



# Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

Seirbhís Chúnaimh d'Fhostaithe na Státseirbhíse



## WELLNESS AT WORK

### Promoting Health In the Workplace

It is possible to significantly improve your physical and mental health by making some small changes in your working day. When you consciously make changes in any aspect of your life, other positive changes naturally and simply follow.



## Steps to Better Health While You Work

Explore the possibility of improving your health while at work.



Start by breathing more slowly and more deeply. Practise **deep breathing** anywhere, anytime, while travelling to and from work or at your desk. Deep breathing energizes the body and clears the mind.

Drink **water at work** to keep the body hydrated. This helps to combat fatigue. Water regulates all bodily functions and it is essential that it is replenished on a daily basis.

Make **exercise** part of your normal day. Take the stairs instead of the lift and make a ten-minute walk part of your lunch-break. Availing of every opportunity you have to walk ensures better health.



Try to get outdoors more at weekends, especially in winter. Serotonin levels shrink over the winter period due to the lack of exposure to **daylight**, which can contribute to low mood.

While commuting, try using the time as an **opportunity** to listen to talktime radio or your favourite music, to read, or simply relax.

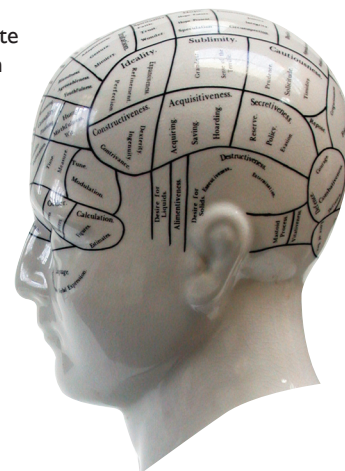
Slow down. **Plan** your day with a **well-organised workspace** and a **to-do list**. Make the quality of each moment count by developing the ability to focus on one thing at a time. Be fully present in the here and now.

Eat **fruit** at your desk or drop into a juice bar at lunchtime. This will help to boost your immune system and ward off infection. (Apples alone contain betacarotene, B vitamins, potassium and pectin and they aid digestion of fatty foods).

Develop a **healthy thought process**. Knowing the difference between positive and negative thinking is one of the most important insights you can gain about your mental health.

Recognise that **other people's** attitudes, behaviours and moods don't have to adversely affect the quality of your day.

Demonstrate **respect** in how you think, feel and behave towards others.



### Exercise for Relieving STRESS:

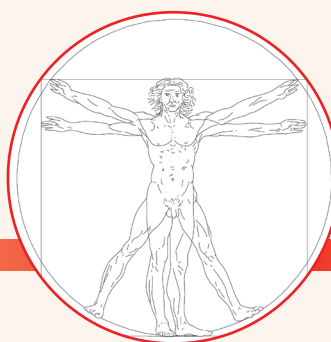
Standing with your arms by your side start to shake your right hand and wrist. Let the movement continue up through the

elbow and upper arm until your whole arm is shaking vigorously. Continue for 5-10 seconds, then breathe and relax. Then do the

same exercise with the left hand and arm. Do likewise with each leg and notice the difference in how you feel.

*(It is not intended that these guidelines should replace any professional medical or psychological advice).*

# Physical Health



## Deep Breathing

Oxygen is the most vital nutrient of all, yet most of us use only a third of our lung capacity.

When you engage in shallow breathing or you become tense, your blood is not being properly purified or oxygenated. When you slow down the body by breathing deeply, the mind will also begin to slow down. Your thoughts will be crisp and clear and you are likely to make better decisions. Your posture affects your breathing, even being slightly slumped over the desk causes shallow breathing. Deep breathing is also a key component of relaxation and is therefore most effective in combating stress.

## Exercise

Boost your health through regular exercise.

Regular moderate exercise increases energy, metabolism and bone density. It also helps maintain muscle and strengthens and improves posture. Exercise decreases stress and anxiety and maintains equilibrium. Let it gradually become part of your life style. Lack of exercise can cause fatigue, but conversely over-training or too much exercise can actually suppress the immune system. Find the balance and honour your own personal rhythm when it comes to exercising.

## Relax the Body

A simple relaxation technique which you can do anytime, anyplace, for example, sitting at your desk:

1. Sit up straight.
2. Exhale deeply and slowly through the mouth (cooling) or nose (warming). Try both and see which you prefer. Pause for a few seconds, then inhale slowly through your nose. Always breathe in through the nose to allow the little hairs to filter any impurities in the air.
3. Do this a few times and send a simple message to the brain via the nervous system that you want to be relaxed right now.

# Nutrition

*"Let food be thy medicine and thy medicine thy food"* Hippocrates

While it is important that everyone maintains optimal nutrition to maintain a healthy body and to ward off infections, good nutrition is also emerging as a key strategy for stress management. A properly balanced diet can improve mood, stress level, brain function and energy level.

Fruit and vegetables are full of the essential vitamins and minerals the body needs. Vitamins and minerals boost the immune system and help fight illness and disease. Foods such as fruit, whole grains, and protein are good anti-stress foods. Fast releasing sugars create a state of stress in the body raising cortisol (the stress hormone) levels. Slow releasing carbohydrates provide an even keel of consistent energy during the day. Avoid over cooking vegetables and eat raw when possible.

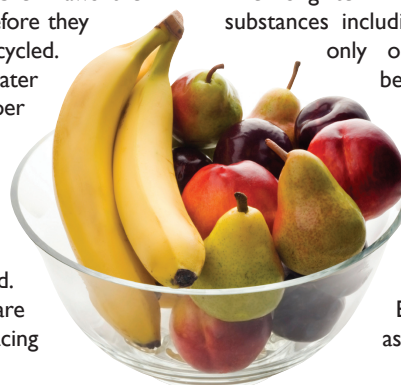
## Fibre

To ensure proper elimination of waste product from the body, you may need to increase the amount of fibre in your diet. Good fibre sources are fruit, vegetables, whole grain cereals, rice bran, nuts and seeds. Fibre draws the toxins out of the body before they can be re-absorbed or recycled. Because fibre absorbs water you need to ensure proper hydration throughout the day. Plain or carbonated cool water is best. Unsweetened fruit and vegetable juices diluted with water are also good. Drinks containing caffeine are counter productive in replacing

water loss because they act as a diuretic. Drinks containing lots of sugar increase water needs instead of satisfying them.

## Mood Altering Substances

The long term overuse of mood altering substances including alcohol, can affect not only our body but our mind, behaviour, social relationships and our attendance and performance at work. Mood-altering substances can also act as a depressant, and can cause irritability, aggression, and increase anxiety. Contact the EAS for support or referral as appropriate.



# The Kitchen Pharmacy

In the winter months, you can help boost the immune system by using lots of garlic and fresh ginger root in cooking. Garlic and onion are anti-bacterial, anti-parasitic and anti-viral, and help lower cholesterol and blood pressure. Eating a raw onion will help treat a sore throat. Fresh ginger clears the lungs and can be effective for stomach upsets. Add chilli pepper to your food. Capsaicin, which gives chilli its heat, aids digestion, helps fight colds, soothes pain and also lowers blood pressure.

We may not consume an optimal amount of all vitamins by diet alone. During times of extra physical exertion, stress or illness, nutrients may fall short due to poor dietary choices. This might be a time to consider taking a mineral or vitamin supplement. If in doubt it's wise to seek advice from a nutritionist or GP on this.

## Healing Herbs

|                |  |                 |  |
|----------------|--|-----------------|--|
| <b>Basil</b>   | Helps alleviate low mood, fight infection, clear the mind and calm nerves.   | <b>Parsley</b>  | High in vitamin C, betacarotene, iron and magnesium, parsley relieves indigestion, boosts the immune system, helps heal gum disease and freshens the breath. |
| <b>Mint</b>    | An after-dinner digestion aid and great for deflating a bloated stomach, mint also works on cold symptoms including coughs, sore throats, fever and headaches. | <b>Rosemary</b> | A stress soother that also relieves headaches, aids digestion and boosts circulation.  |
| <b>Oregano</b> | Possesses potent anti-bacterial properties that support immune function during infection.  | <b>Thyme</b>    | Aids digestion and soothes an upset stomach. Thyme also fights infection and can be used as a mouthwash.   |

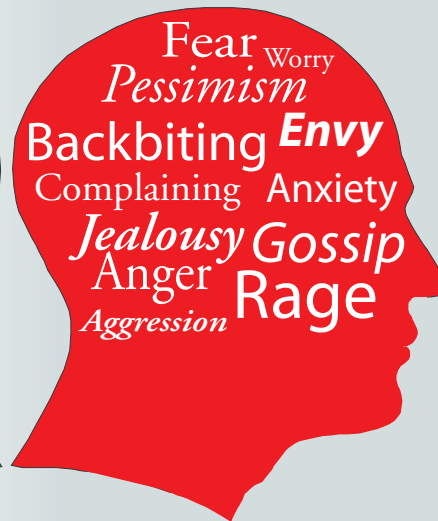
**? DID YOU KNOW:** The most effective way to prevent the spread of germs is to wash your hands regularly. Of all the people who become infected with the common cold virus, only 75% develop symptoms of a cold. The other 25% carry the virus but have no symptoms.

# Mental Health

## Cultivate



## Avoid



## Create health through the power of your mind

It has now been scientifically proven that each positive thought has a direct effect on the chemistry in our bodies and enhances our immune system. Conversely every negative thought has a corresponding negative effect on the body, depleting the immune system and leaving us exposed to illness.

### Thinking Patterns

Be aware of the connection between your thinking and how you feel. Negative thinking can make us feel anxious, angry, sad, depressed and powerless. Awareness of how we think can influence how we feel and act. As soon as you notice you are beginning to think in a negative way, stop and try to find the positives in any given situation. Check in with yourself... It may be a feeling, but is it a fact? Regrets and fretting over mistakes and failures only waste your resources. Take control of your thoughts.

*"You cannot stop birds flying overhead, but you can stop them nesting in your hair"*

Tich Nhat Hanh

### Anxiety

When you experience anxiety you often can't specify what it is you're anxious or worried about. By anticipating the worst you talk yourself into much of your anxiety. Thinking "what if" thoughts project you into an imaginary future situation and creates fear. Being tense, overtired and stressed can lead to feelings of such anxiety.

Here are 10 steps to keep calm and help reduce your level of tension before it magnifies into increased anxiety:

1. Whenever you catch yourself rushing around, slow down. Relax your jaw, drop your shoulders. Breathe. If you have to move quickly, do it in awareness, in a relaxed way.
2. At work take a deep breath before answering the phone. This allows you to be more centred and present to the caller.

3. Take a short break occasionally during the day to notice how your body is feeling.
4. Try to let go of excess tension before it accumulates - do some gentle stretching.
5. Take a moment at your desk to close your eyes and visualise yourself in a beautiful place. Do some deep breathing.
6. Spend at least a little time alone every day.
7. Notice your mindset and body posture when you are driving.....relaxed? or tense?
8. Cut down on caffeine.
9. Eat regular balanced meals of real wholesome food. The more processed the food the less vitality available to you.
10. Listen to relaxation or guided imagery CDs. There are many types available.

*"Take a rest, a field that has rested gives a beautiful crop"*

Ovid 43BC-17AD



### Problem Solving

Learn to deal with problems as they arise rather than let them build up inside you. It is best not to ignore issues. There is usually more than one way of dealing with an issue. Most problems can be broken down into manageable stages. Distance yourself from the problem, so that you can see it in a more detached way and consider what advice you would give to a friend or colleague in such circumstances.

Worrying has no effect on solving problems; action does.

*"All of our problems are problems of the imagination. All of our solutions are solutions of the imagination"*

Albert Einstein.

