

### How Good is Your Mental Health? The Importance of Regular Checkups

By VITAL WorkLife

Most people schedule time for annual physicals, dental exams and routine vision screenings. Until recently, fewer people had annual mental health checkups. Now, according to a recent article in The New York Times, many doctors are routinely asking patients to complete the Patient Health Questionnaire (P.H.Q.-9) during regular exams to assess their patients for signs of depression.



"Regular mental health checks are important because many of the symptoms of depression or anxiety disorders come on so gradually that you might not be aware how much the condition is affecting your daily life," explains Liz Ferron, MSW, LICSW, Physician Practice Lead for VITAL WorkLife.

Ferron believes part of the reason people don't have time to reflect on their personal health and well being is that their lives and their minds are simply too busy. "People are pushing themselves, or being pushed to do more with less, in every sphere of their lives."

#### Red-Flag Symptoms

If you or a family member are experiencing any of the following symptoms to any degree, you might want to consider scheduling a "mental health checkup" with your family physician—or by contacting your Employee Assistance Program (EAP):

- Headaches, backaches, stomach aches (not accounted for by a medical condition)
- Negativity or cynicism
- Difficulty setting limits or boundaries with time and resources
- Negative feedback from people at home or at work
- Difficulty concentrating or staying focused on tasks
- Unusual levels of anger, frustration or resentment
- Overindulgence related to food, spending, drugs or alcohol
- Difficulty balancing work and family responsibilities

"Many people don't feel comfortable discussing emotional issues with their family physicians," notes Ferron. "Making an appointment with a psychiatrist or psychologist about seemingly mild depression symptoms may feel extreme."

A practical—and free—alternative for mental health checkups is available to you as part of your EAP benefit. Ferron notes that one business owner comes in annually for a checkup and encourages his employees to do the same. He says, "Why would I think I don't need to take care of my mental health the same way I take care of my physical health? It doesn't make sense. I regularly suggest my employees contact the EAP and get an objective perspective about their work and personal life, even if they just need to vent about something. It is well worth their time and my money to have the program available. If my employees aren't mentally healthy, then my business suffers."

## Free Mental Health Checkups:

In a discussion with an EAP counselor, you can ask for help with:

- Identifying life stresses—and considering ways to better manage these situations
- Looking at situations from a different perspective in hopes of having a more productive and healthier mindset
- Learning how to strengthen your resiliency
- Setting and prioritizing goals for work/life balance and improvement
- Communicating with others, and building relationships
- Managing change and stress
- Developing healthy coping strategies
- Assessing emotional health and well being

"We may be able to reassure you that the symptoms you're calling about are 'entirely normal,' or can easily be addressed by setting boundaries or creating better work/life balance," says Ferron. "If your symptoms are more severe, we'll work with you to create a plan of action and bring together the resources you need to address whatever mental health issues you're facing."

Ferron encourages people to call as soon and as often as they like to talk about any mental health issues they or the people they love may be having. "There's no need to wait until you're desperate for help," says Ferron. "Why suffer in silence when the help you need is just a phone call away?"

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### About VITAL WorkLife

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VITAL WorkLife, Inc. is a national behavioral health consulting practice supporting all dimensions of well being in the workplace. For over 35 years, our proven solutions have helped to reduce workplace conflict, facilitate culture change, strengthen interpersonal communication and build well being.

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