



Wellness at Sea
FROM SAILORS' SOCIETY



EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Depression, anxiety and mental health: Recognising the signs and symptoms and simple things that you can do to keep mentally healthy.



WELCOME TO WELLNESS AT SEA

Dear Friend,

How are you doing?

In this booklet we will be exploring depression and anxiety and what you can do to cope with life at sea.

These are challenging times for us all. The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine plunged our world into uncertainty and it is only natural, even now, to feel stressed, concerned, angry or anxious. Even before the pandemic, the mental stress that many seafarers can experience was a massive concern.

Consider these stats released by Yale University in 2019, pre-Covid:

- 25% of seafarers completing a patient health questionnaire had scores suggesting signs of depression (significantly higher than other working and general populations)
- 17% of seafarers completing a generalised anxiety disorder questionnaire were defined as seafarers with anxiety
- 20% of seafarers surveyed had suicidal thoughts, either several days (12.5%), more than half the days (5%) or nearly every day (2%) over the two weeks prior to taking the survey
- Depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts were associated with increased likelihood of injury and illness while working on board the vessel
- Seafarer depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts were associated with increased likelihood of planning to leave work as a seafarer in the next six months

Unfortunately, the pandemic catapulted mental health issues even further and that is why it is so important for us to have you as part of this conversation.

We'll be discussing a few everyday things that can help you to care for yourself including:

- knowing the signs so that you can take action should you or a friend, or co-worker get depressed
- a depression test you can take when you are worried about yourself
- top tips for keeping mentally healthy
- some advice to those seafarers who are feeling low or unable to sign off, particularly given the pressures of the pandemic
- some tips to help you cope mentally with the stresses of Covid-19

Sailors' Society's team is here for you. If you are feeling anxious or depressed, reach out for a confidential chat today!

Keep well and healthy,



Johan Smith
Head of Wellness, Sailors' Society

Need help?

Call **+1-938-222-8181**

Instant chat www.sailors-society.org/helpline

Visit sailors-society.org/support-for-seafarers

Email crisis@sailors-society.org

DEPRESSION: KNOW THE SIGNS

Depression is the leading cause of mental health issues – and recognising it is the first step to getting help.

All of us have bad days, but the key to recognising there may be a more serious problem is the frequency of the symptoms below. Understanding the signs can help you know whether to seek professional advice.

EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS



- Displaying unusual behaviour or changes in usual behaviour
- Being withdrawn
- Aggression or tearfulness
- Loss of humour
- Loss of confidence
- Disruptive behaviour
- Inability to concentrate on tasks, increased errors, missing deadlines or forgetting tasks
- Increased consumption of caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes and/or sedatives
- Difficulty remembering things
- Poor job performance
- Becoming withdrawn, not participating in conversations or social activities and spending increasing amounts of time alone in cabins
- An employee who is normally punctual frequently arriving late



FEELINGS

- Irritable
- Anxious
- Overwhelmed
- Worthless
- Frustrated
- Unhappy
- Disappointed
- Sad
- Indecisive
- Unmotivated



PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Suffering from frequent minor illnesses, headaches or stomach upsets
- Difficulty sleeping or constant tiredness or feeling of fatigue
- Lack of care over appearance
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Minor physical ailments
- Displaying unusual behavior or marked changes in behavior



THOUGHTS

- 'I am a failure'
- 'It's my fault'
- 'Nothing good ever happens to me'
- 'I'm worthless'
- 'Life is not worth living'

DEPRESSION: SHOULD YOU GET HELP?

Depression is the leading cause of mental health issues – and recognising it is the first step to getting better. The simple checklist below can help you know whether you should seek professional support.

FOR MORE THAN TWO WEEKS HAVE YOU:

1. Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time?
2. Lost interest or pleasure in most of your usual activities?

If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, complete the symptom checklist below. If you did not answer "yes" to either of these questions, it is unlikely that you have a depressive illness.

3. Lost or gained a lot of weight or had a decrease OR increase in appetite?
4. Had sleep disturbance?
5. Felt slowed down, restless or excessively busy?
6. Felt tired or had no energy
7. Felt worthless? OR Felt excessively guilty? OR Felt guilt about things you should not have been feeling guilty about?
8. Had poor concentration? OR Had difficulties thinking? OR Been very indecisive?
9. Had recurrent thoughts of death?

Add up the number of ticks to questions 3 – 9 for your total score:

What does your score mean?

(assuming you answered "yes" to question 1 and/or question 2)

4 or less: unlikely to have a depressive illness.

5 or more: likely to have a depressive illness.

For further assessment, or if you are concerned about any of these symptoms, please call our confidential 24/7 helpline on +1-938-222-8181 or instant chat via: sailors-society.org/wellness

Remember, depression is treatable and effective treatments are available – the earlier you seek help, the better.

Please note, this test does not diagnose you, but instead raises any red flags and assists you to know when to seek help. We've been talking a lot about where to get help and I want to again remind you that Sailors' Society's team is there for you.

TOP TIPS TO KEEP MENTALLY FIT



SHARE YOUR PROBLEMS

Talking about your feelings is a positive step towards good mental health. Try to talk to people you trust about your experiences and emotions. If you have the opportunity to regularly talk to someone on shore it will help a lot.

If communication is a problem and you are bound to your ship, identify someone on board you can trust. If all else fails try to write your emotions and feelings in a diary and reflect on previous days and your general mood.



