Mental Health during the Pandemic

When we experience good mental health, we can make full use of our abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life and play a full part in our families, workplaces, communities, and among our friends. Despite our mental health being such an important personal and social resource, the extent of mental health problems in the population means that too many of us are struggling, rather than thriving and reaching our full potential. This is why we must start talking about prevention and mental health.

18 simple steps focused on winter wellbeing for you to try...

1. Get up at the same time each morning, it's important to keep a regular routine.

2. Get dressed (if home working, maybe not as fancy as you would in the workplace ☺). PJ's may be comfortable but they don't give you the correct mindset for work-life balance, and that is important for your wellbeing.

3. A wise man once said – "If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of achievement".

4. Keep active – dedicate some time to moving around, be that a winter walk or an indoor exercise video. Exercise can boost your mood, self-esteem, energy and sleep quality, plus it can reduce your risk of certain health problems.

5. Spend some time outdoors during daylight hours – exposure to sunlight aids sleep. Getting as much natural sunlight as possible may also help people affected by seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

6. Take breaks from your workstation for five to 10 minutes every hour – this can help prevent pain and fatigue. Whether you choose to get a drink or do some stretches, your body will thank you.

7. Maintain your work/life balance – the lines between work and homelife can blur when you work from home, so be clear on your time parameters and set boundaries. You don't always have to be 'available'. If you have space for a designated workspace that you can walk away from, that will help you switch off.

8. Stay connected – if you're working remotely, keep in touch with your manager and team. From formal catchups to a quick chat/email or a virtual lunch/coffee/social connection, building and maintaining relationships will help you feel less isolated, alone and stressed. Equally, it's a good way to ensure your colleagues are okay.

9. Maintain contact with your family and friends – schedule time outside your working day to keep in touch with others. If you can't meet face-to-face then video call. You could also do activities online together, for example a weekly quiz or virtual dinner date.

10. Seek help – if you're feeling stressed or anxious, reach out to someone who can offer support, such as family, friends, employee assistance programme (Help EAP), a doctor or a registered mental health charity. Breathing exercises, mindfulness and physical activities may also help. Also liaise with your line manager for work-related support.

11. Do things you enjoy – again, schedule time for this as it's important to keep up your hobbies or start new ones, and/or learn new things/embrace opportunities and experiences. If the current situation makes it hard to do certain activities, look for

alternatives. Free online options to learn and connect with others range from book clubs to museum tours.

12. Be mindful of good ergonomic principles – if you're a home worker, follow advice from your service health and safety adviser (HSA) regarding the set-up of your workstation. This should help you achieve a good working posture, making you healthier and happier.

13. Request adjustments – if you need any changes to your work or equipment related to a diagnosed medical condition or disability then contact your line manager/HSA. Send a photo to illustrate any problems. Also raise any health and safety matters, such as new aches and pains, for an assessment.

14. Use credible sources of information – for example, when seeking updates on Covid-19 turn to Human Resources, Health & Safety, NHS, Scottish or UK Government. This will help protect both your mental and physical health from disinformation.

15. Limit your time on social media – overuse can promote negative experiences such as anxiety, fear of missing out and isolation. Also, avoid exposure to blue light sources, such as mobile phones, for at least two hours before bedtime as this inhibits a hormone called melatonin, making it harder to fall and stay asleep.

16. Engage in self-care – taking time for yourself is really important, so plan your week to include some relaxing activities and 'me-time'.

17. If you're feeling overwhelmed by work, try breaking down big tasks into smaller, achievable goals, which allow for regular 'quick wins'. Give yourself a reward of your choosing (not chocolate – kidding) when you complete the whole task.

18. Performing small acts of kindness and/or giving your time to others can help support your own mental health. Here are a few suggestions: telling a family member how much you need and appreciate them, offering to support a vulnerable neighbour, sending someone a silly joke, skill sharing with a colleague, or just a good old chinwag with pals and catch up with the juicy gossip ☺.