

SAFETY & LOSS PREVENTION

OUTLOOK

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW ENDING THE STIGMA AND MEETING
CHALLENGES HEAD ON BENEFITS ORGANIZATIONS
AND THE WORKFORCE AS A WHOLE

ALSO INSIDE:

- How chronic stress can add up to a mental health crisis
- Recognizing signs of a mental health crisis in a coworker (or yourself)
- How and why employers should implement mental health training as part of their safety program





A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Over 55 million adults in this country live with mental illness — yet less than half of them receive treatment, listing high costs, long waits, and social stigma as barriers to access to mental health care. As the number of people experiencing mental health challenges continues to grow, so do rates of substance abuse and suicide.

A BURNED-OUT WORKFORCE

COVID-19 added a slew of new challenges to a workforce already beleaguered by stress, particularly for those workers deemed essential during the pandemic. Fears about our health and safety, the sudden shift to remote work and school, financial worries, and social isolation added an undercurrent of anxiety still affecting us today. Workers report rising production expectations, staffing issues, and instability have also added to their stress and given them a sense of dread about their jobs.

A CALL TO ACTION

Poor mental health is wreaking havoc on our population— both in and outside of work. Mental health challenges affect the entire organization, causing more absenteeism, more accidents, and a less “present” and productive workforce. Employers have been hesitant to consider the mental health of their staff in their policies and programs, but the payoff is immense, and the costs of not doing so are so much more.

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WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

MENTAL HEALTH refers to the state of one's emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing.

Each of us has mental health, the state of which is determined by our ability to function well in daily activities, contribute to the community, and effectively handle stressors. Our mental health is not solely dependent upon the presence or absence of mental illness; those with diagnosed mental health conditions can still have good mental health, while those without them can still struggle with symptoms.



MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

A mental health condition, or mental illness, is a diagnosable health condition that impacts one's emotions, thoughts, and/or behavior. Mental illnesses have varying symptoms that cause mild to severe distress and functional impairment.

Examples of mental illness include anxiety and depressive disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), neuro-developmental disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and eating and substance abuse disorders.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

A mental health challenge or stressor is a situation or condition that temporarily affects the way one thinks, feels, behaves, and/or relates to others and to their surroundings.

We all experience mental health challenges from time to time, both in our personal lives (grief, financial strain, medical issues, etc.), and at work (deadline pressure, heavy workloads, fatigue, etc.). When these stressors become difficult to handle, they can negatively affect our mental health, causing the symptoms of mental health conditions.

MENTAL HEALTH **IS** PHYSICAL HEALTH

Mental health conditions affect our health the same way physical health conditions like diabetes and asthma do – and our mental health and physical health affect each other. Asthma might make a person struggle to breathe while walking up stairs, but with effective treatment, that person might run a marathon. The same is true for mental health conditions – proper diagnosis and treatment can make all the difference.

HOW CHALLENGES RELATE TO CONDITIONS

Mental health challenges, especially over an extended period of time, may cause one to exhibit the symptoms of mental illness – for example, a person struggling to pay bills may feel tense, depressed, or nauseated; they may have trouble concentrating or sleeping – all symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder. However, this does not necessarily mean the person meets the criteria to be diagnosed with the condition.

Mental health challenges may also hasten the onset or exacerbate the symptoms of existing mental and physical illnesses, as well as impeding their treatment. Existing mental illnesses can also make mental health challenges more difficult to manage.

PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Like many other chronic illnesses, treating mental illness is less about cure and more about controlling the disease and relieving symptoms. Most patients with mental illnesses must continue to be treated and monitored throughout their lives.

Mental health challenges cause the same symptoms as mental illnesses and are treated the same way. Many people no longer need treatment once the source of stress subsides, but those who have experienced mental health issues have a high risk of recurrence, so they should continue to monitor their mental health so they can receive treatment early, before a crisis.



