the time we spend with loved ones, friends and family. The pressure of an increasingly demanding work culture in Ireland can have a damaging impact on our lives. We need to be aware of this if we are to avoid tiredness, exhaustion or burnout.

After a long day of commuting and working, it can be all too easy and quite frankly appealing to order a takeaway and settle down on the couch in front of the TV. If this becomes a regular routine, it can have a knock-on effect on our sense of work-life balance and our mental health and wellbeing. Our physical health and mental health are interlinked, so much so, that if we try to improve one, we will improve the other.

## Stress

Stress at its most basic level is our body's natural response to pressures from a situation or life event. Stress can keep us safe, alert and help to motivate us. However, if prolonged or intense, stress can be overwhelming and too much to cope with on our own. If it continues over time, it can affect our quality of life, our thoughts and how we behave. Some of the things that can make us feel stressed are experiencing something new or unexpected, or if we feel, we have little control over a situation.

### Work related Stress:

Work related stress is a reaction we feel when under too many pressures, feeling rushed, too many decisions, conflicts or other demands being placed on us in our workplace.

Our work lives are changing, with longer days and extra hours becoming a common feature. According to the Central Statistics Office (2019) the proportion of people working for 35-39 hours a week dropped between 2006 and 2016 and there has been an increase in the proportion working for 40-44 hours a week.

 **Mental Health Ireland's 2018 Mental Health Insights Survey reported that work was the most commonly cited aspect influencing our mental health and wellbeing** 

— (Mental Health Ireland, 2018).

We can all cope with some short-term busy periods, in fact many people enjoy the buzz of a fast moving and demanding workplace. However, if this becomes the norm, over a longer period we can begin to feel resentful or unhappy about the amount of time we are spending at work. Without noticing it, we can start neglecting other aspects of life because of work. This can increase your chances of feeling stressed and, if not addressed lead to more severe mental health issues.

**The number of employees working 50 hours or more per week increased to almost 5% in 2016, the same level as in 2005 (OECD, 2017).**

### Signs of Stress:

Everyone experiences stress. However, when it is affecting our life, health and wellbeing, it is important to tackle it as soon as possible.

It is important to spot when the demands of work and life are becoming too much to cope with on our own. We may start to notice a change in our behaviour, thoughts or feelings. We might experience physical symptoms such as sickness, aches or pains we wouldn't usually experience. Everyone has different strengths and abilities to help them cope with life's challenges. Seeking out and asking for support from work colleagues and management during stressful times is vital to begin to see a change in some of these signs.



### Seeking help

#### Have a workmate who you think needs help?

- Have a mate who is acting differently lately?
- Is he not around as much recently?
- Is he taking less care of himself?
- Is he drinking more? Smoking heavily? Using drugs?
- Is he getting angry or irritated over small things?

**If a guy you know seems to be going through a tough time, they might not talk about it even if they want to. If you spot a friend who you think might need some help;**

- **Arrange to catch up with them outside of work** – in the local park for a run;
- **Ask the question**
  - *How are you keeping?*
  - *You seem a bit stressed lately, is anything up?*
  - *You don't seem yourself the past while, is there something on your mind?*
- **Listen.** Let him know you hear what he is saying. Take it seriously and try not to judge. Remember, you don't need to jump in with solutions, just let him talk or be there for him if he finds it difficult to talk.
- **Support.** Encourage him to seek professional help. A GP is the first point of contact when someone is finding it difficult to cope with daily life.

## SIGNS OF STRESS

### BODY

- Headaches
- Frequent Infections
- Taut Muscles
- Muscular Twitches
- Breathlessness
- Skin Irritations
- Fatigue

### EMOTIONS

- Irritable
- More Fussy
- Depression
- Loss of Confidence
- Apprehensions
- Alienation
- Apathy

### MIND

- Worrying
- Muddled Thinking
- Impaired Judgement
- Nightmares
- Indecisions
- Hasty Decisions
- Negativity

### BEHAVIOUR

- Accident Prone
- Loss of Appetite
- Loss of Sex Drive
- Drinking More
- Smoking More
- Restlessness
- Insomnia

### Ways to take control and reduce your stress levels

1. **Realise when it is causing you a problem;** Be aware of times when stress is having an impact on your life. When we make the connection between feeling tired, angry or ill and being stressed, it is important to respond to it.
2. **Spot the causes;** Determine the possible reasons for your stress. Are you taking on too much? Are there things you are doing which could be handed over to someone else? Can you arrange some time away from work to catch up with friends or family?
3. **A healthy diet;** There is growing evidence that suggests what we eat affects our mood and mental wellbeing. Try to get plenty of fresh foods and variety in your diet. Learn about what a healthy diet looks like at [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)
4. **Sleep;** When you are stressed your sleeping patterns can be disturbed. Try to keep a good routine aiming to get 6-8 hours a night.

When feeling under pressure some people find it difficult to open up fully and they may not answer honestly the first time. Take your time, they will appreciate your concern.

Ask the question a second time. It shows that you have noticed something is different with them and that you want to help.



Similar to any physical illness, there are times in our lives when going it alone will not be enough and we will need to see a doctor. If we have a broken leg, we do not try to fix it on our own. Similarly with our mental health, there are times even when we might need the help of a professional.

#### Doctor/GP:

In Ireland, about a third of all GP visits relate to a mental health concern. So you're not the only person going through a difficult time. Arranging an appointment with your GP will help guide you on a range of care and supports available.

#### Employee Assistance Programme:

An employee assistance programme (EAP) is a free confidential workplace service that is provided by some employers in Ireland. It can help in identifying and resolving concerns related to family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, emotional, stress, or other personal issues that may affect job performance. Contact the Human Resources Department within your workplace or your Employee Handbook to find out if your workplace has an EAP.

#### For advice, information and support about services for mental health and wellbeing go to:

[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie) or call their information line for advice on supports/ services available to you and how to access different services and their relevant opening hours – **1800 111 888**

The YourMentalHealth information line is not a counselling service.

Seeking support from professionals such as a counsellor or psychotherapist can help you deal with a range of issues, from everyday worries to more serious, long-term psychological problems.

For a list of registered counsellors and psychotherapists contact;

- Irish Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy [www.iacp.ie](http://www.iacp.ie), or
- Irish Council for Psychotherapy [www.psychotherapycouncil.ie](http://www.psychotherapycouncil.ie)

#### Samaritans Ireland

The Samaritans telephone service is available 24 hours a day. For confidential, non-judgmental support:

**Freephone** 116 123

**Email** [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)

**Visit** [www.samaritans.ie](http://www.samaritans.ie) for details of the nearest branch.

## The Five Ways to Wellbeing

The Five ways to Wellbeing are simple, evidence based actions, you can do every day to feel good and function well (NEF, 2008).



### CONNECT

Connect with people around you, friends, relatives or co-workers you have not spoken to in a while. Try to make new connections where possible.



### BE ACTIVE

Do what you can to stay active. Try a new class in the gym, walk instead of getting the bus, try gardening, dancing, or cycling. Choose something you enjoy, suits your mobility and fitness.



### TAKE NOTICE

Take time to look around you, notice changes in the world, the passing of seasons. Be aware of your feelings and reflect on your experiences. Be present in the here and now.



### KEEP LEARNING

Try something new, a new recipe, hobby, or language course, take on a different responsibility in work. Set yourself a challenge you will enjoy achieving.



### GIVE

Do one good deed every day. Smile at a passer-by. Make someone a cup of tea. Join a community group. Doing good for someone else can be rewarding.

#### Ways to look after your mental health and wellbeing in work as a team;

- **Connect** – Organise a shared team lunch once a month.
- **Be Active** – Arrange a 5 a side football tournament with your local sports facility
- **Take Notice** – Try to notice something you never seen before on your work commute.
- **Keep Learning** – Arrange a group of your work mates to try a new sport no one has played before. .
- **Give** – Volunteer as a team with a local charity.



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