

# YOUR MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Now more than ever is the time to prioritise your mental health. Here's how to spot the cues

# THE NEW NORMAL

LAST YEAR WAS DIFFICULT FOR EVERYONE. HERE'S HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH AND CAREER IN 2021

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## YOUR

**PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING** may have been affected by challenges presented by Covid-19 and because we all react to stress differently, it's not always easy to spot the signs of depression.

Deputy Director of the SA Federation of Mental Health Leon de Beer notes that men and women may experience mental health problems differently, 'for example, depression may manifest in men through symptoms that

aren't usually associated with depression: sadness, low mood, loss of energy.

'In men, depression may lead to anger, irritation, substance abuse and other types of behaviours they may not construe as being indicative of depression.' He further cautions that this may lead to depression being undiagnosed and, thus, untreated, leading to – in extreme cases – higher levels of suicide in men. Men may also be less inclined to seek help to avoid being seen as weak.

If you're wondering about the importance of prioritising your mental health, he explains that there can be no health and wellbeing without optimal mental health. 'It needs to be prioritised by everyone, every day, as it improves resilience levels and may help you cope better with adversity,' he says.

Here, De Beer offers his perspective.

**GQ:** What are the benefits of investing in your mental health?

**Leon de Beer:** This quote from the Canadian Mental Health Association (2020) sums it up: 'Just as physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong, mental fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a state of optimal mental health.' When we're mentally healthy, we enjoy our life and environment, and the people in it. We can be creative, learn, try new things and take risks. We're better

able to cope with difficult times in our personal and professional lives. We *feel* the sadness and anger that comes with the death of a loved one, a job loss or relationship problems and other trying events, but in time, we can get on with and enjoy our lives anew.

Nurturing our mental health can also help us combat or prevent mental health problems sometimes associated with a chronic physical illness. In some cases, it can prevent the onset or relapse of a physical or mental illness. Managing stress well can have a positive impact on heart disease, as an example.

**GQ:** Please list practical ways to improve your mental health?

**LD:**

- Connect with other people
- Stay positive (or, at least, try to)
- Make time for physical activity
- Try to help others
- Get enough sleep
- Find happiness, joy and satisfaction in your life
- Eat a healthy diet
- Connect with what gives you meaning in life
- Try to cope with hard times more effectively
- Seek professional help if you need it

**GQ:** What are some types of behaviours that may affect mental health negatively?

**LD:** These may include smoking, drinking alcohol, gambling »



and drug misuse, along with poor financial skills leading you into debt (NHS, 2020). Other issues may include:

- Negative perfectionism – for example, setting yourself goals beyond your reach
- Poor posture – sitting up straight could reduce symptoms of depression and may improve self-esteem and mood
- Guilt
- Lack of exercise
- A failure mindset – succumbing to a negative inner voice
- Overuse of social media and smartphones may lead to depression and anxiety
- Regret
- Codependency
- Poor sleeping habits (Careers in Psychology, 2020)

**GQ:** What if you feel you can't do it on your own?

**LD:** Connect Health and Community (2020) lists the following four useful ways in which men can improve their mental health:

- Getting outside and being active
- Understanding that it's OK to seek help
- Taking control of your finances, addressing debt issues
- Prioritising social connections

**GQ:** Are online support groups available if you don't feel comfortable asking for help?

**LD:** The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) offers support groups nationally.

**GQ:** What's your advice to someone living with depression, anxiety, or both, as we navigate uncertain times?

**LD:** Seek professional help and know that you're not alone. Last year was difficult for everyone, so there's no shame in admitting that and reaching out for help. However, ensure you get support from qualified professionals and avoid self-diagnosing through, for example, using the internet, which may lead you to unreliable sources of information.

'Seek professional help and know that you're not alone. Last year was difficult for everyone. There's no shame in admitting that and reaching out for help'

If you require assistance, you can contact our offices at info@safmh.org, and we'll help you get the support you need.

## MEN ADD THEIR VOICES

### KATLEGO MONAMOUDI, IT TECHNICIAN

Looking after your mental health is vital for your psyche, emotional and physical health, and through all the hardships you encounter in your daily life, you should know that it's an illness you can overcome. I've learnt from experience that our tendency as humans is to avoid problems, but the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness.

Over the past three years, I've lost my mother, brother and, more recently, my sister during the pandemic. I also lost my job. These events caused grief and financial strain, which made me feel isolated and depressed. Fortunately, through the support I received from close friends and family, and teachings and daily practices to keep my mental health in check, I could regain my confidence and the motivation to keep going. I overcame a trying situation through daily practices such as positive affirmations that helped me avoid self-sabotaging thoughts, binaural beats for meditation, and working out, which was not only great for the body but also for my mind.

I've been listening to audiobooks, mostly on positive thinking and wealth. So far, I've seen the positive impact these practices have had on my behaviour, which gives me more reason to continue as I feel much stronger than before. I know I can master anything through sweat, hard work and determination. The future's looking bright because I'm prepared to face similar situations.

Strive for happiness and keep it front-and-centre of your life. To anyone who's going through a difficult time and is afraid to speak out, I'd encourage you to

talk to someone and get help from trained professionals and organisations dedicated to mental health issues.

We all need to inculcate in ourselves and in our children the necessity for suffering and its value, the need to face problems head-on and to experience the resulting pain. The tools and techniques I used helped me to experience the pain of problems, so that I could work through them and solve them successfully, learning and growing in the process.

To all who're ready and have gathered the strength to seek help, be aware that organisations and professionals are there to help those suffering from mental illnesses, amongst whom is the #BUWADepressionAwareness Campaign (BUWA\_CAMPAIGN on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter).

### PRINCE SHUMBA, WINE SOMMELIER

I'm deeply passionate about wine, so the lockdown has been hard for me, what with not having access to the things I enjoy. Adjusting to my new normal wasn't easy, but my family kept me sane. Using the time to study also helped.

I discovered it was the perfect time to pay attention to the elements in my profession that needed improvement. Praying also helped; having that special time with God strengthened my relationship with Him, and I appreciated being able to connect with Him, without interruptions.

If there's one thing our youths have learnt, it's to be more responsible and invest in our tomorrow. Beyond the challenges presented by the pandemic, I can only hope that we'll come out of it better than we were before.

# NEED A WORK-FROM-HOME BOOST?

While the thought of not having to commute may have once appealed to you, now remote working is a reality, your four walls may have become suffocating. Here's how to stay motivated

## IT'S

### NOT UNCOMMON TO FEEL

off-balance when navigating uncertainty. Career mentor and business coach Tumi Chiloane says working from home has been both beneficial and challenging for employees, and that many people are battling to adapt to the new normal. 'If you've been working from home while trying to homeschool your kids, take care of your pets, manage your household and advance your career, you may be reaching the point of exhaustion,' he says.

How do you create a healthy working environment at home? Well, according to brand and empowerment coach Claudia Brandt, it all boils down to three fundamental factors: structure, boundaries and balance.

Brandt explains that when you're establishing a structure, it's a good idea to recreate your office space at home and it also helps to dress up, especially for Zoom meetings, even if it's only the top part. 'Having a structured start to your day also helps. Get up on time, chat to your family, then proceed to your working space. Take a lunch break and stop working at a specific time each day.' She notes that some people are working a lot more now that they're at home, which she attributes to pressure emanating from the uncertainty of the pandemic. 'Businesses

aren't doing well in general and, understandably, employees are worried about losing their jobs. You no longer have to commute to the office, which makes it easier to continue working longer than usual.

'Set yourself up for success by using alarms and making members of your household aware of your structure. If you plan to take a walk at lunchtime, for example, asking someone to join you will help you stick to it.'

It's crucial to create boundaries around the work you do and what you feel responsible for, says Brandt, who notes that if you tend to struggle with boundaries and often say yes to everything, this can be intensified in the lockdown. 'That means you constantly have to ask yourself if your boundaries are either too broad or too rigid? Where are you not feeling responsible enough, and where do you feel you have too much responsibility?' Asking yourself these questions will allow you to strike a balance between what you take responsibility for and what you don't.

Working remotely also means you aren't micro-managed, and your boss is no longer in a position to monitor the work you deliver. Brandt notes that because of that, you need to deliver your work on time and make sure that you maintain boundaries that encourage trust. 'This also means being able to say, "I've worked 12 hours every »



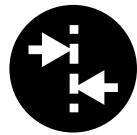


# TUMI CHILOANE'S TOP TIPS FOR CREATING A HEALTHY WORK-FROM- HOME ENVIRONMENT



## ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Even though you might not be going to a physical office space, this is crucial. Get dressed every day – at least, change out of your pyjamas – and set standard times for your office hours versus your private time to create structure. Your work-from-home setup must also be effective.



## SET BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are overwhelmingly essential to productivity. Set a healthy limit between yourself and those you live with. Also, avoid eating lunch at your desk. Try to step away to clear your head and unplug. You're your best advocate, so make sure you set reasonable boundaries to avoid pent up frustration or confrontation.



## OVER-COMMUNICATE WITH LOVED ONES

Leaning on your support system is more crucial now than ever. Create a shared calendar, so you know when your loved ones are busy with work or personal time. In the long-run, over-communicating helps to avoid burnout, frustration and isolation.



## PRACTISE SELF-CARE

Set aside time to be kind to yourself. Take one to two hours a day to read, workout, walk, run or engage in your favourite hobby. Getting involved in activities unrelated to work can help you excel at your job. For example, reading a book could spark an idea, or a workout could help decrease stress and increase productivity. Focus on what you can control and the things for which you're grateful.



## NETWORK CONSISTENTLY

A good way to avoid work-from-home burnout is to network. Try to spend at least one hour per week networking outside of your company to learn about your industry's best practices. Learning from other people right now will benefit you and have a positive impact on your career. It's also a fantastic way to share your ideas on topics you're excited about. Engaging in a passion project that doesn't relate directly to your job instils a sense of purpose. Aside from external networking, catching up with co-workers one-on-one via Zoom to talk about topics unrelated to work is an opportunity to check in with people with whom you might not usually engage. Ask them how they're doing and if there's anything you can do to help.



day now and I can't take this anymore, it's not sustainable," she adds. Having clarity about boundaries and responsibilities is, therefore, important in cultivating trust between employer and employee. She further explains that boundaries and structure also extend to those you live with. 'Be reliable, which means being honest about your availability,' she says. Brandt is aware of the reality that most employees don't have the luxury of a dedicated workspace, which presents a different set of challenges.

If you're always surrounded by people, for example, she suggests wearing headphones or working at night when people are asleep. That may not be ideal, but it may be your only chance of finding quiet time. 'We're also not in a hard lockdown anymore, so going somewhere else to work is also an option. You can find a lobby, go to a friend's place or use a desk in a co-working environment. Why not have an honest conversation with your boss about finding a space in which you can work?'

'Be intentional about maintaining a work-life balance.'

'Be intentional about maintaining a work-life balance. Don't carry on working because you can'

Don't carry on working because you *can*, instead, make it a habit to take mini-breaks,' she says.

You may also be feeling isolated if you're working from home. How do you stay connected to your colleagues? 'One of my clients has just started a company called Team Pause, helping teams to take pauses on a physical and mental level, and connecting through yoga and mindfulness. I'd highly recommend it.' Brandt also encourages taking time to ask your colleagues how they're doing before or after a meeting. 'When I run a team, I check in with its members at least once a week. That's lost at the moment, but I cannot stress enough how important it is to take the time.' She also cautions that when a team loses connection and no longer communicates, it can erode trust.

There also needs to be a balance between introversion and extroversion. Naturally, introverts love working from home, but you must be careful that you don't become a hermit, fearing the outside world. 'We need to connect with friends, colleagues, neighbours and family,' she says,

having seen this happen with clients who were relieved not to have to connect with the world. They needed a push to overcome resistance to be around people.

Brandt also notes that extroverts, on the other hand, are finding it hard to work from home, so it helps to 'be able to see the rest of your team working, have more breaks to chat or go into the office at least once or twice a week'. She affirms that it's natural for a social being to find a balance between working and connecting with others.

Balance also applies to work meetings. 'There must be enough time to chat, but also a clear structure when it comes to what you need to do.' She recommends having your camera on because people can be easily distracted. 'Setting an agenda and inviting only the people who need to be in the meeting is crucial to having a structured and productive meeting makes it possible to limit it to 15 to 20 minutes.' Having worked with clients throughout the lockdown, Brandt shares that, essentially, it's about striving for a balance between structure, free time, personal time, work time and exercise. But she's also aware that, in general, people are exhausted.

'Having to overhaul the way you work, lead teams and relate to other people can be incredibly taxing. I think we need to be kind to ourselves, so big is the shift in the way we do things,' she concludes. »

# FUTURE-PROOF YOUR CAREER WITH HYBRID SKILLS

These days, employers are no longer satisfied with hiring workers who're only good at one thing

## MORE

**COMPANIES ARE LOOKING** for professionals who have specialised skills in more than one area to fill so-called hybrid jobs. Some of these jobs are new, some are new versions of existing ones, but they all pose different challenges for workers, students, employers and educators. The advantage of hiring a hybrid workforce is that it can adapt to new work environments; however, it raises questions concerning the impact that a hybrid-workforce will have on workplace culture, collaboration, diversity and inclusion. The organisations that'll thrive will be those that identify, recruit and retain the skills they need to compete and develop learning cultures that

ensure their teams have the agility and speed to adapt.

**GQ:** What's the driving force behind hybrid jobs?

**?:** More than any other factor, advances in technology – from the increasing reliance of companies on big data to the emergence of the internet of things – are helping fuel the demand for hybrid jobs. As business and technology become increasingly intertwined, professionals will be needed to apply technology to create new value and insights for businesses.

The real drivers of hybridisation are 'disruptive' skills you can apply across multiple fields. Coding is a good example: graphic designers create content in HTML code. Marketers and salespeople need basic SQL skills to operate databases. Entire new categories of jobs are being created, such as UI/UX designers, who work on creating technological interfaces people can use. Disruptive skills aren't necessarily new ones, and while we need technical skills for previously non-technical jobs, there's also been an increase in the demand for business skills in jobs that were once purely technical. Management skills, in particular, are becoming crucial in IT. The biggest challenge the hybrid job economy poses, for employers, workers and educators alike, is that few of these roles are entry level positions. These jobs tend to be more specialised, and more likely to require higher-order

thinking. On the positive side, the gap between a hybrid and non-hybrid job may only be a few training sessions away.

**GQ:** How do you get a hybrid job?

**?:** As hybrid jobs emerge, businesses often turn to current employees first to fill these positions. A strong desire to learn and willingness to embrace change are traits that'll serve you well when looking to expand your skillset. The internet has also made it easy to learn new skills for the workplace – online courses can help without you having to take a big career detour.

Another way to build skills for hybrid jobs (especially if you're an experienced professional with in-demand expertise) is through project and consulting work. Exposure to new projects at different companies pushes you to grow. Even if your current position doesn't call for a combined set of skills, chances are it will in the future. Embracing the idea of becoming a multifaceted specialist early on in your career, and committing to continually improving your abilities, can help you succeed in the world of hybrid jobs.

**GQ:** What's the take-home message?

**?:** Creating a culture of learning will be critical for companies who want to adapt their workforce's skills to the dynamic changes emerging technologies bring to the working world. ❌

