

30-Day Mental Health Guide



ICAS

Atlas
Insurance

Atlas
Wellbeing

01

Developing EQ, emotional intelligence and emotional regulation

At some point in our life, emotions can get out of control. This can be caused by an argument, professional or personal failure, or concern about a loved one. Unchecked emotions can lead to regret for things said and done in the heat of the moment. However, through emotional intelligence, you are able to recognise and understand emotional information and be able to identify your own or others' emotional experiences and to act on this information in a way that leads to a positive outcome. It is important develop your EQ, especially if you want to grow in your personal life and career.

Pro Tip

People's emotions are less likely to increase and lead to regrettable situations when they are regulated. This can be done through problem-solving, affirmation of self and reassessment of situations, which can lead to mood improvement and increase compassion and empathy for others. You can improve your emotional intelligence by observing how you react to people, the kind of self-talk you engage in, looking at your work environment, doing a self-evaluation, examining how you react to stressful situations, taking responsibility for your actions and examining how your actions will affect others.



02

Mental health in the workplace

Mental health problems are increasingly impacting the workplace, with one in four people experiencing a mental health problem in any given year. There are three areas which show that an employee may be suffering from mental health issues. These are psychological symptoms, physical symptoms and behavioural/social symptoms. Signs of stress in a group of people within a business can become evident through increased dissatisfaction, complaints/disputes being raised, increase in staff turnover and grievances against managers.

Pro Tip

Mental health problems in the workplace can be reduced by creating a positive workplace environment. This can be done by offering support to your team through openly acknowledging the resources available to them, communicating with them and providing supporting initiatives such as promoting employee counselling help lines. It is also important to be mindful that changes in workplace culture need to be modelled from the top down.



03

Impact of social media on mental health

Frequent social media use can make you feel increasingly unhappy and isolated in the long run. It can also lead to the development of mental health issues such as anxiety or depression when used too much or without caution. While some people feel that spending time on social media gives them a boost, others tend to feel down after using social media. This can also be dependent on the amount of time spent on it.

Pro Tip

You don't have to quit social media completely. But reducing it considerably and reconnecting with friends and family in real life rather than the virtual world, can make you happier. Spending less time on social media than you normally would, may lead to significant decreases in both depression and loneliness.



04

Being positive during hardships

When times are hard, you get tested, and sometimes far beyond what you can handle. The best ways to deal with hardships aren't always those meant to prevent or stop them, but to manage them when they do happen. Unfortunately, life is not perfect; the good and bad times are to be expected.

Pro Tip

Although there are various ways to manage and cope with hardships, it's important to be aware that you won't always be positive. You are human, your emotions, outlook, and perspective on things is constantly changing. Therefore, be gentle and patient with yourself, and keep working towards being happier each day.



05

Overcoming a traumatic experience

When we experience a traumatic event, it can threaten our sense of safety, and we often feel overwhelmed by a whole range of reactions. It is also common for us to feel as though we are alone in our own particular experience of the event, and our reactions to it. The emotions following a traumatic event should gradually reduce in intensity over time. Some people, however, may need extra help with coming to terms with the experience.

Pro Tip

It's at times like these that the support and comfort from others such as family, friends, colleagues or a professional, helps to put the event back into context, and for us to feel stable or return to some form of normalcy.



Dealing with grief and bereavement

Grief is an undesirable emotion, yet also a vital one. It is a powerful way of honouring and reaffirming the value of the person we have lost and what that person stood for. It is also a way that helps us to adjust to the new order that we face. Because of the deep pain that grief causes, it is an emotion that we are almost hard-wired to try and avoid.

Pro Tip

There is no universal grief formula. We all have different coping styles, emotional preferences and levels of resilience. Grief can take months or years but most of us are likely to go through some or all of the stages of grief eventually. The stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. They might be seen as ways in which we go through the process of grieving as our emotions allow us to continue living.



07

Managing depression

It's normal to feel anxious or a little sad sometimes, but when anxiety becomes constant and sadness becomes depression, it's important to get help. Anxiety and depression can be very damaging to your quality of life, but they can also be treated with the help of a professional.

Pro Tip

It's important to remember that depression has multiple causes and symptoms that vary from person to person. Therefore, there isn't one specific treatment option that can be recommended to every person. However, in most cases, the best approach seems to be a combination of therapy, medication, self-help techniques and lifestyle changes.



Stress can be caused by a number of factors including anxiety, poor lifestyle, sleep disorders, medication, medical conditions, home circumstances or working conditions. Chronic stress can lead to reduced productivity and an increased risk of injury and illness.

Pro Tip

Learn to manage your stress with some fun stress-reducing activities such as dancing to your favourite music, laughing out loud, spending time with loved ones or exercising. Remember that stress can be good in small doses, but lots of stress is bad for you. Don't wait for stress to lead to depression or depression to result in higher stress levels before making the decision to prioritise your health and wellness.



Dealing with change

When you're dealing with a change, it's not unusual to feel stressed or overloaded. You may also have physical responses, such as sleep disruption, headaches, or gastrointestinal distress.

Pro Tip

Change is as inevitable as the changing of the seasons. Many things in your life will change over time, such as, your job, your family, your weight, your happiness, your house, even your city. Viewing change as an opportunity will help you recover from setbacks and make the most of the options available to you.



10

Managing anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human emotion. Many people feel anxious, or nervous, from time to time, but if you suffer from an anxiety disorder, you might experience intense, excessive, and persistent worry and fear. There are several kinds of anxiety disorders. Included amongst these are generalised anxiety disorder (persistent worry that is usually out of proportion to the actual circumstance) and panic attacks (waves of anxiety so intense that they reach a climax in a few minutes).

Pro Tip

If you're suffering from short periods of anxiety, it may be helpful to identify the events surrounding the experiences you're having. Consider what provokes the anxiety, the thoughts or physical sensations that accompany the anxiety and how you are coping with the anxiety. Exploring your answers may help you to understand the nature of your anxiety as well as determine ways of reducing it.



11

Finding a balance between work and life

A work-life balance is a balance, where one's personal and professional lives are equally prioritised. Unfortunately, work is often prioritised over other parts of life. In order to succeed in the professional world, many of us may take shortcuts in our personal lives in order to donate more time to our professional lives. This lack of balance, however, can lead to numerous problems in both areas and may, in the long term, lead to burnout.

Pro Tip

Your work-life balance will never be perfect. The best way to manage it is to set a realistic schedule. Although it may sound ideal to work for only half a day, and spend the rest with your family, it isn't realistic. Essentially, this means that you understand that some days will be more work-centric than others. You may sometimes get caught up at work and come home late - that's part of adult life. But it should be the exception rather than the rule.