Steps for finding **solutions** to **problems**:

- Briefly jot down your problems. (When you write things down you get some objectivity.)
- Identify those over which you have no control.
- Put those you can tackle in order of importance.
- Decide which one you will deal with first. (Start with the easiest, if you can.)
- List as many different solutions or options as possible.
- Decide which options are realistic and cross out the unrealistic ones.
- Choose an option and if appropriate break it down into small steps. Plan how and when you will complete each.
- **Start Taking Action.... Do something that makes a difference today.**

**Useful Websites:** [www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie) • [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

[www.cseas.gov.ie](http://www.cseas.gov.ie) (See "Working on Stress" and "Effective Communication" documents)



## Assertiveness

Being assertive means communicating your needs, wants, feelings, beliefs and opinions to others in a direct and honest manner, without intentionally hurting anyone's feelings. Assertiveness is like the middle ground between aggression and passivity. Aggressive behaviours may get you what you want in the short term, but your relationships will suffer. On the other hand, passive behaviour can also ruin relationships, because your own needs, wants and feelings are ignored in favour of avoiding arguments.

## Behaviour Types

### Direct Aggression:

Bossy, Arrogant, Bulldozing, Intolerant, Opinionated, Over-bearing.

### Indirect Aggression:

Sarcastic, Deceiving, Ambiguous, Insinuating, Manipulative, Guilt Inducing.

### Passivity:

Helpless, Waiting, Indecisive, Apologetic.

### Assertiveness:

- Honesty rather than Deceit.
- Equality rather than Injustice.
- Compromise rather than Victory.
- Sharing feelings rather than hiding feelings.
- Taking responsibility rather than blaming others.



- Taking the initiative rather than waiting for rescue.

Assertiveness is a skill anyone can learn, but like all skills it takes time and lots of practice. Thinking assertively is the ability to think positively about ourselves and our lives. We need to think assertively before we can behave assertively.

## Counselling - The Talking Cure:

There will always be challenges. Find someone who can help you hear yourself- family, friend, colleague, Employee Assistance Officer. A problem well stated is a problem half solved. When you feel listened to, you gain clarity and insight and become better equipped to make the necessary changes in your life. The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) provides a confidential non-judgemental and safe environment where the options to resolve issues can be explored. The CSEAS also provides information, advice, support and referral.

*"If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you always got."* Roger von Oech

## Massage

There are many complementary therapies that can improve your wellbeing. If your body is showing signs of stress-related aches, you might consider massage.

## Benefits of massage:

**Psychological:** Reduces stress and anxiety, promotes relaxation and gives a sense of overall well-being.

**Physiological:** Improves circulation and relieves congestion throughout the body, relieves muscle fatigue, decreases water retention and aids digestion and elimination. It also puts the body back into proper alignment.

Massage is widely available now in fitness centres, hotels and beauty salons countrywide. As with any product, always check the qualifications of your practitioner.

# The Art of Mindful Living

*"Realise deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life."*

Eckhart Tolle. *The Power of Now.*

Mindfulness involves letting go of all that is on your mind and simply bringing attention to the present moment. Whether writing a report, peeling potatoes, or cutting the grass, be present and experience the moment. We spend a lot of time rushing, caught up on the treadmill. Whenever we become too focused on what's ahead or what has gone before it means we are missing out on experiencing the now.

"Being mindfully aware, attending to the richness of our here-and-now experiences, creates scientifically recognised enhancements in our physiology, our mental functions, and our interpersonal relationships. Being fully present in our awareness opens our lives to new possibilities of well-being. Mindfulness leads to a healthy relationship with oneself."

*"The Mindful Brain": Daniel J Siegel.*

## Meditation

*Ideally everyone should meditate for 15 minutes everyday. Unless you are really busy then you must meditate for 30 minutes!*

When you are stressed there is an imbalance in your life which needs to be addressed. Meditation is one of the best ways for developing harmony in your life. During our normal day-to-day activities our brain produces beta waves at between 14-50 cycles a second, when we meditate or use our imagination to visualise a calming scene, we enter into a relaxed state of awareness and our brain begins producing the more calming alpha waves 8-13 cycles a second. When you calm your mind, you also calm your body. By sitting still and focusing on an object, a sound, a word and allowing the internal chatter to cease, you begin to experience stillness. By practising 10-20 minutes a day, you can develop a greater inner assurance and serenity which will give you the courage to deal with whatever challenges the day might bring.

*If you stop and smell the roses today, years from now you will not look back and wonder where your life went.*

with compliments from



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