

1. Talk about your feelings

Talking about your feelings can help you maintain your mental health and deal with times when you feel troubled.

Talking about your feelings isn't a sign of weakness; it's part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy.

It can be hard to talk about feelings at work. If you have colleagues you can talk to, or a manager who asks how you are at supervision sessions, it can really help.

Identify someone you feel comfortable with and who will be supportive. You may want to think about what you want to disclose, who to and when a good time and place to do this could be.

If you are open about how you feel at work, especially if you are a leader, it might encourage others to do the same.

If you don't feel able to talk about feelings at work, make sure there's someone you can discuss work pressures with – partners, friends and family can all be a sounding board.



2. Keep active

Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and can help you concentrate, sleep, and look and feel better.

Exercising doesn't just mean doing sport or going to the gym. Experts say that most people should do about 30 minutes' exercise at least five days a week. Try to make physical activity that you enjoy a part of your day.

You may have a physical job like construction or teaching – you'll notice if you are off sick because of injury or physical illness how quickly your mood starts to be affected by the change in activity level.

If you work in an office it can make a huge difference to get out for a walk or do a class at lunchtime, or to build in exercise before or after work to ease you into the day or create a space between work time and personal time.



3. Eat well

What we eat can affect how we feel both immediately and in the longer term. A diet that is good for your physical health is also good for your mental health.



It can be hard to keep up a healthy pattern of eating at work. Regular meals, plus plenty of water, are ideal.

Try and plan for mealtimes at work – bringing food from home or choosing healthy options when buying lunch.

Try and get away from your desk to eat. You could try a lunch club at work – where you club together to share meals and try new things.

For busy times, or times when you are feeling low or stressed, try reducing or giving up caffeine and refined sugar. Make sure there is a ready supply of fruit/vegetables and snacks like nuts or trail mix that provides ready nutrients.

Be aware that some people find public eating at work very stressful because of past or current eating disorders – so if someone doesn't want to come to work dinners, or makes different food choices in the office, don't pass comment or put pressure on them to join in.

4. Drink sensibly

We often drink alcohol to change our mood. Some people drink to deal with fear or loneliness, but the effect is only temporary.

Most people don't drink at work – but most of us recognise the pattern of drinking more at the weekend or in the evening when work is hard going.



Be careful with work functions that include drinking. It can be tempting to have a drink to get 'Dutch courage', but if you feel anxious you may drink too much and end up behaving in a

way you'd rather not, which will increase feelings of anxiety in the medium to long term.

5. Keep in touch

Relationships are key to our mental health. Working in a supportive team is hugely important for our mental health at work.



We don't always have a choice about who we work with, and if we don't get on with managers, colleagues or clients, it can create tension. It may be that you need to practise more self-care at these times, but you may also need to address difficulties. There are more tips for doing that in our guide to relationships ([Mental Health Foundation resources](#) section on page 38).

Work politics can be a real challenge when we have mental health problems. It can be helpful to find a mentor or a small group of trusted colleagues with whom you can discuss feelings about work – to sense check and help you work through challenges.

Try and make sure you maintain your friendships and family relationships even when work is intense – a work–life balance is important, and experts now believe that loneliness may be as bad for our health as smoking or obesity.⁷

6. Ask for help

None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel or when things don't go to plan.

Your employer may have an Employee Assistance Programme. These services are confidential and can be accessed free and without work finding out.

You may also be able to access occupational health support through your line manager or HR service.

The first port of call in the health service is your GP. Over a third of visits to GPs are about mental health.⁸ Your GP may suggest ways that you or your family can help you, or they may refer you to a specialist or another part of the health service.⁹ Your GP may be able to refer you to a counsellor.



7. Take a break

A change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health.

It could be a five-minute pause from what you are doing, a book or podcast during the commute, a half-hour lunch break at work, or a weekend exploring somewhere new. A few minutes can be enough to de-stress you. Give yourself some 'me time'.

If your employer offers mental health days – discretionary leave to look after your wellbeing – take these, and make sure you use them well.

Sleep is essential to our mental health. Listen to your body. Without good sleep, our mental health suffers and our concentration goes downhill. You can access our resource on improving your sleep in our **Mental Health Foundation resources** section on page 38.

It can be hard to take holidays and time off from work. When we are stressed, it can seem even harder to take the breaks we are entitled to – when we need them most. Try and plan periods of leave for the year so that you always have a break to look forward to.



When you are on leave or at home, resist the temptation to check in with work. If you find that you can't break away, it may be a sign that you should be re-examining your workload to manage stress.

8. Do something you're good at

What do you love doing? What activities can you lose yourself in? What did you love doing in the past?

Enjoying yourself can help beat stress. Doing an activity you enjoy probably means you're good at it, and achieving something boosts your self-esteem.¹⁰

Concentrating on a hobby, like gardening or doing crosswords, can help you forget your worries for a while and can change your mood.

It's OK to be good at your job – when you feel stressed, it can be easy to forget your talents, or fall foul of imposter syndrome (where you feel like a fraud, or that you don't deserve your successes).

If possible, you should plan your workload to include tasks you know you are good at, so as to 'sandwich' things you know will be harder or more stressful.

At work, you may have a hobby you'd like to share or join in with colleagues on – a work cycling club, book group or crafting group can be a great way to share a skill with others.



9. Accept who you are

We're all different. It's much healthier to accept that you're unique than to wish you were more like someone else.



Feeling good about yourself boosts your confidence to learn new skills, visit new places and make new friends. Good self-esteem helps you cope when life takes a difficult turn.

Be proud of who you are. Recognise and accept the things you may not be good at, but also focus on what you can do well. If there's anything about yourself you would like to change, are your expectations realistic? If they are, work towards the change in small steps.

Self-acceptance and self-care can be very hard when you have a mental health problem – an ongoing challenge people need to work on.

It can be tempting to invest everything in building self-esteem around work success. That often means that people with mental health problems give everything at work and are high achievers. It also creates a risk that when things go wrong, when mistakes are made, or when change is necessary, people may take it personally.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that involves paying deliberate attention to what is happening, as it happens.

Mindfulness practice can help us to be more present with ourselves, our work, and our families. It can help us feel more connected, take stock, and be compassionate to ourselves and others.

You can download our resource on mindfulness, and find out about our evidence based online mindfulness course in our **Mental Health Foundation resources** section on page 38 or visit www.bemindful.co.uk.

10. Care for others

Caring for others is often an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you.

Working life can provide opportunities to care for others – contributing through vocational jobs like nursing or care work can be hugely significant for mental health. In most jobs, you can choose to be there for colleagues – either as a team mate, or as a line manager, when strategies like coaching and training are good ways to support others.

Helping can make us feel needed and valued, and that boosts our self-esteem. Volunteering can be hugely rewarding, and it helps us to see the world from another angle. This can help to put our own problems into perspective.

Many companies have volunteering opportunities and Corporate Social Responsibility programmes that enable staff to get involved in community work.

Caring responsibilities at home can be hugely rewarding to us, but also a source of stress. Our roles as parents, or carers for relatives, can collide with our work identities.

Carers are at greater risk of developing mental health problems – work can provide a respite for carers, as they can be someone else at work – so it is important to retain and support carers in the workplace.

Workplaces that support flexible working, carers' leave, childcare voucher schemes and other initiatives to support caring roles can have a big impact on staff mental health and productivity.

