

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

## Mental Health



**Healthy  
Workplaces**

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by





## Module Tools - Educate

## mental health

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Here you will find Mental Health 'Educate' Resources with useful information and tips to share with employees. The following documents are included;

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## Ideas and Suggestions for Promoting Healthy Minds in the Workplace

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- Use bulletin boards to post information about various topics relating to healthy minds. Use fact sheets and information from the Educate section of Healthy Minds on the [Healthy Workplace](#) website.
- Include information on the importance of healthy minds in short articles for internal newsletters, staff e-mails, or paycheque inserts.
- Organize information sessions for employees on how to maintain a healthy mind at work. For example, the value of laughter, yoga, time management, or stress management.
- Look out for national or provincial theme weeks and promote them. For example, [Mental Health Week](#) in May and [Mental Illness Awareness Week](#) in October. Use these theme weeks to start conversations about mental health and mental illness.
- Educate supervisors and managers about mental health in the workplace. [Mental Health Works](#) offers a variety of workshops, training and tools to help with this.
- Tell employees where they can learn more about mental health and mental health problems. For example:
  - [Canadian Mental Health Association](#): The website includes mental health self-tests for stress and work-life balance, brochures on a number of mental health topics, and links to find your nearest CMHA branch.
  - [Here to Help](#): Mental health and substance use information you can trust, by a group of seven leading provincial non-profits. This site provides information in several languages. It contains screening self-tests for well-being, mood disorders, anxiety disorders and risky drinking.
  - [Bounce Back](#): A free program you complete in your home available to any adult in BC to combat low mood. Available in English or Cantonese.
  - [Antidepressant Skills at Work](#): A workbook for individuals that provides strategies that are effective in managing depressed mood. It focuses on ways to deal with workplace problems, so they are less likely to cause depressed mood or lead to depression and ways to reduce the effects of depression and depressed mood on work satisfaction and performance.
  - [Anxiety Canada](#): Tools and resources to help manage anxiety. Raises awareness about anxiety and support access to proven resources and treatment.

Source: [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)



## Understanding Mental Health

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**Mental Health** is a state of mental and emotional well-being. A mentally healthy person realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to their community.

**Mental illness** can take many forms, just as a physical illness can. They are also more common than you might realize. Statistics show that **one in every five** Canadians will develop a mental illness at some point in their lives. **Mental illness** describes a broad range of mental and emotional conditions. The type, intensity and duration of symptoms vary from person to person, but mental illness all result in a significant impairment to a person's thinking, emotions, physical well-being, roles and/or relationships. Despite the fact that every Canadian knows someone who has been, or will be, affected by a mental illness, few people know very much about it.

It's important to remember that most mental illnesses are episodic. This means that **most people who have been diagnosed with a mental illness can still have long periods of good mental health**. The reverse is also true; someone who has never been diagnosed with a mental illness may currently have very poor mental health.

Maintaining a healthy mind and good mental health involves nurturing healthy coping habits, relationships, positive thinking, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose.

### Benefits of a Healthy Mind in the Workplace

Here are some of the benefits of maintaining a healthy mind in the workplace:

- Being able to work more productively and accomplish more, leading to greater career success.
- Feeling more personal fulfillment from work.
- Being absent less often.
- Having better relationships with co-workers.
- Feeling more rested and energized.
- Being able to make choices about your priorities, rather than sacrifices.
- Having improved relationships with family and friends.

### Reducing the Stigma around Mental Illness

Because of the stigma around mental illness, people are sometimes ashamed of their condition and are reluctant to seek help. Can you imagine choosing not to seek treatment for a broken leg? We need to develop the same attitude toward mental illness as we have toward physical illness. When people know that they will not be discriminated against or



harassed, they are much more likely to seek help. Early treatment is important and increases the chances of a quick recovery.

Learning more about mental health and mental illness is a crucial step in eliminating stigma, overcoming prejudice and promoting early identification and effective treatment. Employers can strive to create a workplace environment where it is safe to talk about mental health and mental illness. This includes:

- Recognizing that in increasingly demanding workplaces, stress, burnout and the challenge of maintaining a work-life balance are realities for employees and can trigger mental health problems.
- Giving employees information to protect their own mental health, recognize mental health problems and find out where they can get help.

### Types of Mental Illness

An employee's wellness benefits everyone. Encouraging workers to get quality care for their health problems—of any kind—ultimately boosts morale and productivity. Some of the more common mental illnesses, and examples in each category of illness, include:

- **Mood disorders:** Depression (including post-partum depression and seasonal affective disorder) and bipolar disorder
- **Anxiety (and related) disorders:** Generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder and social anxiety disorder
- **Psychotic disorders:** Schizophrenia
- **Personality disorders:** Borderline personality disorder
- **Eating disorders:** Anorexia, bulimia
- **Concurrent disorders:** Substance use disorder combined with a mental disorder

To learn more about mental illnesses or how to combat the stigma surrounding them, contact your local branch of the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#).

Note: The information provided is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for appropriate professional medical advice from your physician or health-care provider.

**Sources:** The Health Communication Unit at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto; [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)



## Healthy Body, Healthy Mind

We know that physical wellness and mental wellness are inseparable. Developing healthy habits by following the simple steps listed here will benefit both your mind and body.

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### Physical Activity

Finding time in your schedule for a physical activity routine is one effective way to deal with and prevent many symptoms of stress. Frequent exercise is also one of the best stress-reduction techniques available. Exercise not only improves your health, it also relaxes tense muscles, helps you sleep, and releases endorphins.

