

# Checking our mental health vital signs

We physicians tend to take care of others before ourselves, especially in an emergency. When we spring into action, nothing can stop us.

But it's important to take time to slow down, take a break to reconnect with ourselves, and focus on our own physical and mental health. Knowing the signs to watch out for can help to prevent burnout.

Checking in with ourselves is the first step toward building resilience.

## A handy self-evaluation tool

The Mental Health Continuum allows us to take our mental health vitals at a glance. Used daily, it can help us keep our balance during periods of prolonged stress or after a difficult event.

Wherever we fall on the continuum—even if it changes day to day—the important thing is to provide ourselves with the means to get back into the green zone.

## The mental health continuum

|  | Healthy                                 | Reacting                              | At risk                                | Critical  |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| SIGNS                                  | Calm and steady                         | Occasional anxiety or sadness         | Persistent anxiety or sadness          | Excessive anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts |
|  | Sense of humour                         | Irritability or pessimism             | Angry or cynical                       | Angry outbursts or aggression                       |
|  | Mentally alert                          | Forgetfulness or intrusive thoughts   | Indecision, poor concentration         | Unable to concentrate                               |
|  | Sleeping well                           | Difficulty sleeping                   | Sleep disturbances, nightmares         | Significant sleep disturbances or oversleeping      |
|  | Performing consistently                 | Feeling overworked or procrastinating | Feeling overwhelmed, poor performance  | Unable to complete work tasks                       |
|  | Confident in self and others            | Self-doubt                            | Distrusts others                       | Excessive distrust                                  |
|  | Feeling good                            | Tension or headaches                  | Persistent physical symptoms           | More serious physical symptoms                      |
|  | Good energy levels                      | Low energy                            | Fatigue                                | Exhaustion  |
|  | Physically active                       | Reduced physical activity             | Physically inactive                    | Lethargic   |
|  | Socially active                         | Reduced social contacts               | Avoiding social contacts               | No contact with loved ones                          |
| Substance use is occasional and social | Substance use is regular but controlled | Substance use is difficult to control | Substance abuse or dependence          |   |
| STRATEGIES                             | Maintain current activities             | Recover: slow down and rest           | Acknowledge the need for action        | Consult a professional immediately                  |
|  | Practice mindfulness                    | Build mental health toolkit           | Recover: eliminate non-essential tasks | Reach out to peers or someone you trust             |
|  | Cultivate social relationships          | Identify problems                     | Reach out to peers                     | Consider a leave of absence from work               |
|  |   | Act on things that can be changed     | Maintain contact with loved ones       | Rekindle close relationships                        |

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