**HOW
CHRONIC
STRESS IS
MAKING US
SICK**

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING IS A BAD THING

People often talk about stress as something to avoid, but stress can be a good thing – it activates our bodies’ threat response, which is designed to help us in a crisis. Stress can offer a burst of energy and alertness in order to react more quickly to danger; it can motivate us to achieve a goal, such as meeting a deadline or winning a competition; it can even improve our focus and performance in the short term. This “good stress” (also known as “eustress”) occurs infrequently and in manageable bursts.

EUSTRESS or “GOOD STRESS”	VS.	DISTRESS or “BAD STRESS”
CAN IMPROVE FOCUS & PERFORMANCE		CAN LEAD TO ANXIETY OR ILLNESS
OCCURS INFREQUENTLY		IS CHRONIC & ONGOING
IS SHORT-LIVED		LASTS AWHILE
MOTIVATIONAL		DEMOTIVATIONAL
MANAGEABLE		UNMANAGEABLE

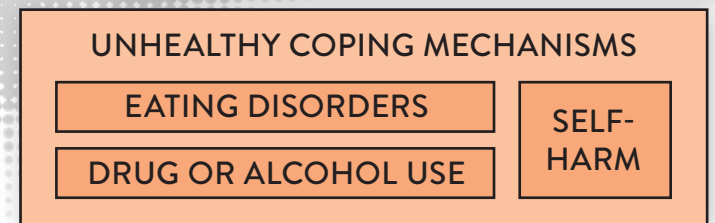
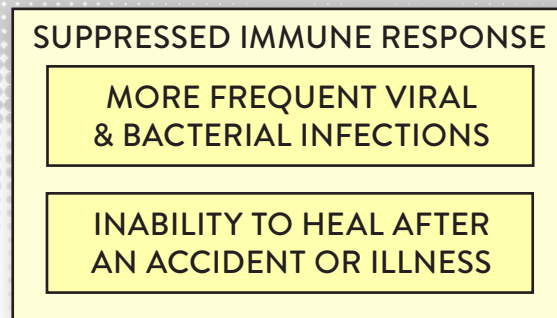
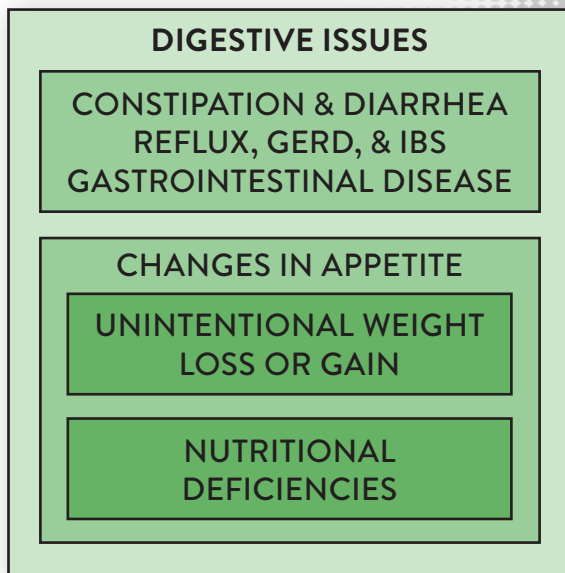
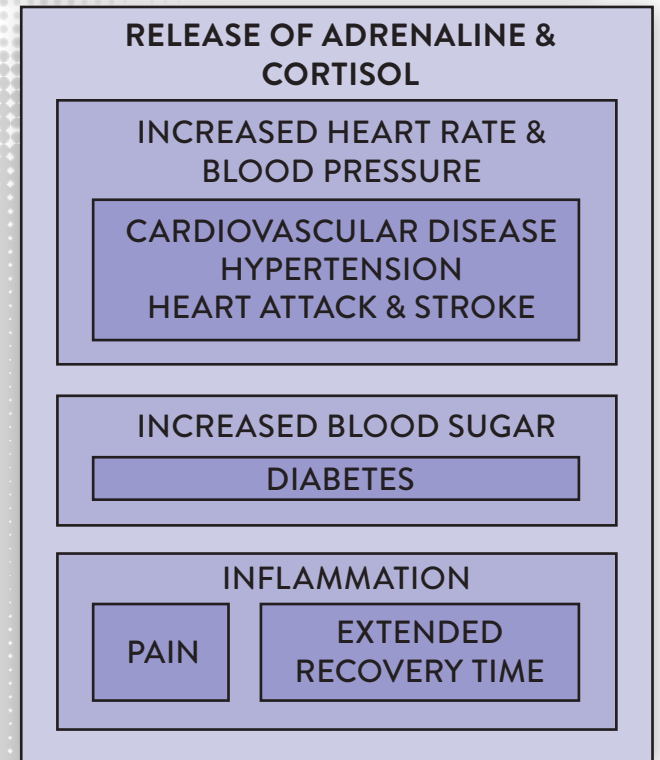
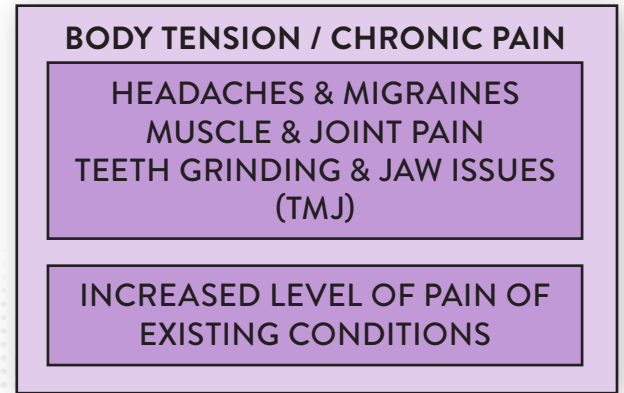
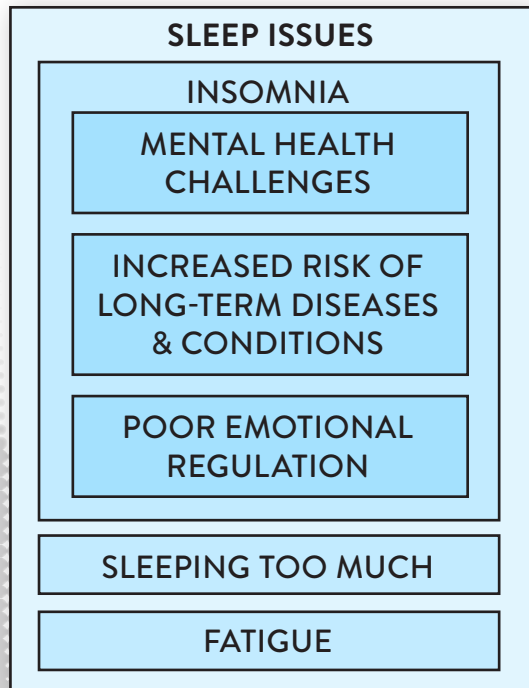
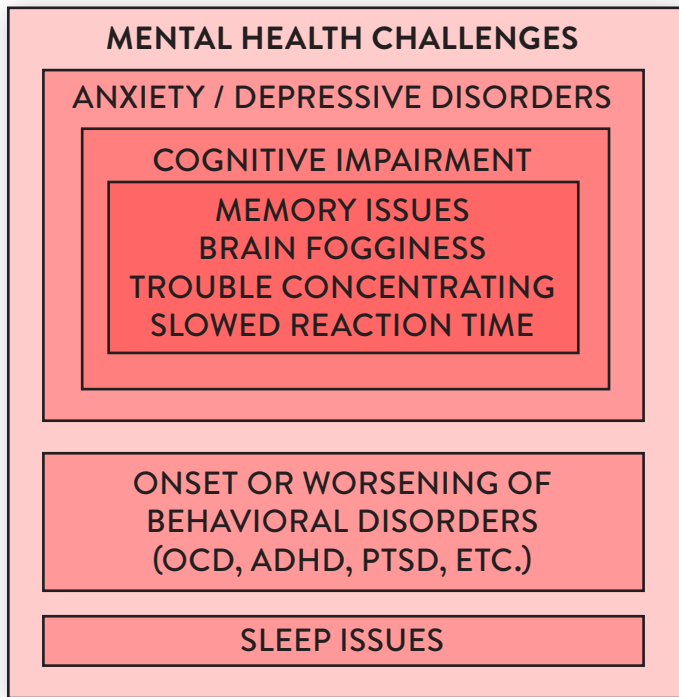
But when someone is made to perform under a state of constant stress, such as dealing with a pandemic, an unrelenting workload, or the responsibility of caring for an ailing family member, it can become unmanageable, turning that motivation into “bad stress” (or “distress”). The threat persists, and so does our bodies’ response to it. Long-term stress can cause a long list of ailments, both mental and physical. The worst part? The symptoms of chronic stress add more stress, creating a cycle that makes stopping it more difficult the longer it continues.

