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The Balance Sheet

Health, Balance and Productivity

October 2011



Topics in this Issue

- **Mental Health in the Workplace** - A quick guide for employees
» Page 1
- **Recognizing and dealing with stress**
» Page 3
- **Depression**
» Page 4

Upcoming Events

PPC Canada's Free Webinar Series

- **October 13, 9:00am – 9:30am (PDT)** | Mental Health Essentials for Managers: Recognize the Signs and Solutions
- **November (Date & Time TBD)** | Financial Management for the Holidays
- **December 8, 10:30am – 11:00am (PST)** | Substance Abuse: Spotting the Signs

To register for these events, please contact: carrie.middleton@ca.ppcworldwide.com

Mental Health in the Workplace - A quick guide for employees

Mental Health is a part of overall health, just like physical health. In fact they are both intertwined. Mental health can be seen as a state of well-being, where a person realizes his/her own abilities, copes with daily stress, works productively, enjoys life outside of work and contributes to his/her own community.

In Canada, we have come a long way in terms of understanding mental health. Mental health and mental illness are now more openly discussed in mainstream and social media than ever before, yet we still have a way to go in terms of bringing this understanding into the workplace. Let's look at some facts and myths about mental health and illness, and then explore what you can do to look after yourself and support others at your workplace with mental health issues.

What is a mental health issue?

Mental health issues are broadly defined as a person's experience of excessive stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, addictions & substance abuse, manic episodes, bipolar and schizophrenic disorders, among others. Abnormal situations can trigger

temporary mental health symptoms in all of us from time to time. The Conference Board of Canada's survey on mentally healthy workplaces states that 44% of employees are either currently experiencing or have experienced a mental health issue. Clearly, mental health is something about which we all need to be aware.

What are some facts about mental health?

- **Fact ①** 20% of us will have some major challenges in our lifetime.
- **Fact ②** The strongest factor in mental well-being in the workplace is having a healthy relationship with one's manager.
- **Fact ③** People with mental health issues can and do recover, can and do function in the workplace, and can control their symptoms with proper treatment.
- **Fact ④** A stressful work environment can contribute to mental health issues but it is not the only cause, other causes may be present.
- **Fact ⑤** Work days missed because of mental health issues are no greater than those missed by physical health problems.



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- **Healthy Workplace Month** | www.healthyworkplacemonth.ca

What are some myths about mental health?

- **Myth ①** People with mental illness are more violent. This is not so; it is our fear and lack of understanding that has created this myth.
- **Myth ②** Addiction is a choice caused by personal weakness. Addiction is both mental and physical, and is an illness.
- **Myth ③** People with depression should “snap out of it”. Depression can be treated by a variety of therapies and is not simply a matter of will power.

Mental health and the workplace

Major studies have shown that a co-operative, supportive, understanding, approachable and self-aware manager will have a more productive team. Employees who take responsibility for using the same strategies with their co-workers also contribute to the healthy functioning of a team and are more productive.

The following are some typical changes in work behaviour that might mean someone is experiencing mental health issues:

- withdrawing
- lateness
- excessive worry and overwork

- emotional outbursts
- chronic complaining
- more absences than usual

What can you do if a co-worker is showing these changes in work behaviour?

- Talk calmly with him/her, face-to-face in a quiet, private location about what you notice.
- Show your concern – normalize – “This can happen to us all”.
- Encourage your co-worker to confidentially speak with his/her supervisor or HR person and/or a trusted co-worker.
- Don’t gossip to other co-workers about what you notice.
- Get information about mental health from your EFAP program.
- Suggest a self-referral to your EFAP - PPC Canada.
- Talk about mental health awareness in your team meetings - be open about how important it is.



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performance
consultants

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What can you do if you are noticing these changes in yourself?

- Speak with your supervisor or HR person in confidence and/or to a trusted co-worker.
- Confide in a family member about how you are feeling.
- See your family doctor or go to a walk-in medical clinic for an assessment and treatment recommendations.
- Contact PPC Canada, your EFAP provider, to talk with a counsellor telephonically, electronically or in-person.

Workplace mental health has been proven to enhance work productivity. Happy people are productive people. It's that simple sometimes. Understanding mental illness and mental well-being, and creating a work culture that is conducive to mental health is everyone's job.

Major Source: The Conference Board of Canada Report June 2011 "Building Mentally Healthy Workplaces" www.e.library.ca

Recognizing and Dealing with Stress

What is stress?

It is a natural response to the inevitable pressures of life. Stress is both our mental and physical responses to a demand, threat, or some kind of problem that requires a solution. It stimulates you and increases your level of awareness. But if the demand, threat or problem is too great, if there are too many of these, or if they go on too long, then stress becomes problematic. The same central nervous system arousal that gives you the energy and focus to master and even enjoy whatever challenge is presented, can start to wear you down, distort your thinking, affect your relationships, and leave you unhappy.

