

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE WORK PLACE: IT'S OKAY TO NOT FEEL OKAY

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Although there is growing awareness around mental health issues by employers, fear of discrimination in the work place remains. Many employees are reluctant to ask for help because they worry that their mental health issues won't be understood or taken seriously, and that their business relationships might deteriorate.

Depression and anxiety: What are the signs?

While it's normal to have some anxiety at work, especially as a young professional trying to learn the ropes and build your reputation, it becomes a problem if it lasts for several months at elevated levels and begins interfering with your daily activities. Mental health issues also have a physical component, causing fatigue, insomnia, and difficulty concentrating.

When to talk to your manager

You may not be comfortable talking about your mental health with your superiors. However, if depression and anxiety are starting to affect your work, it is better to be proactive so that you can get the support you need, especially if you require accommodations or time off. Remember that if and when you decide to talk to your manager, you are not required to tell them your whole medical history! And you can always speak to human resources for guidance if you need help figuring out how to navigate the discussion with your boss.

Finding mental health resources

If you are an employee, find out what benefits are available through your group insurance plan. Determine if your provider provides access to an employment assistance program (EAP counselling) through your work benefits. Read your company's policies and procedures regarding medical leave and sick days, in the event that you need time off for medical appointments.

Reach out to a social worker, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional to help you identify the right diagnosis and treatment you may need. You can also contact CLSCs in Quebec, which offer access to psychosocial services.

How to take care of yourself, in and out of the workplace

At work, you can tackle depression and anxiety by setting manageable goals for yourself each day, identifying where you're struggling and looking for ways to compensate (such as taking extra notes during meetings if you have difficulty concentrating), and saying something to your manager or HR if you feel overwhelmed.

Outside of work, reach out to trusted friends and family. Consider joining a support group where people can relate to your experiences and also share coping strategies and resources. Lifestyle changes can also make a big difference: eat healthy, reduce your caffeine intake, and exercise regularly.

By developing healthy routines and work habits, and utilizing your resources, not only will you be able to get through the difficult times, but you will come out the other side a better (and happier) employee.

No matter what stage you're at on your journey towards employment, your mental health matters. Get support for your job search and access our new directory of English-language Mental Health Services & Resources at [yesmontreal.ca](https://www.yesmontreal.ca).