

Toolbox Talk

Daily Habits for Better Mental Health



Time: 15 minutes

Objective: To encourage workers to build simple everyday habits that support their mental health, energy and ability to cope with the pressures of work and life.

We all understand the idea of maintenance. We service our vans, check our tools, inspect our equipment and replace things before they become a bigger problem. We do it because looking after something regularly is usually easier than waiting until it breaks. So here's the question: how often do we think about looking after ourselves in the same way? Most people don't wait until their teeth are falling out before brushing them, yet when it comes to our mental health, it's easy to ignore the basics until we're already stressed, exhausted or struggling. Looking after your mental health doesn't always mean doing something big. Quite often, it's the small things you do regularly that help keep you in a better place.

Why It Matters

Construction can make routine difficult. One week you might be five minutes from home, the next you're travelling an hour and a half each way. Some days everything goes to plan and other days you're dealing with delays, changing drawings, other trades working around you, problems with materials and pressure to get the job finished. Then you've still got whatever is happening outside work waiting for you when you get home. Because of that, it's very easy to slip into a routine where work takes priority over everything else. You skip lunch because you're busy, stay up later than you should, spend the evening scrolling on your phone, stop exercising, stop seeing people and then get up the next morning and do it all again.

None of those things on their own mean something is wrong but over time they can affect how we feel and how well we cope with pressure. Good daily habits don't remove difficult jobs, money worries or problems at home but they can give us a stronger starting point when those pressures arrive.



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Think of it like turning up to a physical job after sleeping properly and eating well compared with turning up exhausted and running on caffeine. The job hasn't changed but your ability to deal with it has.

Signs To Look Out For

Sometimes the first signs that our routine is slipping are easy to miss. You might realise you've been grabbing takeaway food every night because you can't be bothered to cook, staying awake on your phone when you know you need sleep or reaching for another energy drink because you're struggling to get through the afternoon. You might stop doing things you normally enjoy, cancel plans because you can't be bothered or find yourself going straight from work to the sofa every evening. Maybe you're becoming more impatient at home or on site, or you notice that you're constantly thinking about work even when you're supposed to be switched off.

The same can happen to the people around us. Someone who normally goes to the gym might suddenly stop. A workmate who usually has a laugh might start disappearing on their own during breaks. Someone might regularly say they're shattered or seem to be living from one working day to the next. These things don't automatically mean there's a problem but they can be useful reminders to check how we're actually looking after ourselves rather than simply carrying on out of habit.

What Can Help

Start with the simple things because they're often the easiest to lose when life gets busy. Try to protect your sleep as much as you reasonably can. That might mean putting the phone down earlier, getting into a more regular routine or simply recognising that staying up for another hour isn't always worth it when you've got an early start.



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Eat something during the working day and drink enough water. It sounds obvious, but plenty of us have worked through lunch because we wanted to finish a job and then wondered why we felt completely drained later. Give yourself something outside work as well. That doesn't have to mean joining a gym or completely changing your lifestyle. It could be walking the dog, going fishing, getting outside, playing football, working on something at home, seeing friends or doing anything else that helps your head move away from work for a while. Try to have some time where you're not constantly looking at emails, messages, social media or work notifications. Even a short period where your brain isn't being fed more information can help.

Connection matters too. It's very easy, particularly when travelling long distances or working away, to fall into a pattern of work, eat, sleep and repeat. Make the phone call. Go and see the mate you've not seen for a while. Sit down with your family without your phone in your hand. You don't need to have a deep conversation about mental health every day. Sometimes simply spending time around people you care about is enough to help you reset and don't try to change everything at once. If your routine isn't great at the moment, choose one thing. Go to bed half an hour earlier. Take lunch tomorrow. Go for a walk after work. Put your phone down for twenty minutes. Small changes are much easier to stick with than trying to completely overhaul your life on Monday morning.



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Discussion Questions

- What's one habit that helps you feel better after a difficult working day?
- Which healthy habits are usually the first to disappear when work gets busy?
- What's one realistic thing you could do more regularly to look after yourself?

Takeaway Message

Looking after your mental health isn't something that only matters when you're struggling. The small things we do every day can make a difference to how we cope when work or life becomes difficult. Sleep, food, movement, time away from work and staying connected with people might sound basic but the basics matter. You don't need the perfect routine and you don't need to change everything overnight. Find a few things that work for you and try to keep them going.

Action

Before the end of today, think of one small habit you've let slip or one thing you know helps you feel better. Pick it back up this week and while you're at it, ask someone you work with what they do to switch off after a busy day. Sometimes sharing the simple things that help us can give someone else an idea they needed.



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