

Staying Mentally Healthy Following Redundancy



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It is recognised that being made redundant is likely to be in the top ten most stressful events that can happen throughout your life. However it can also be seen as an opportunity for change, a chance to re-evaluate what is important to you, and what direction your career might take in the future. It might be useful to note that most of us will be made redundant 2.7 times in our working life.

The most important element to being made redundant is that you keep your self confidence high. Your friends and family are likely to be able help you stay positive. There are plenty of people that you can speak to for example the Jobcentre or a professional careers advisor, about what new opportunities you might consider.

Looking After Your Mental Health

Some people call mental health 'emotional health' or 'wellbeing' and it's just as important as good physical health. We all have times when we feel down or stressed or frightened. Most of the time those feelings pass. But sometimes they develop into a more serious problem and that could happen to any one of us. Everyone is different. You may bounce back from a setback while someone else may feel weighed down by it for a long time. Your mental health doesn't always stay the same. It can change as circumstances change and as you move through different stages of your life.

There's a stigma attached to mental health problems. This means that people feel uncomfortable about them and don't talk about them much. Many people don't even feel comfortable talking about their feelings. But it's healthy to know and say how you're feeling.

Ten Tips to being mentally healthy

- 1.** Talking about your feelings can help you stay in good 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. Talking can be a way to cope with a problem you've been carrying around in your head for a while. Just being listened to can help you feel supported and less alone. And it works both ways. If you open up, it might encourage others to do the same.
- 2.** Keep active: Experts believe exercise releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep, look and feel better. Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy. Exercising doesn't just mean doing sport or going to the gym. Walks in the park, gardening or housework can also keep you active. Experts say 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.
- 3.** Eat well. There are strong links between what we eat and how we feel – for example, caffeine and sugar can have an immediate effect. But food can also have a long-lasting effect on your mental health. Your brain needs a mix of nutrients to stay healthy and function well, just like the other organs in your body. A diet that's good for your physical health is also good for your mental health.

A healthy balanced diet includes:

- lots of different types of fruit and vegetables;
- wholegrain cereals or bread;
- nuts and seeds;
- dairy products;
- oily fish; and
- plenty of water.

Eat at least three meals each day and drink a lot, though not too much alcohol. Try to limit how many high-caffeine or sugary drinks you have.

- 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. When the drink wears off, you feel worse because of the way alcohol withdrawal symptoms affect your brain and the rest of your body. Drinking is not a good way to manage difficult feelings. Occasional light drinking is perfectly healthy and enjoyable for most people.

Stay within the recommended daily alcohol limits:

- Three to four units a day for men.
- Two to three units a day for women.

Many people smoke or use drugs or other substances to change how they feel. But, again, the effects are short-lived. Just like alcohol, the more you use, the more you crave. Nicotine and drugs don't deal with the causes of difficult feelings. They don't solve problems, they create them.

- 5. Keep in touch.** Strong family ties and supportive friends can help you deal with the stresses of life. Friends and family can make you feel included and cared for. They can offer different views from whatever's going on inside your own head. They can help keep you active, keep you grounded and help you solve practical problems. There's nothing better than catching up with someone face-to-face. But that's not always possible. Give them a call, drop them a note or chat to them online instead. Keep the lines of communication open. It's good for you!

6. Ask for help None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel or when things go wrong. If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. Your family or friends may be able to offer practical help or a listening ear. Local services are there to help you. For example, you could:

- join a support group
- find a counsellor to help you deal with your feelings
- visit a citizens advice bureau if you want advice on debt.

Your GP may be able to refer you to a counsellor. You should consider getting help from your GP if difficult feelings are:

- stopping you getting on with life;
- having a big impact on the people you live or work with; or
- affecting your mood over several weeks.

Over a third of visits to GPs are about mental health. Your GP may suggest ways you or your family can help you. Or they may refer you to a specialist or another part of the health service.

7. Take a break. A change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health. A few minutes can be enough to de-stress you. Give yourself some 'me time'. Taking a break may mean being very active. It may mean not doing very much at all. Listen to your body. If you're really tired, give yourself time to sleep. Without good sleep, our mental health suffers and our concentration goes downhill. Sometimes the world can wait.

- 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 helps beat stress. Doing an activity you enjoy probably means you're good at it and achieving something boosts your self-esteem. Concentrating on a hobby like gardening or the crossword can help you forget your worries for a while and change your mood.

It can be good to have an interest where you're not seen as someone's mum or dad, partner or employee. You're just you. An hour of sketching lets you express yourself creatively. A morning on the football pitch gets you active and gives you the chance to meet new people.

- 9.** Accept who you are. Some of us make people laugh, some are good at maths, others cook fantastic meals. Some of us share our lifestyle with the people who live close to us, others live very differently. 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 what you are not good at, but focus on what you do well. Work out if there's anything that you still want to change. Are your expectations realistic? If they are, work towards the change in small steps.

- 10.** Care for others. Caring for others is often an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you. It can even bring you closer together. Why not share your skills more widely by volunteering for a local charity? Helping out can make us feel needed and valued and that boosts our self-esteem. It also helps us see the world from another angle. That can help to put our own problems in perspective.

(Based on How to look after your mental health, The Mental Health Foundation, 2008)

visit www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Support and information

If you are worried about your mental health, or that of a close friend or relative, you should contact your doctor. They can offer advice or refer you to specialist services.

All local doctors have access to teams of professionals and support staff offering a range of skills and different ways to help.

The team normally includes:

- Primary Care Mental Health Workers based in the GP practice
- community psychiatric nurses
- psychiatric social workers
- consultant psychiatrists
- clinical psychologists
- occupational therapists

Where necessary, they will work closely together to provide support and services. If you feel uncomfortable with your doctor you should be able to:

- ask to see another doctor in the practice
- ask to see the nurse at the practice (if there is one)
- register with a new surgery

Further information can be found from www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Samaritans provides emotional support for people who are experiencing distress or despair. For confidential support, call **08457 90 90 90** (local rate) 24 hours a day or e-mail: jo@samaritans.org

For information about finding a qualified counsellor contact:

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy

Phone: **01455 883300**
Website: www.bacp.co.uk

UK Council for Psychotherapy

Phone: **020 7014 9955**
Website: www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Support and information

For general health information and advice:

You can contact NHS Direct 24 hours a day, 365 days a year for information about health-related issues. Information is available in a wide range of languages.

Phone: **0845 4647**
Website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk