



EAP Newsletter

Issue 11
November 2021

Stress Awareness and Men's Mental Health

1st November 2021 marks the start of International Stress Awareness Week (1st -5th November). Over recent years, International Stress Awareness Week has turned into a large scale, annual event to focus on stress management, assist with stress prevention and aims to remove the stigmas associated with stress and mental health issues.

Stress is normal and, to some extent, a very necessary part of life. In fact, often a small amount of stress can drive us to get things done, as long as it is harnessed in the right way.

However, what happens when we're no longer able to harness stress to our advantage? What happens when that feeling of stress becomes all-encompassing? When we can't think about anything else? What happens when that stress simply feels out of control? That's the time when we need to recognise that it's time to seek help.

In general, the most common causes of stress tend to be fivefold:

- 1 Financial problems
- 2 Work
- 3 Personal relationships
- 4 Parenting
- 5 Daily life

Stress can affect our body and our mind in many ways. Too much stress can affect our mood, our mental health and our relationships. It can make us feel anxious, on edge, irritable, and affect our self-esteem too. When we are stressed, we may find ourselves starting to withdraw from those around us. Often in this situation, the things that we find 'pleasurable' end up going to the bottom of the pile. But the key thing to remember, is that it's those more pleasurable activities that allow us the breathing space we need to switch off from the stressors and ultimately recharge our batteries.



Stress Awareness and Men's Mental Health

If you are feeling stressed, **consider the following 3 tips:**



Get moving.

Even a little regular exercise can help ease stress, boost your mood and energy, and improve your self-esteem.

Aim for 30 minutes on most days, broken up into short 10-minute bursts if that's easier.



Practice a relaxation technique.

Take time to relax each day and give your mind a break from the constant worrying.

Meditating, breathing exercises, or other relaxation techniques are excellent ways to relieve stress and restore some balance to your life.



Don't skimp on sleep.

Feeling tired will only increase your stress and negative thought patterns. Finding ways to improve your sleep during this difficult time will help both your mind and body.

Try this today: A mindfulness technique to release stress

It's time to take a breather. Just take a moment to concentrate on the here and now and take slow deep breaths (in through your nose and out through your mouth) for a couple of minutes.

Now use your five senses. What can you hear, what can you see, what can you smell, touch and taste?

Relay these details back to yourself and be present. Notice what is around you.

Take a minute to get up. Have a quick change of scenery (perhaps get a glass of water) and then re-focus back to the task at hand.

Did you know?



Keeping your cool as energy prices soar

Aside from financial stress being a common concern towards the end of the year, one of the stressors many of us seem to be facing this winter is managing the unforeseen stress due to the rising costs of energy. Here's 5 ways to help you keep your cool at home as the energy prices soar:

1



Talk to someone. When you are facing money problems or worrying about an increase in your monthly outgoings, there's often a strong temptation to bottle everything up. Sadly, this will only make your financial stress worse. Instead, the answer is to talk about it. Not only is talking face-to-face with a trusted friend or loved one a proven means of stress relief, but speaking openly about your financial problems can also help you put things in perspective too. Remember the person you talk to doesn't need to be able to fix your issues, they just need to listen without judgement.

2



Take inventory of your finances. If you're struggling to make ends meet due to the rising energy costs, do not bury your head in the sand. It's essential to detail your income, debt, and spending over the course of at least one month so you have a full overview of where you stand. Make sure you include the following in the inventory; your income, your spending (however small it might be) and list out your debts. A number of websites and smartphone apps can also help keep track of your finances too.

3



Boost your self-esteem. Rightly or wrongly, experiencing financial problems and worrying about increases in your outgoings, can cause you to feel like a failure and impact your self-esteem. But there are plenty of other, more rewarding ways to improve your sense of self-worth. Even when you're struggling yourself, helping others by volunteering can increase your confidence and ease stress, anger, and anxiety. Or you could spend time in nature, learn a new skill, or enjoy the company of people who appreciate you for who you are, rather than for your bank balance.

4



Create a stress bucket. A nice way to think about our stress is in the form of a 'stress bucket'. We all have a stress bucket that is being dripped into with the many stressors around us. The key is to have an outlet for our stress, or our bucket will overflow, resulting in burnout, anxiety and overwhelm. You can put holes in your bucket by looking after yourself, practicing self-care, spending time with friends and family and focusing on the tips above. Remember you're only human and there is only so much room in your stress bucket.

5



Seek professional advice. Depending on where you live, there are several organisations that offer free counselling on dealing with financial problems and this will include helping you with increasing monthly spends due to energy price rises. Whether or not you have a friend or loved one to talk to for emotional support, getting practical advice from an expert is always a good idea. Remember, reaching out is not a sign of weakness and it doesn't mean that you've somehow failed as a provider, parent, or spouse, it just means that you're wise enough to recognise your financial situation needs addressing.




Keeping your cool as energy prices soar

Certainly, we are all facing some uncertain times right now, but for those struggling with stress due to the energy crisis, anxious as a result of the ongoing pandemic or indeed due to any other issues, we want to highlight that there is support available to everyone who needs it.

For those who feel that they need that extra layer of support, we would encourage you to reach out to family, friends, your GP, or some other available support quickly. Reaching out is a positive first step to managing your mental health.



Here are some support services for those dealing with heightened stress right now:

-  For mental health support: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/>
-  Access support alongside your GP if you are struggling using **NHS 111** or click on: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/urgent-support/>
-  If you or someone you know is struggling with high stress, depression or suicidal thoughts, please call the **Samaritans on 116 123**. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week www.samaritans.org or text **SHOUT to 85258** in the UK to text with a trained crisis volunteer.

If you're feeling stressed today, **try this 10-minute mindfulness practice:**

Choose an activity to do mindfully. This can be anything you like, from sitting quietly on the sofa, to taking a walk outside or even cooking your favourite recipe.

Before you start: Become aware of your posture, and the nature of the movement required to begin the task.

- 1

Check in with your body and be inquisitive about any physical sensations.

4

At times, thoughts may arise and distract your concentration. When this happens, try to remember this is normal and to be expected. Then when you are ready, return your awareness back to the task.
- 2

Pay attention to your senses. Notice any smells, sights, or sounds that accompany the activity. You may find it helpful to undertake your task more carefully and slowly than normal. Bring your full awareness to everything you are doing moment by moment.

5

As you come to the end of your activity, notice if there is a tendency to want to rush on to the next thing. If so, see if you can let the activity's conclusion be as mindful as the earlier moments.
- 3

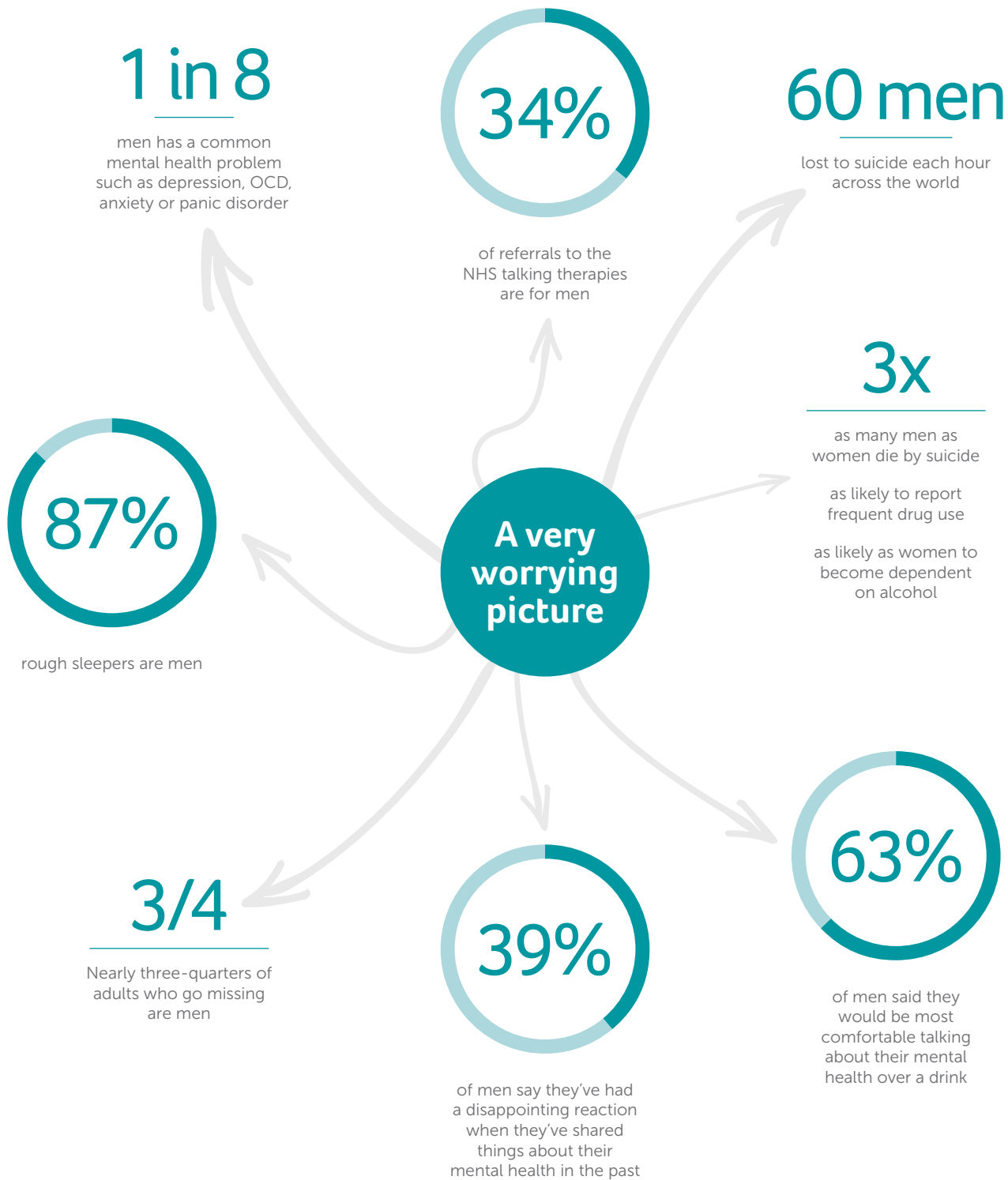
As you apply this level of mindful awareness, it is possible that this will change your experience of the task. Consider how this makes you feel.

6

It's time to congratulate yourself on what you have achieved and note your satisfaction levels.

Men's Mental Health

November also sees many of us join in with the 'Movember' movement. But behind all the pruned tashes, pristine beards and the ghastly goatees there is a very serious issue at stake here; the state of Men's Mental Health. Let's look at the facts...



The data paints a concerning picture, doesn't it?

Men's Mental Health

In short, men are less likely to access mental health support and generally tend to ask for help far later than women. This is a worry.

This partly stems from how we treat boys at an early age. For instance, boys are often taught to internalise their issues and aren't schooled in being open about their emotions. Men are often told to, 'man up' or made to feel weak because they are causing a fuss.

We need to do all we can to help men and boys open up about their mental health, here's how to help them do so in just a few simple ways:



Find the time to talk: Whether it's sitting down in the pub or even next to each other on a long journey, find time to truly talk to one another. It's fine to do activities with your male friends, but make sure you find the time to talk too.



Know when to end the banter: It's easy to misread a situation especially when everyone is throwing the banter around. But know how to spot when someone's not in the mood or when they want to talk about something serious. If you notice something is different about your friend, or your jokes aren't going down so well, ask them how they are doing and then ask again.



Question 'fine': We've all done it; we say we're fine when we're not. To really find out, ask twice and don't take 'fine' as your final answer.



Avoid toxic language: Be clear that 'grow up', 'man up', 'get a grip' or 'grow a pair' are incredibly unhelpful phrases and can be ever so damaging. Avoid them at all costs.



Read between the lines: We don't always say exactly how we are feeling, so often you will need to read between the lines when speaking to men about their mental health. For instance, **31% are more likely to say they are stressed** and **30% that they are not feeling themselves**. Whilst **35% of men** said if they wanted to talk to a friend about their mental health, they would ask how their friend is doing and hope that friend would reciprocate the question.



Support them: All your friend, colleague or family members wants to hear is that you're there for them and your feelings towards them will not change if they open up. You don't have to try and give advice; they just need to know they are being listened to.

If you need support, want to help a friend or loved one, or want to learn more about men's mental health, contact the below organisations:








Men's Mental Health

Another way to help remove the stigma around men's mental health is by getting involved in Movember. Here's how:

This partly stems from how we treat boys at an early age. For instance, boys are often taught to internalise their issues and aren't schooled in being open about their emotions. Men are often told to, 'man up' or made to feel weak because they are causing a fuss.

We need to do all we can to help men and boys open up about their mental health, here's how to help them do so in just a few simple ways:

-  Grow your own moustache and get sponsored.
-  Move for Movember. Try moving, whether that be running, walking or shuffling, 60k for the 60 men lost to suicide each hour across the world.
-  Host a Mo-moment. You can do this in many ways, from having a gaming tournament to holding a trivia event or hosting a virtual quiz night. You could even host a shave down at the start of the month.
-  Run a bake off at work with all donations going to Movember.
-  Or why not simply donate?

Remember Men's Mental Health is important all year long – not just during the month of November. Here are three ways we can all support the health of our male co-workers at work all year long:

1

Find the right space: Face-to-face, conversations can often feel intense and intimidating and actually our new normal of video calls may well be beneficial to those men struggling to open up. The key is finding an environment that's slightly more relaxed for them to talk. Going for a walk or car journey can also be helpful. Once they do start to open up, let them, listen and be there to support.

2

Role model behaviours all year round: We should all look to use terminology that demonstrates compassion and care in our workplaces. It is essential to try to create an open dialogue and this will only happen when that person feels safe. Likewise, role modelling these behaviours amongst leaders, both with the language they use and by demonstrating that it is safe to be vulnerable, will help build a culture where men can open up.

3

Celebrate vulnerability: To tackle the inequality that exists with male mental health in the workplace, it is important that organisations ditch harmful standards of work-life balance and give men space to express their vulnerability. If you are a manager, then don't be ashamed to speak up. By you coming forward, you may just help someone else.

And finally, our tip of the month; the one thing we ask you to do today if you do nothing else...

Stop and take note of the impact toxic language is having on men and those who identify as male. We should look to consciously change our approach to how we talk about male mental health. Irrelevant of gender, societal status, or identity, it is critical men are not made to feel ashamed to look after their mind. It is never O.K. to tell someone to 'man up'. Now is the time to give men a voice, normalise conversations around mental health and take down the barriers that so often prevent men accessing life-saving support. And we all have our part to play in making that happen.