

No. 066/20

7<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Dear Colleague,

## Checklist for Achieving Better Mental Health

Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems in the UK, with one in four of us experiencing problems every year. The workplace can often exacerbate mental health problems.

The TUC has produced a useful checklist of five things you can do to help yourself and others.

1. Firstly, talk to your friends and colleagues. Connecting with others is a good way to fight isolation and improve your mental health. Building good relationships raises your self-worth and combats a sense of isolation or "not fitting in".

You shouldn't rely on social media alone to build or maintain relationships with other people - physical contact is more important.

Try joining a colleagues during the lunch break or chat with your co-workers instead of using a iPhone, listening to music alone or using a computer, lap-top or tablet etc.

2. Secondly, get some fresh air and exercise. Exercise doesn't only get you fit and improve physical health, it's also a great way to improve mental health. It releases endorphins - chemicals in your brain which make you feel more positive. You can also feel a sense of achievement from setting and then reaching fitness goals.

You can exercise as part of your working day. Try to include walking or cycling into the daily commute or use the lunch hour to go for a walk. Some employers offer cycle to work schemes or discounted gym membership.

3. Thirdly, get a good night's sleep. Long-term sleep problems can lead to anxiety, depression and other serious mental health issues. It can be difficult to get a good night's sleep if you're worrying about work.

Cutting out caffeine and alcohol, regular exercise and avoiding looking at screens at night are all easy ways to sleep better.

If you find yourself worrying about work at night, writing in a diary or making a note to deal with an issue later can also help.

4. Fourthly, practice mindfulness. Mindfulness - paying attention to the present moment - can do wonders for one's mental health.

Noticing your thoughts, feelings, and the world around you is the first step to mindfulness. Practising CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) techniques is an effective way to deal with anxieties and worries.

Taking part in a breakfast/lunchtime/after work yoga and meditation can help improve mental health or something like Tai chi, which combines deep breathing and relaxation with flowing movements which is practised around the world as a health-promoting exercise and help reduce stress, improve posture, balance and general mobility, and increase muscle strength in the legs.

5. Fifthly, keep a healthy diet. Diet can affect our mental health but keeping to a healthy eating pattern at work can be difficult.

Planning your meals and bringing food from home is a great way to keep body and mind healthy. Keeping a good supply of nuts or fruits handy can also help decrease stress and replace sugary snacks.

Joining your colleagues for lunch is a great way to try new things and leave your work behind for a while.

If members have problems they should be encouraged to speak to their local Union Rep for support and advice.

Any enquiries regarding this Letter to Branches should be addressed to the Health, Safety & Environment Department on telephone number 020 8971 7365.

Yours Sincerely,



Dave Joyce  
**National Health, Safety & Environment Officer**