You don't have to find a big chunk of time at the end of a busy day to fit in physical activity. You can:

- **Energize** your day with 10-minute bouts of activity, such as a short walk during a break.
- **Move around** or stretch at least once an hour.
- **Do a few stretches** to relieve stress at your workstation.

### Healthy Eating

Combining this approach to physical well-being with a diet that includes a variety of healthy options will give your body a natural feeling of wellness. Try to:

- **Avoid eating sugary foods.** Eating high-sugar, simple carbohydrate foods (such as doughnuts and pastries) tend to make you feel better in the short term. However, the instant lift is followed by a drop in blood sugar that leaves you feeling lethargic and craving more sugar.
  - Try: Having a slice of melon or fresh berries with a low-fat yogurt instead of cookies for a mid-afternoon snack.
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol.** Caffeine can lead to irritability and anxiety. Alcohol is a depressant on the nervous system so can make a low mood worse.
  - Try: Drinking a glass of sparkling water with lemon instead of a pop, coffee or alcoholic drink.
- **Avoid high-fat foods.** They are harder for your body to digest.
  - Try: Swapping a ham & cheese croissant for wholegrain toast with peanut butter.
- **Eat more fish** and foods with omega-3 fatty acids as they are thought to be good for mind, mood and body.
- **Drink more water.** Water replenishes brain cells and helps fight fatigue.
- **Plan your meals.** Try to maintain a regular eating schedule with regular meals and healthy snacks in between. This will combat stress-related binge eating, or the low energy and irritability that can result from skipping meals.
  - Try: preparing your lunches and snacks the night before
  - If you find it hard to make changes, think about how to make these foods handier. If you have cut fruit and nuts at your workstation, you're more likely to reach for them when you want a snack

**Sources:** The Health Communication Unit at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto; [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)



## Work-Life Balance

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We hear the term “work-life balance” a lot these days, but what does it actually mean? Essentially, it is a self-defined, self-determined state of well-being that a person can reach, or can set as a goal, to allow them to balance multiple responsibilities at work, at home, and in their community. It also helps promote physical, emotional, family, and community health.

‘Balance’ may sound like an ideal that’s hard to reach; the truth is that having a realistic expectation of what balance will look like in our lives is a major part of getting there. It’s about figuring out how the different parts and roles in our lives can co-exist more in harmony than in conflict. And just because you find balance doesn’t mean you’ll always stay there. Just like physical balance, it involves a lot of work to maintain balance, and changes in our life can shift our sense of balance.

### How Do You Know When You Have Balance?

You know you’ve found balance when:

- You are satisfied with your work and home lives most of the time.
- You can fulfill your multiple responsibilities at home, at work, and in the community without guilt or regret.
- You have good physical health, emotional stability and strong social connections.
- You feel a sense of control over your life.
- You feel that any decisions you make are informed choices rather than sacrifices.
- You have realistic expectations about what you can and cannot do.

### How Do You Know When You Don’t Have Balance?

You know you haven’t found balance when:

- You’re constantly tired and feel like you’re running uphill all the time and getting nowhere.
- You feel like you have no choices or control.
- Life seems to be happening to you instead of you managing your life.
- You can think of more things that aren’t getting done than are getting done.
- You’re frequently challenged by guilt and regret that you’re neglecting areas of your life or are not ‘good enough’ in one or more of your roles.
- You feel one area of your life consistently dominating the others.

Are you in balance? Take [this quiz](#) to find out more about your own personal balance.



Check out [Work-Life Balance: Make It Your Business](#) for more tips and resources to help make it easier to find balance within your work day.

## Consequences of a Lifestyle That's Out of Balance

The more out of balance and out of control your life feels, the more likely you are to pay a physical and emotional price. You probably won't eat as healthily as you should: you may consume more caffeine, more alcohol, more sugar, and more fat. You are less likely to exercise regularly and are less likely to be getting enough sleep. You are less likely to have a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment and commitment to your employer. You have a greater likelihood of either falling sick, falling sick more often, or being more sick than usual whenever you become sick. If you feel overwhelmed and exhausted, you can feel low, anxious and irritable. Your relationships can suffer. You are more likely to avoid making important changes like addressing or leaving unhealthy relationships.

The good news is that you can make a few changes to improve your work-life balance:

- **Schedule brief breaks for yourself throughout the day.** Your productivity and effectiveness will increase if you take even 10-minute break every 2 hours. Believe it or not, you will actually accomplish more if you take some time out.
- **At the end of each day, set your priorities for the following day.** Be realistic about what you can achieve in the time you have available.
- **Respond to e-mail only once or twice a day.** Then, close your e-mail program to avoid being distracted as messages come in.
- **Make a distinction between work and the rest of your life.** Protect your private time by turning off electronic communications. Don't be available 24/7.
- **Address concerns about deadlines and deliverables early.** As soon as you see that a deadline is unrealistic, communicate your concern to your employer. Don't wait until the deadline has passed.
- **Take all your allotted vacation time.** After a vacation you'll come back to work feeling refreshed and you will be more productive.
- **Practice being more assertive**, which means saying what your needs are more often and more directly. It's being honest but not mean. Saying yes may be easier in the moment but can be a burden later on. Setting boundaries, learning to say no, and knowing when to ask for help are key skills toward finding balance. You can learn assertiveness techniques from self-help books or from watching others who use this skill effectively.
- **Research policies and procedures your employer might have** that could help, such as flexible work hours, telecommuting and job sharing.

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**Source:** [Canadian Mental Health Association](#)