

Signs of poor mental health

Someone could be diagnosed with a mental health condition but is able to manage it and function well in all contexts. They could also not be diagnosed and encounter problems in their daily lives.

Each person has their own personality, which changes over time. Sometimes we can cope well with the work environment and life but, at other times, we can find it difficult to cope and develop mental health problems.

Recognising that there is a problem

Some possible early signs:

Poor concentration	Easily distracted
Worrisome	Hard time making decisions
Less interested in day-to-day activities	Low mood
Overwhelming feelings	Tearful
Tiredness and lack of energy	Sleeping (more or less)
Avoidance of social activities	Talking more or very fast (jump between topics)
Difficulty controlling emotions	Drinking more
Short tempered	Aggression

Here are some questions to ask yourself to determine if you need to talk to your manager and/or need professional help.

- How long have you had these problems?
- How disruptive are they to your work and life?
- How ready are you to talk to a mental health professional, e.g. Staff Counselling or Welfare
- What is the risk if you do not seek help?
- Who could support you to seek help (in the mission area or outside)? This could include your colleague, manager, staff counselling or medical services.
- If you have previously been assessed with the mental health problem/illness, have you been following your intervention plan, e.g. medication, therapy? If you have not, do you need to contact your mental health professionals?

If you have not been previously assessed as having a mental health problem, remember that it can be helpful to see a mental health professional so that you can get the support you need. Many of us have, at some point in our lives, sought help from a mental health professional. This is not a failure but simply the fact that, sometimes, we all need professional help.

Getting help

There are many different types of help available. It is important to seek professional help rather than try to seek your own solutions.

Kinds of support available:

- Talking therapies

The aim is to help understand feelings and behavior, there are a number of different types of talking therapies available. Some are more effective than others. It is important to make sure that the therapist (counsellor, clinical psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist) is appropriately trained in using the therapeutic technique that they will be utilizing with you.

- Mindfulness

This can help with mild depression, anxiety and low mood. It can help create space between yourself and your thoughts and emotions while choosing how to react and identifying negative emotions earlier.

- Medication

Some medication can be helpful, usually alongside therapy. It is very important to use the medication as prescribed and to have regular blood level checks to make sure that you are taking the right dose.

Antidepressants may be prescribed for depression, anxiety and some eating disorders. They increase the amounts of various chemicals in the brain and usually take about two to three weeks to begin to have an impact.

- Antipsychotics

These are prescribed for psychosis, schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, hypomania and severe anxiety. They help the symptoms become more manageable.

- Mood stabilizers

These may be prescribed for bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, hypomania and mania. They help stabilize mood if the person is prone to extreme mood swings.

- Hospitalization

You may be admitted to hospital if you're unwell or if other interventions haven't worked or you are in crisis. If and when you return to work, it is important to have a recovery and support plan to help you.

- Self-Care

Self-care alone is not really enough but there are things that could be done to make life easier such as:

- ❖ Eating well
- ❖ Exercise to boost your mood and wellbeing
- ❖ Getting enough sleep to improve concentration and energy levels
- ❖ Practice relaxation techniques (e.g. progressive muscle relaxation)
- ❖ Talking to friends, family or other people with similar experiences can help with feelings of isolation

A person with a mental health problem may find it helpful to exercise or socialize to help them recover. Being out and about does not mean they are less unwell or do not need time off. It is important to try and encourage the person to look after their mental health even after work, while going about their daily activities.

Contact details: swo@iom.int

If you find yourself relating to some of these behaviors, contact Staff Welfare.