

# SELF CARE

## Looking after your mental health *The Health Column*

**Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which individuals realise their own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their community.**

Mental illness, on the other hand, describes a number of diagnosable disorders that can significantly interfere with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities.

### **Mental illness affects many Australians**

- Each year, approximately one in every five Australians will experience a mental illness.
- Mental illnesses are the third leading cause of disability burden in Australia, accounting for an estimated 27% of the total years lost due to disability.
- Prevalence of mental illness decreases with age but is greatest among 18-24 year olds.
- Women are more likely than men to seek help for anxiety disorders (18% compared with 11%) and mood disorders (7.1% compared with 5.3%). Women are also more likely than men to use services for mental health problems.
- In 2007, 45% of Australians aged 16–85 years reported that they would have met the criteria for a diagnosis of a mental disorder at some point in their life.
- In any 12 months, approximately 14% of Australians will be affected by an anxiety disorder.



- The annual cost of mental illness in Australia has been estimated at \$20 billion, which includes the cost of lost productivity and reduced labour force participation.

### **World Mental Health Day**

World Mental Health Day occurs on the 10th of October every year. The aim of this day is to raise awareness of mental health issues around the world. The theme for this year's World Mental Health Day is 'mental health in the workplace.'

### **Mental health in the workplace**

Mental health in the workplace is important. Poor mental health has a large impact on individual employees as well as employers. A mentally healthy workplace increases personal and organisational resilience and success.

### **Signs of mental health strain**

Be aware of some common signs that may suggest someone at work is struggling with their mental health:

- Emotional signs, such as being irritable, sensitive to criticism, showing a lack of confidence that is not normal, or losing their sense of humour.
- Changes in work performance, such as making more mistakes than usual, having difficulty making decisions or being unable to concentrate.
- Behavioural changes, such as arriving late, not having lunch breaks, taking time off, not joining in conversations, unable to meet deadlines, or behaving in a way that is out of character.
- Physical signs, such as having an ongoing cold, being tired at work, rapid weight loss or gain, or not making an effort with their appearance.
- *Beyond Blue* ([www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)) has some resources to help you learn about different mental health conditions, and your pharmacist can also provide you with further information and advice.
- Talk to others about mental health. This can help create an environment where people are comfortable to seek support if they need it.
- Work out ways to reduce stress. Prolonged or excessive stress can have a negative impact on mental health. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about ways you can reduce your stress.
- Support work colleagues. If someone that you work with isn't themselves or is behaving out of character, ask if they are okay. This support can make a big difference.

If you are concerned about someone that you work with, ask if they are okay, and encourage them to seek support. *Heads Up*, developed by the *Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance* and *Beyond Blue*, has resources and information to help you support work colleagues ([www.headsup.org.au](http://www.headsup.org.au)).

## Creating a mentally healthy workplace

No matter what your position is in the workplace, everyone can contribute to creating a healthy workplace. Here are some strategies to help create a workplace that is mentally healthy:

- Look after yourself. If you are feeling sad, stressed or having difficulty coping, talk to someone about this, such as your GP or an Employee Assistance Program counsellor if your workplace has one available.
- Be aware of signs and symptoms that may suggest someone you know is having trouble coping.

Pharmacists can also provide further advice on ways to maintain your mental health and ways to cope with stress. There is a series of mental health information cards available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information program. These cards cover a number of topics such as *Anxiety*, *Depression* and *Posttraumatic stress disorder*.

There are also useful Fact Cards covering a range of related topics such as *Relaxation techniques* and *Sleeping problems*, all with helpful tips.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au/selfcare](http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare), then click 'Find a Self Care pharmacy near you'.

Your Self Care Pharmacy: