

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN

KEY POINTS

- How do you know if you're not OK? Why it's important to check-in on your own mental health
- Tips for checking on, and supporting, your colleagues when they are facing mental health challenges
- Tips on improving your own mental health and wellbeing
- How to access support and help when your mental health is at risk

There is no health without mental health; mental health is too important to be left to the professionals alone, and mental health is everyone's business

- Vikram Patel, Psychiatrist, Researcher and Co-Founder and former Director of the Centre for Global Mental Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

We all have tough times and down days, periods of time when we feel that things are 'not quite right'. During these times we might experience overwhelming emotions; we could feel loneliness or anxiety, we may be quick to anger or just feel 'down' or 'blue'.

But, how do we know when we need help, when we need to reach out to someone else and take the brave step to say the words "I'm not okay"?

Time for a mental health check-in

Being in touch with your own mental wellness is central to your own health and wellbeing. If your feelings of being down, tense, angry or anxious have been continuing for a long period of time, you may be experiencing poor mental health and you may need to seek support to get well again.

Poor mental health isn't a 'phase' or something people can just 'get over', and it's not something to be ashamed of or a sign that you are a 'failure'. When you are experiencing poor mental health, it's important to get help before there are impacts on your everyday life and your relationships at home, with family and friends and at work.

Mental self awareness is a vital tool for checking in on your wellbeing. Through being self aware, you can identify emotional and behavioural warning signs. Being aware of these can help prevent your mental health from deteriorating further and can serve as an impetus to seeking help. Seeing the warning signs early and getting help quickly can help you to bounce back faster and get back to living a happy, healthy life.

You can take a quick audit of your mental health by completing the following checklist:

AM I OK? CHECKLIST

Thinking back over recent weeks, have I been affected by any of the following?			
	Never	Occasionally	Often
Moodiness that is out of character			
Increased irritability and frustration			
Finding it hard to take minor personal criticisms			
Spending less time with friends and family			
Loss of interest in fun/ enjoyable activities			
Difficulty sleeping			
Increased alcohol and/ or drug use			
Staying home from work			
Increased physical health complaints like fatigue or pain			
Being reckless or taking unnecessary risks			
Slowing down of thoughts and actions			
Feeling bad about yourself or seeing yourself as a failure			
Difficulty in concentrating on work or other activities			
Considering self harm or suicide*			

* If you are considering self harm or suicide, immediately call Lifeline crisis support and suicide prevention 13 11 14 or Ambulance on 000.

If your answers to the above are predominantly "Occasionally" or "Often" you may need immediate help and support. It is important to call Converge International so that you can speak with one of our qualified counsellors. **You can call Converge International on 1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327) 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.**

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MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN

If your symptoms of poor mental health have been continuing for a long period of time, you may need to talk to someone about how you are feeling and how you are managing your mental health. Talking with a trusted person, a close friend, a colleague at work or a member of your family, is a great place to start. You may want to ask them if they have noticed any changes in your emotional state or in your everyday behaviour. Speaking with someone who is close to you can help to reassure you about your own feelings and your mental health and it can also prompt you to take additional steps to improve your mental health, like speaking with a medical professional.

CHECKING IN ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF COLLEAGUES OR FRIENDS

It isn't practical or realistic to walk around with the checklist from the previous page when you want to check in on a work colleague or friend who may be experiencing mental health difficulties. That's why it's important to be familiar with the types of questions that can be useful to ask when trying to determine if someone needs help and support with their mental health.

Checking in on someone else's mental health is a wonderful way to show them that they are not alone and that others care about the challenges they are facing. However, it's important to be aware of the responsibility that comes with asking someone if they are OK and if they need support: if their answer is "No, I'm not OK. Yes, I need some help." you need to be ready to offer that support.

Also, before you ask someone if they are OK, you need to be sure that you are OK; ask yourself if you are in the right headspace to have the conversation, if you are the right/ best person to be asking the question or if you think that there is someone else in their network that might be better suited to bringing up concerns about their mental health.

The R U OK Day website features some useful tips on asking someone else about how they are feeling. Before you have the conversation, ask yourself:

AM I READY?

- Am I in a good headspace?
- Am I willing to genuinely listen to my colleague/ friend?
- Can I give them as much time as they need?

AM I PREPARED?

- Do I understand that if I ask someone if they are OK, their answer might be "No, I am not"?
- Am I ready to hear their response if they are not OK?
- Do I know what to do next if someone tells me that they are not OK?
- Do I understand that I am not the right person to offer specific advice and support on 'fixing' someone's mental health problems?
- Do I know who to refer them to if they need specialist help?
- Will I accept that they might not be ready or willing to talk to me?

HAVE I PICKED THE BEST MOMENT?

- Are we somewhere relatively private where our conversation won't be overheard?
- Is this a good time for them to talk? Have I allowed enough time to have a discussion?

Talking to someone about their mental health is a big step. Here is some advice you can use to have a supporting, caring and helpful conversation:

- Be relaxed and friendly in your approach to the conversation, but also show the concern you feel for your colleague's health and wellbeing
- Help your colleague to have the conversation by asking questions and being specific. Try asking "How are you going?" or "You seem less chatty than usual. Is everything OK?"
- Listen to what they say, don't interrupt and avoid passing judgement on what they are experiencing or feeling
- Encourage your colleague to take action so that they can begin the journey towards feeling better. You could ask questions like "How would you like me to support you?" or you could say "You might want to talk with someone who can support you. I'm happy to help you to find the right person to talk to."

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Improving your own mental health and wellbeing

We all experience a range of emotions and, even when we are feeling well, we can experience difficult times, periods of being worried or stressed, as well as depression or anxiety. Looking after your mental health is important and we can all take proactive, positive steps to stay mentally well:

- Building and maintaining strong personal relationships is one of the best things we can do for our mental health. When we have a broad network of family, friends and work mates it is more likely that our emotional needs are being met. Investing in our relationships by spending time together, at work and in social settings, helps us to feel connected and supported
- Contributing to the community is a wonderful way to help others as well as broadening your social circle, adding a sense of meaning and purpose to your life and increasing your sense of wellbeing
- Living a healthy and active lifestyle has also been shown to keep you mentally healthy and reduce the incidence and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Eating a healthy diet and minimising the consumption of alcohol are also keys to a happy, healthy lifestyle
- Making sure you get enough sleep is vital for your physical and mental health, as well as for helping you to be alert and 'switched on' at work. You can enhance your physical and mental health by going to bed early to get 7 - 9 hours of quality sleep each night
- Becoming a 'positive thinker' by being conscious of negative and unhelpful thoughts and challenging them. You can do this by writing down the negative thoughts that concern you most and then writing down positive actions you can take to address any worries. It is also important to focus on things that you can actively control and positively influence. If you are having negative thoughts it is important to talk with someone about addressing these feelings

Getting early access to help and support at work

Your workplace provides you with access to support from Converge International's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). You can speak to a qualified EAP counsellor at any time by calling 1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327).

OTHER RESOURCES

If you are experiencing mental health challenges you may find it helpful to speak with a psychologist or other mental health professional. You can get a referral to a mental health specialist by first seeing your family doctor.

Mental health support is always available. If you, or someone you know, is at risk, get help.

Emergency services - Ambulance 000

R U OK Day website www.ruok.org.au

Lifeline crisis support and suicide prevention www.lifeline.org.au
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