Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Is depression affecting your work and productivity?



Four out of five adults with depression report that it causes them at least some difficulty with work, home, or social activities. So it would be no surprise if depression is interfering with your productivity at work.

The signs of depression

Depression, whether major depressive episodes or a longer-lasting type called Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD), has many symptoms, and different people manifest depression differently. Here are the most common signs of depression:

- having less energy or getting tired easily
- sleep disturbances
- loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities
- isolating oneself from friends and family
- feeling worthless or very guilty
- significant changes in appetite or weight
- overeating or eating too little
- a decrease in productivity or performance
- memory difficulties and difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- feelings of anger or irritability
- chronic aches and pains that don’t respond to treatment
- frequent crying episodes
- suicidal thoughts or talk of suicide (in which case, seek professional help immediately)

How depression affects work and productivity

Depression can have a major impact on your productivity and the quality of your work. You may feel too tired to manage your tasks or do a good job. It might be hard to focus or concentrate. You may feel uninterested in work that normally engages you. You might be less friendly or communicative. You may even miss work by taking sick days.

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Handling work responsibilities when you are experiencing depression

Here are some ways to cope at work while you're depressed:

Recognize the symptoms. Pay attention to how you feel when a depressive episode is coming on. With fair warning, you can take steps to lessen the impact, such as employing coping mechanisms that you find effective and seeking support.
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Find coping mechanisms that work for you—and use them. Deep-breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, taking a short walk, or doing a quick stretching workout may help you return to work with your mind more fully engaged in the tasks at hand and avoid falling into a worse mood. Try different methods to see what helps, and then schedule these into your day. Every person is different, and different strategies work for different people. Think about how you feel, and look back to see if you've experienced this same feeling in the past. If you have, what were small things that helped you through it? If you can identify the tools that worked best for you, you can apply them to your current situation in hopes of gaining some relief. If your symptoms persist, speak to you doctor about what you are experiencing.

Prioritize. Organize your tasks and responsibilities by order of importance. Set a realistic schedule for getting specific tasks done. Having a list of ordered priorities and a schedule for completing them will help you stay focused and get work done. If you find it hard to set a schedule and stick to it, try out one of the many time management techniques you can find online and in books.

Talk with your supervisor. If you feel comfortable sharing personal information, let your supervisor know you're unwell. You don't have to specify the problem. Ask if there might be flexibility with certain tasks, if co-workers can be assigned to step in and help temporarily, or if other allowances might be made.

Keeping a lid on job stress

Job stress can exacerbate symptoms of depression, and depression can make work feel more stressful. Reducing stress will likely help you cope more effectively. Here are some effective ways to manage stress:

Get regular exercise. A wealth of scientific evidence shows that regular exercise helps improve your overall health and sense of well-being. More specifically, exercise boosts endorphins, the brain's "feel-good" neurotransmitters.

Eat healthy. Adjust your diet to focus on high-fibre, low-fat meals with plenty of carbohydrates. Include lots of fruits and vegetables, and cut back on meat and high-fat dairy foods like cheese and whole milk.

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Avoid alcohol. Many people drink alcohol to cope with stress. For most people a glass of wine or beer now and then won't cause any harm. However, alcohol is a depressant, and any amount can increase feelings of depression. Also, heavy drinking, along with the aftereffects are likely to make you more, not less, anxious.

Avoid caffeine and sugar. Caffeine gives you a quick boost of energy. But that effect comes from an artificial boost in stress hormones, and caffeine remains in your system for many hours. As for sugary snacks and drinks, there's some evidence that heavy consumption of sweet foods and beverages may contribute to depression, according to research published by the National Institutes of Health.

Try relaxation techniques. Even just a couple of minutes of deep-breathing exercises can relieve stress. Studies have also shown that regularly practicing mindfulness meditation significantly reduces anxiety and depression.

Finding support

Depression is highly treatable. Talking with a mental health professional can help you identify the causes and find ways to overcome both the underlying problems and the symptoms of depression. Medication is effective for many people as well.

Contact your health care provider if you have symptoms of depression that last for more than a few weeks, especially if they are interfering with your work or your relationships.

Remember, depression is an illness, not a weakness. Don't hesitate to seek help, including seeing a psychotherapist for treatment, if depression is hurting your productivity at work or impacting your relationships and well-being.