The graphic on page 3 shows how untreated stress affects the body and the mind – and how the symptoms compound to make the problems worse. Stress leads to mental health challenges, which can lead to physical symptoms, and those physical symptoms often lead to mental health challenges, which becomes more stress. See how insomnia and mental health challenges are both symptoms of chronic stress, and they are also symptoms of one another.



**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Memory issues caused by chronic stress can be so severe that they can be mistaken for the onset of dementia. Researchers studying a possible link between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and dementia found that people suffering from PTSD may have up to twice the risk of developing dementia, though this increased risk is not fully understood.



The Compounding Effects of CHRONIC STRESS

Mental Health Arithmetic

HOW IGNORING CHRONIC STRESS CAN ADD UP TO A CRISIS

1.

Everyone has moments of high pressure that cause stress, but when that pressure continues for an extended period of time, or when multiple challenges hit at once, stress can become chronic, which can be described as a “perpetual state of overwhelm.”

CHRONIC STRESS

AT WORK + PERSONAL + EXTERNAL

STAFFING ISSUES	FINANCIAL TROUBLES	POLITICAL & SOCIAL ISSUES
HEAVY WORKLOAD	RELATIONSHIPS	RIISING COST OF LIVING
LOOMING DEADLINES	FAMILY STRUGGLES	ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS
STAFF INCOMPATIBILITY	HEALTH CONCERNS	WAR & CIVIL UNREST
SAFETY CONCERNS	TRANSPORTATION ISSUES	GLOBAL CRISES
PHYSICAL STRAIN	HOUSING UNCERTAINTY	VIOLENCE
INJURIES & ILLNESSES	UNTREATED MENTAL ILLNESS	UNCERTAIN FUTURE

=

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT	INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS
LACK OF CONCENTRATION	ABSENTEEISM & PRESENTEEISM
POOR TIME MANAGEMENT	INSOMNIA & FATIGUE
LOSS OF PRODUCTIVITY	PHYSICAL AILMENTS & PAIN
MISSED DEADLINES	ANXIETY & DEPRESSION
BURNOUT	UNHEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS

2.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES
CHRONIC STRESS
 +
2x MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES
CHRONIC STRESS
 +
3x MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES
CHRONIC STRESS
 +
 ... AND SO ON ...

Chronic stress and its effects will continue to add up unless they are addressed. The ever-increasing burden makes stress even more difficult to handle and increases the risk of a mental health crisis.

MENTAL ILLNESS
 ANXIETY DISORDERS
 DEPRESSION
 ADHD & AUTISM
 SCHIZOPHRENIA
 BIPOLAR DISORDER
 SLEEP DISORDERS
 PTSD & OCD

Pre-existing mental illnesses act as a multiplier in this equation, increasing the severity of symptoms and hastening a crisis – especially if they are left untreated.

Every person, regardless of their mental health status, is at risk of their untreated mental health challenges developing into a

CRISIS
 SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS EPISODE
 SERIOUS INJURY OR ILLNESS
 LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT
 FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND DEBT
 STRAINED RELATIONSHIPS
 SUICIDAL IDEATION OR SELF-HARM
 DEATH

serious crisis, the outcome of which can be painful, severe, or even deadly.



Health-related stigma can be defined as “a level of shame, prejudice, or discrimination toward people with health conditions caused by a lack of understanding, misinformation, or negative attitudes toward these conditions.” Many physical conditions such as cancer were once stigmatized, but as knowledge and understanding of causes and treatments has risen, so has public acceptance.

Unfortunately, the stigma surrounding mental health conditions remains, and this stigma acts as a barrier to support and care — only around 30% of people with mental illnesses receive treatment, and more than 70% report actively concealing their condition from others out of fear of discrimination, especially at work.

The National Academy of Medicine describes three different types of stigma that surround mental health conditions:

Self-stigma: An individual internalizes and accepts negative stereotypes, making it difficult to ask for help or receive treatment. Perceiving stigma from others, whether real or assumed, can add to this.

Social stigma: A society or culture creates an environment where people with mental health conditions are discredited, isolated, and feared, which keeps people from sharing their conditions with others.

Structural stigma: Discrimination based on mental health issues occurs on a system level (such as a workplace or other organization), where cultural norms, institutional rules, and policies limit resources and opportunities for those with mental health issues.

People have long accepted the old adage “Leave your worries at the door” as the best way to handle stress. Managers had instructed employees with problems outside of work to simply leave them there. Self-help gurus and clinical psychologists alike have recommended “putting work away at the end of the day” and taking time to relax. So we try to tamp down our troubles to be dealt with later.

This is, of course, easier said than done. Present scientific wisdom tells us that our brains are just not wired to compartmentalize our stress in this way, so we often fail to meet the expectation to do so. And when we “succeed,” too often those worries go unaddressed and pile up like dirty laundry — eventually that pile becomes a mountain, and that mountain becomes a crisis.

While the COVID-19 pandemic increased our already large mental health burden, it also brought the need for more acceptance and support from employers to the forefront. Most Americans spend the majority of their waking hours at work, so workers often have the best opportunity to notice and take action when a coworker is suffering a mental health crisis. For some, the workplace may offer the only support network they have.

Many business leaders who have begun taking a more comprehensive approach — acknowledging the connection between life at work and at home, considering their employees’ mental as well as physical health, and offering solutions — have seen the benefits. So why are so many still unwilling to even discuss mental health in the workplace? In spite of all the progress made in recent years, the stigma remains.

Each individual stressor, regardless of the source, adds to our total stress load. Too much stress and our ability to carry the load is diminished. This causes a loss in productivity and can lead to mental health issues, which then become stressors themselves and add even more to our total stress load ... and the cycle continues and worsens until it becomes a crisis — or action is taken to lighten the load.



WORKPLACE ATTITUDES TOWARD MENTAL HEALTH

Since 2019, Headspace Health has conducted yearly surveys regarding American workers' mental health and their attitudes surrounding it — here are some of their most significant findings:

Regarding stress levels and mental health challenges:

- 48% of employees in 2019 and 59% in 2021 reported **crying at work** due to stress
- In 2021, 87% of workers said they **experience stress** on a regular basis (at least once a week)
- 81% of employees say that their **stress level impacts their work performance**
- 80% of CEOs and 75% of their employees say they **missed at least one day of work** in 2022 due to mental health challenges (up from 50% in 2019); 47% of CEOs **missed five or more days**

Regarding COVID-19's impact on the workplace:

- In 2020, 70% of employees reported feeling **more stressed than ever before** in their professional careers
- 37% more employees rated their **stress level as "high" or "extreme"** in 2021 (48%) than in 2019 (35%)
- 68% of employees surveyed said **working from home** had improved their mental health; 18% believed the impact was mostly negative; only 1% saw no positive benefits
- In 2021, 57% of employees said their organizations had **increased their focus on mental health** because of COVID-19; only 21% felt that the higher level of focus had remained in the years that followed

Regarding attitudes toward mental health care and support:

- More than 90% of employees believe **employers should care** about their mental health
- 96% of **CEOs believe they are doing enough** for their employees' mental health; 69% of their employees agree
- 80% of CEOs recognize that employee **mental health impacts productivity**
- 92% of employees agree that **support from their employers** positively impacts their productivity
- 58% of CEOs believe **talking about their own mental health** makes them better leaders
- In 2021, more than 95% of employees said they received some type of **support at work that helped them cope** with stress

Regarding the stigma surrounding mental health:

- 19% of workers whose employers offer mental healthcare services **chose not to utilize them** for fear that doing so would jeopardize their careers
- 84% of employees and 65% of CEOs said they **hide their mental health issues** from coworkers
- 88% said that they appreciate it when their bosses **discuss mental health issues**, but only 35% said that their managers actually do
- 56% of CEOs worry that talking about their mental health will **make others see them as less credible** and reliable as leaders
- 69% of CEOs claimed to be **accepting of emotional and mental health issues** in the workplace, but only 35% of employees surveyed agreed

"Stigma is the biggest killer out there. Stigma kills more people than cigarettes, than heroin, than any other risk factor. Because it keeps people in the shadows, it keeps people from asking for help. It keeps good people from being willing to offer help." **Former U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams, MD**

"The mind drives the activity of the body. We've seen movements all around the world on mindfulness. To work safely, people need to be mindful of what they're doing, and that's part of the conversation on mental health." **Larry Masotti, director of strategic relationships at Workplace Safety & Prevention Services in Ontario, Canada**

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS: THE CASE FOR INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUR ORGANIZATION'S LOSS PREVENTION PROGRAM

As safety and loss prevention professionals, we already recognize the importance of preventing workplace injuries and illnesses by avoiding hazards and providing a safe work environment – the time has come to consider mental health hazards as well.

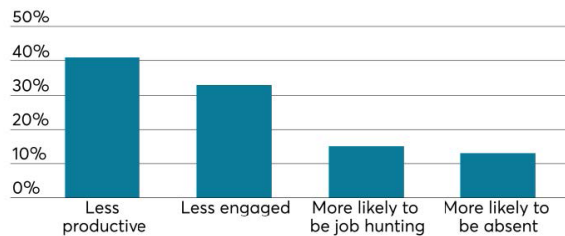
Every successful leader knows that their organization's success relies heavily on the quality of its most valuable resource – its people – and that resource requires maintenance in order to run well. As we continue to acknowledge the relationship between physical and mental health (hint: they're the same thing), adding mental health to an organization's safety program – where the communication structure and support network is already in place – makes sense, and ignoring it can come at a high price – both literal and figurative.

ABSENTEEISM, PRESENTEEISM, & BURNOUT

According to the CDC, employees with poor mental health miss 5% more days of work – those suffering the symptoms of depression report an average of 4.8 missed workdays and 11.5 days of reduced productivity every three months. Worldwide, around 200 million workdays are lost to depression each year. One report from the International Risk Management Institute estimates that substance abuse and mental health disorders cost employers between \$80-\$100 billion each year in indirect costs.

Depression and anxiety affect creativity and problem-solving skills and may make people more

The impact of stress on the workforce



Source: Colonial Life

hesitant to take risks, which can lower productivity and make an organization stagnant. Stress undermines morale and makes employees less likely to be energized to perform well or stay at a company that shows little interest in supporting their mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES CAUSE MORE INJURIES – AND VICE VERSA

Employers often underestimate the potential impact mental health has on the number of work-related injuries. Common symptoms of chronic stress such as memory issues, lack of focus, and fatigue make an employee more likely to practice unsafe behavior and cause an accident. An injured worker then faces the possibility of costly medical bills, lost pay due to missed workdays, and even the inability to return to work at all. Of course, all of this costs the employer as well – in workers' compensation claims, lost productivity, and increased resources needed to rearrange job tasks and implement return-to-work procedures.