EAT HEALTHILY

There is a strong link between what we eat and how we feel. Make sure that you are comfortable with your diet and be on the lookout for food that triggers certain emotions.



LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS

Caring for others is often an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you. It can even bring you closer together. You now have the knowledge to see the signs of poor mental health in someone else – reach out, and give a helping hand where you can.



STAY IN TOUCH

Friends and family can make you feel included and cared for. They can offer different views from whatever is going on in your own head.

It is sometimes difficult to keep in touch when you are at sea. Perhaps write a letter about what you are experiencing and make sure that it is posted in the next port you visit. Make 'remember notes' on important stories you want to tell the people you care for.

TOP TIPS TO KEEP MENTALLY FIT



KEEP FIT

Experts believe that exercise releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep, look and feel better. Exercise also keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy. Many exercise programmes exist that are specifically aimed at helping you keep fit on board. Work out a fitness routine that will fit in with your specific circumstances while on board.



LEARN TO BE COMFORTABLE IN YOUR OWN SKIN

Some of us make people laugh, some are good at maths while others cook fantastic meals. Some of us share our lifestyle with the people who live close to us, others live very differently. We're all different. Accept that you are a unique human being, unlike anyone else out there.



HAVE A REST

A change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health. It could be a five minute pause from the task you are busy with or a half hour lunch break in a different location on the ship. A few minutes can be enough to de-stress you.



ASK FOR HELP

None of us are superhuman. We all get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel, or when things go wrong. If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. You can call Sailors' Society's helpline on **+1-938-222-8181** or instant chat via: **[sailors-society.org/wellness](https://www.sailors-society.org/wellness)** any time for a confidential chat.

Your employer values your mental health – that's why they have signed up to the Wellness at Sea Awareness Campaign.



DO SOMETHING YOU ENJOY

What do you love doing? What activities can you lose yourself in? What did you love doing in the past? Enjoying yourself helps beat stress. Doing an activity you enjoy probably means you're good at it and achieving something boosts your self-esteem. Make sure you take an activity you like with you on board.

HELPING YOU COPE WITH ANXIETY AND STRESS

It is only natural to feel stressed, concerned or anxious at times in our lives and we know things can feel even worse when you are far from home, friends and family.

On top of the practical steps you should take, there are some things you and your crewmates can do to help manage your anxiety during tough times and to support each other through.

Here are our top ten tips:

1. CHALLENGE YOUR SELF-TALK

The way we think influences the way we feel and can result in anxious, depressed and out-of-control feelings. These worse-case feelings often exaggerate danger and underestimate your ability to handle it. Be conscious of your thoughts and steer them in a positive direction.

2. PLAN WORRY TIME

Not worrying is easier said than done! Schedule ten minutes of 'worry time', indulging in all your concerns. Write them down or give them a name, as verbalizing your fears can help alleviate them. Once this is done, make a conscious effort to substitute worrying thoughts with positive memories. If this is hard, identify your fear, make a mental note of it and schedule some 'worry time' to handle it. Now shift your focus.

3. FACTS MINIMISE FEAR

With headlines blaring at us and media outlets competing to break the news first, having the right facts is crucial. Misinformation catapults anxiety. Seek information from reliable sources (such as those listed below) and use it so that you can take steps to protect yourself and those around you. Look for information updates at specific times to avoid feeling overwhelmed or confused and consider muting some of your social media channels.

4. TAKE A SOCIAL MEDIA HOLIDAY

While social media is a great for keeping connected to our families, it can be detrimental when everyone is in panic mode and intensify our feelings of missing out on family events. Take a break for a few hours or even a day and try to see some beauty in the situation that you are in on board your vessel.

5. STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION

With the global nature of the coronavirus, chances are that your fellow crewmates are experiencing the same thing. Talk to them and express your anxieties and fear. Knowing that you are not alone can do a great deal! Be a change agent by shifting discuss the global pandemic in more positive ways by discussing the recoveries and countries where good strategies work rather than just the fatality toll.

6. SLOW BREATHING

Anxiousness causes faster and shallower breathing. Try to take a short break from your work on deck, bridge or in the engine-room and intentionally slow your breathing. Count to five while inhaling slowly – and then do a countdown as you blow out your breath.

HELPING YOU COPE WITH THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID-19

7. MUSCLE RELAXATION EXERCISES

Find a quiet and peaceful place on your vessel. With closed eyes, start from your toes and slowly tense and relax each of your muscle groups from your toes to your head. Hold the tension for a count of five seconds and then slowly release it, by again counting to five. Muscle tension is often a sign of anxiety and dealing with this, helps release your fears. You may also find meditation or prayer helpful. Meditation apps such as Calm and Headspace have both released free digital sessions or you could participate in an online worship service.

8. KEEP IN MIND THAT YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR EMOTIONS

Your social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual wellness plays a role in your mental health. If you have free time between shifts, consider each of these aspects and think how they can assist you with a positive outlook.

9. BODY AND MIND WORK TOGETHER

Try to eat healthily and make time to exercise. Take a run or a walk on the deck. Exercise releases endorphins in your bloodstream and can elevate your mood.

10. BE KIND TO YOURSELF

You are WAY more than your emotions. You are not your fears and anxiety. Give yourself a break. You are of great value!



sailors-society.org/wellness

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