Recognizing stress

Some signs that stress is becoming more problematic and less healthy for you include muscle tension, digestive problems, fatigue, increased blood pressure, or headaches. Worry, anxiety, depression, and irritability are also often signs of stress. The following strategies can keep stress levels healthy and enjoyable.





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Helpful strategies

Express yourself - You need someone to talk to who will simply listen.

Talk it over with yourself - your control over the difficult events in your life may be limited, but you can change what you say to yourself about these events.

Avoid the following self-talk tendencies as they can make things worse and more stressful:

Catastrophizing ("This is the worst thing that ever happened to me.")

Generalizing ("I've annoyed a client, therefore I'm no good at this job.")

Fortune-telling ("I'm sure this isn't going to work out.")

Instead, talk to yourself as gently and compassionately as possible.

Get in touch! Hug someone, hold hands or stroke a pet. Physical contact relieves stress. Just make sure the person or pet you touch is ok with that!

Exercise – Walk, hike, go dancing, or join a gym; do yoga or T'ai Chi. Do something you like that gets your body moving.

Eat healthily – Reduce or eliminate alcohol, caffeine and refined sugar. Eat

more whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains.

Practice rest and relaxation:

- Breathe slowly and deeply: use your diaphragm, not your chest; take six deep breaths.
- Use your imagination to place yourself in a pleasant, preferably natural, place that you know- a beach, the mountains, or your favourite park, for example. Close your eyes and imagine the scene in detail, including all your senses. In a couple of minutes you will re-experience the pleasure of actually being there.
- Get at least 7 hours of sleep nightly.

Laugh all you can - Watch a comedy video—with others (you'll laugh more).

Stop smoking - Nicotine is a stimulant and can increase anxiety.

Seek counselling - Talking with a knowledgeable, non-judgemental listener will in itself reduce your stress. A counsellor can offer much more detail about all the strategies above and tailor them specifically to you and your situation.

Access PPC Canada and its various online, electronic, telephonic and in-person services for assistance and



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direction on how to reduce your stress and prepare yourself for other stressful events that may be around the corner.

Stress is inevitable for most of us. It can motivate or overwhelm us. The good thing is that the stress you experience today may better prepare you to handle the stress of tomorrow.

Adapted from: liveandworkwell.com

Depression

What is Depression?

Everyone experiences "highs" and "lows" in life, but people with mood disorders experience them with greater intensity and for longer periods of time than others. About 10% of Canadians are affected by mood disorders, which include depression. SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), a specific type of depression that affects approximately 2-3% of Canadians, is more prevalent in northern parts of the country where climatic extremes are greater. Even if you don't suffer from SAD, changes in weather can mean changes in routine and subsequently in your mood. With the fall and winter seasons approaching, here is some information about depression that may be helpful for you or someone you know who is struggling with depression.

Signs and symptoms of depression

Some indicators of depression include:

- sadness and or irritability
- change in appetite-over or under eating which may result in weight change
- change in sleep pattern- difficulty staying/falling asleep or sleeping too much
- decreased interest in hobbies, work, or school
- decreased energy-physical and/or mental
- increased physical complaints, especially in children and older people

These changes may significantly disrupt your daily life and impact those with whom you interact on a regular basis. Let's now explore what you can do to address depression and some of these symptoms.

Some helpful strategies to combat depression

Take time for yourself every day - Even five minutes of sole/soul time per day can help reduce stress. Relax, breathe deeply, read uplifting books, or listen to music.

Exercise regularly - Walking briskly, taking the stairs, getting off the bus a stop or two earlier than your destination and walking to it, and parking further from the mall



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entrance are easy ways to incorporate exercise into your daily routine.

Avoid alcohol and non-prescribed drugs - Many substances which people use in an effort to "forget" about problems or get to sleep actually result in increased irritability and getting less restful sleep.

Maintain a routine - Eat, sleep, and wake at about the same time each day.

Spend time with people who are upbeat, positive and 'ego boosters' - Optimism is contagious.

Go out with friends - Do something that you like to do that is healthy, satisfying and self-caring.

Spend time outdoors - A change in environment along with sunshine can help you relax and regroup.

Consult self-help books - Learn what others do to address depression and mental health concerns.

Attend self-help groups/access online resources - Support from others with similar challenges helps to reduce isolation and may offer other effective strategies to address depression.

Check out this online resource:
www.mooddisorderscanada.ca

Learn your early warning signs of depression - Since changes in mood, attitude and/or behaviour can be gradual, pay attention to your early signs of change, and take action for self-care without delay to prevent a full depressive episode.

Seek professional help - A combination of counselling and medication is most effective for most people. Talk with a mental health professional or your family doctor to determine the best course of treatment for yourself.

Be aware that many people who are depressed wait too long to seek treatment or may not seek treatment at all because they don't realize they have a treatable illness, or they're concerned with a potential negative perception.

If you have thoughts of suicide or harming yourself, please call PPC Canada at 1.800.663.9099 or 1.800.SUICIDE (1.800.784.2433). If you are at immediate risk, call 911 or go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital.

Adapted from: liveandworkwell.com