When an employee has an injury or illness, whether job-related or not, their productivity suffers – and so does their mental health. Worries about finances and job security, health concerns, and the physical

The National Safety Council has collaborated with an independent research institution, NORC at the University of Chicago, to create a tool demonstrating the **cost of employee mental health and illness** for employers.

This cost calculator is an authoritative, easy-to-use tool providing business leaders with specific information about the cost of mental health in their workplace based on the size of employee base, industry, and state. Scan the QR Code for more information.



pain from the injury itself all add to the person's stress level, which can lead to poor mental health. Because depression often manifests as physical pain and insomnia, injured workers can find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of symptoms that lengthen their recovery time and delay their return to work even longer.

Physical pain also causes the brain to release cortisol, the "stress hormone," which causes inflammation and inhibits the body's ability to heal; it also keeps the body in a constant state of "fight-or-flight," as if under attack. Without abatement, that stress becomes chronic and leads to mental health challenges. (This is one reason why effective pain management after an injury is so important.)

Even minor injuries can lead to mental health challenges – one study of workers with job-related musculoskeletal injuries found that about half experienced symptoms of depression during the first year after the injury.

Access to proper physical and mental healthcare, in combination with a robust return-to-work program and a supportive workplace culture can help to ease stress and speed healing for workers after an injury or illness.

BE A PART OF THE SOLUTION, NOT THE PROBLEM

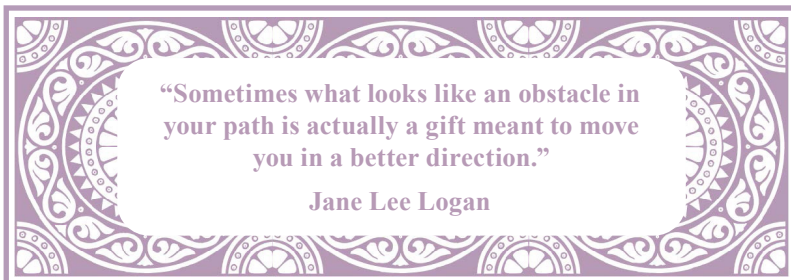
Studies show employees who report having highly demanding jobs, a lack of control over their work, and a workplace culture they feel doesn't support them have higher rates of mental health conditions, particularly anxiety and depression. Organizations can reduce these mental health hazards using the same methods geared toward hazards to physical health – by taking into account how certain aspects of the job and workplace environment affect their employees' safety and well-being.

Some jobs contain more obvious hazards to mental health than others; law enforcement officers and healthcare workers, for example, face situations that are stressful in tangible, measurable ways. The state of Florida has already made progress toward supporting these workers through legislation – first responders now qualify to receive workers' compensation benefits for job-induced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can be easy to forget that those in “desk jobs” can also be subjected to high levels of stress – the body reacts the same way, regardless of the stressor. (See “[The Compounding Effects Of Chronic Stress](#)” on [page 3](#).)

LOWER COSTS BY INCREASING RESOURCES

It may seem counterintuitive to think that spending more can mean spending less; however, mental illnesses are more difficult and more expensive to treat the longer they are left untreated; they also contribute to higher numbers of other costly health conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke, which dramatically increases direct and indirect costs for the employer as well as its employees. Clinical screenings can help identify mental health conditions earlier, allowing patients to receive treatment when symptoms are less severe and before other health conditions are triggered.

The World Economic Forum reports that for every dollar spent on mental healthcare, \$4 is returned to the economy through increased productivity and decreased costs.



WAYS TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

EMPLOYERS CAN:

- Talk more openly about mental health with employees to better gauge their needs and help reduce the stigma surrounding it
- Create and maintain dedicated quiet spaces where employees can relax and unwind throughout the workday
- Allow employees opportunities to weigh in on decisions that affect their job stress
- Encourage employees to take advantage of confidential screenings for anxiety and depression, such as this one: <https://www.helpyourselfhelpothers.org>
- Offer educational materials (posters, brochures, emails, etc.), and provide training opportunities (either in-person or online) about mental health and symptoms of mental illness
- Provide information about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), specifically mental health services available for workers in the state of Florida
- Train employees to recognize mental health issues and to know what to do if they suspect they or a coworker is affected
- Incorporate mental health into existing safety and return-to-work programs

EMPLOYEES CAN:

- Encourage their employers to offer the services listed above – and utilize them when they are available
- Be open-minded and accepting of their colleagues' differences, feelings, and experiences
- Offer support and empathy to those who talk about their mental health challenges, and encourage them to seek help
- Share their own personal struggles with mental health with others to reduce stigma
- Adopt healthy behaviors that promote stress management, such as eating healthy, getting enough sleep, and maintaining social connections
- Practice stress management techniques, such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness
- Seek and maintain treatment for existing mental and physical health conditions
- Ask for help when they are struggling



RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION IN A FAMILYMEMBER, FRIEND, OR YOURSELF

Diagnosing mental health issues isn't a straightforward science, but there are ways to notice when someone needs help. Look for changes in behavior, like someone typically outgoing becoming withdrawn, memory issues in someone who is typically on top of things, leaders struggling to lead, etc.

The National Association on Mental Illness lists the following common warning signs to look for:

- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Trying to harm one's self or making plans to do so
- Severe, out-of-control risk-taking behavior
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, which can include physical symptoms such as racing heartbeat or difficulty breathing
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Seeing, hearing, or believing things that aren't real
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs
- Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality, or sleeping habits
- Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

HOW TO HELP AN EMPLOYEE WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE

- Show empathy – be open and non-judgmental
- Consider taking the conversation outside of the workplace to ensure confidentiality
- Accentuate the positive as much as possible – focus on the person's strengths to help foster self-esteem and purpose
- Whenever possible, consult with members of your human resources team to determine how best to offer support
- Point them in the direction of resources such as the EAP – and offer to help walk them through the process

NATIONAL SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE: 988
CRISIS TEXT LINE: HELLO TO 741741



E-Learning *from the* DIVISION OF RISK MANAGEMENT

The safety training required per section 284.50, F.S. for all newly appointed safety and alternate safety coordinators, previously available solely in webinar format, is now being provided through online training modules available at your convenience.



- PEOPLE FIRST
TIMESHEET USERS:**
- Login to **People First**
 - Click on **Talent Management**
 - Click on **Learning**
 - Click on **Find Learning**
 - Type "DFS_RM" into the search bar for a list of current courses
 - Click "Start Course" on the module of your choice

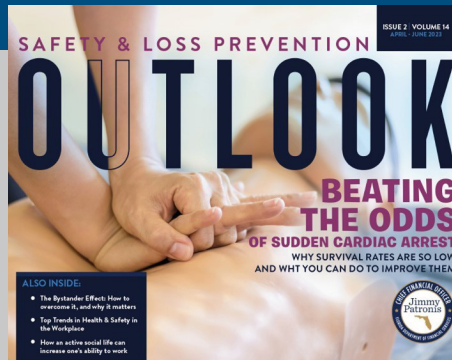
DRM WEBSITE REGISTRATION

- ALL OTHERS:**
- Click the button to access the external registration portal on the Division of Risk Management's website
 - Submit your information
- This is a single registration process for the People First Learning Management System and will allow access to all of our trainings.

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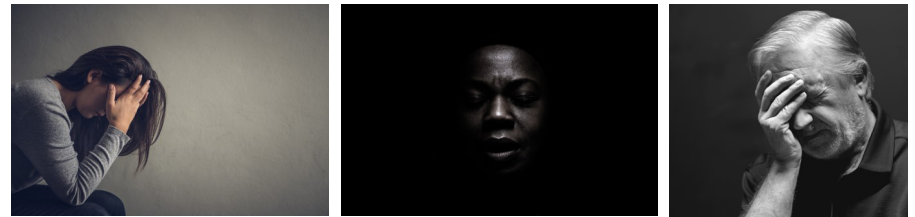
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