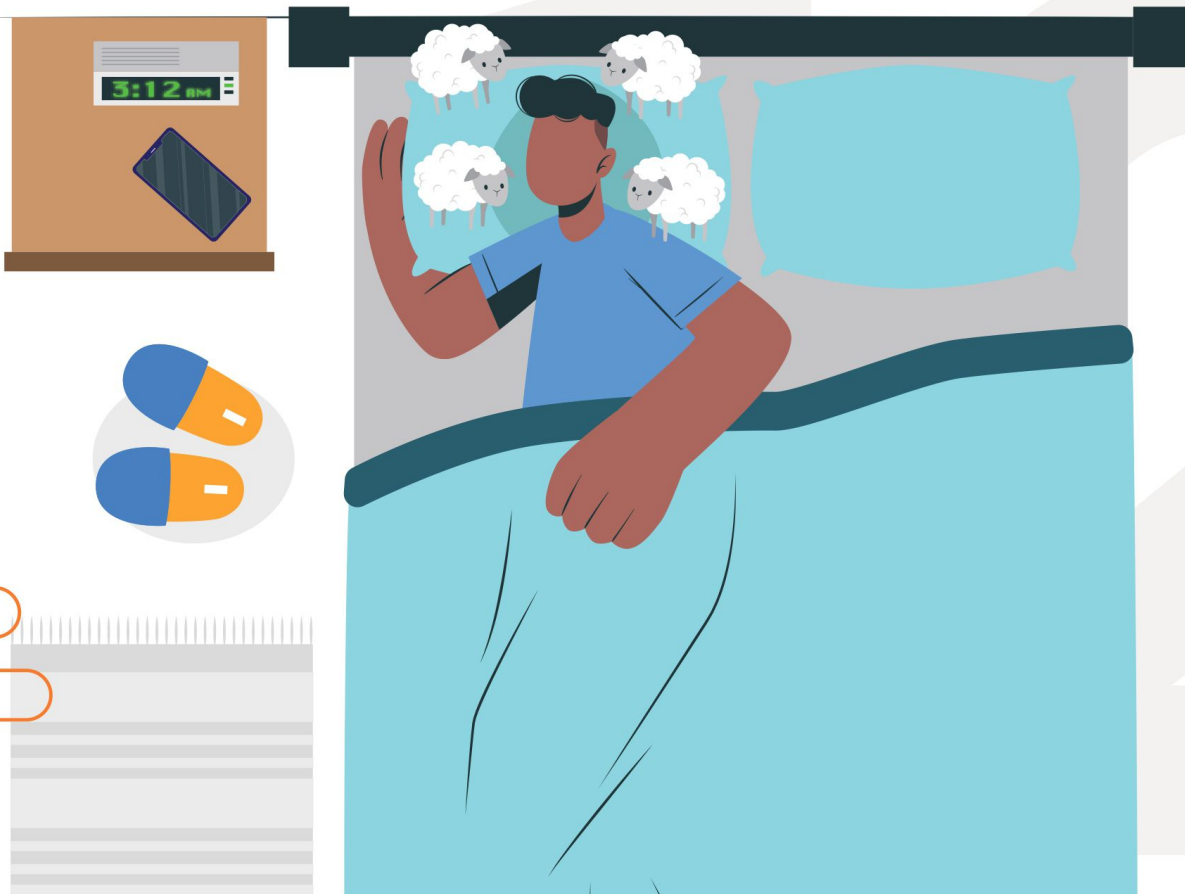


The importance of sleep

Lack of sleep may lead to countless troubles, including increased risk of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Sleep isn't just good for babies, to help them grow strong and healthy (and less cranky). It's also vital for the health of people of all ages. The fact that most people don't get enough sleep is well-documented as a challenge facing modern civilisation.

Pro Tip

Your body has a lot of important work to do while you sleep. Do your best to get a good night's rest and remember to consult a healthcare professional if you have trouble doing so.



Coping with worry

Feeling powerless or vulnerable often leads to worry. You may become focused on the anticipated negative result of an event or focus on “worst-case scenarios.” While there is no way to predict the future or know how things may work out, there are many steps you can take to manage your reaction to worry.

Pro Tip

You can manage worry by talking to supportive people, focusing on the positive, staying present or engaging in physical activity.



The power of patience

Learning how to be patient is a challenge for many people. It's not unusual to feel some urgency about achieving goals and dreams. Patience is the ability to consider the best course of action rather than reacting instinctively to events. Three qualities that are common in people with patience include persistence, calmness and resilience.

Pro Tip

Patience is a quality that can be developed over time. If you are looking for ways to improve your patience levels, try looking at problems in a different way by asking how they could result in good outcomes or reminding yourself that frustration is temporary.



15

Improving your mental wellness

Mental health is a key factor in overall wellbeing. People who struggle with stress, anxiety, depression, or a diagnosed mental health condition may feel the impact on their physical health too.

Pro Tip

Improve your mood and increase your mental wellness by acknowledging your condition, taking action, seeking balance or seeking support from loved ones or a professional.



16

How to build resilience

Resilience is the ability to persevere or adapt when things go wrong, overcome obstacles, bounce back from major setbacks and reach out and expand your world.

Pro Tip

Proactive strategies to build your resilience include looking after your physical health, making some lifestyle changes, using your support network and working on your mindset.



The importance of mindfulness

Focusing on the present moment helps us become aware of our passing negative thoughts, acknowledge that they are there without passing any judgment, and realising that those thoughts are not an accurate depiction of reality. Through mindfulness, people can view their thoughts as being less powerful and more distorted, allowing them to pass by easily. Part of being mindful is being able to develop and use your “felt sense,” meaning that you know how to be fully aware of the processes of your body, your breathing, your heart rate, and the sounds that you hear.

Pro Tip

Mindfulness can be extremely helpful if you are aiming to improve the cognitive symptoms of depression that can impair every area of a person’s life. For example, poor concentration can have a negative impact on your job or schoolwork. Negative thinking can also lead to negative emotions, which only deepens one’s depression.



Mental health during COVID-19

The new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues take time to get used to. Adapting to lifestyle changes such as these and managing the fear of contracting the virus and worry about people close to us who are particularly vulnerable, are challenging for all of us. They can be particularly difficult for people with mental health conditions.

Pro Tip

Things that we can do to look after our own mental health include staying informed, keeping to a routine, minimising newsfeed, screen time and social media.



Your mental health and exercise

Most of us know that we need to get some exercise. The body needs movement in order to function properly. Exercise is good for managing weight, maintaining muscle mass, healthy circulation and breathing as well as improved brain function. Exercise is also great for managing stress because it gets our heart rate up and our body releases endorphins. This helps us to feel and function better because the endorphins can improve our mood and self-esteem, and the quality of our sleep, which can be disrupted by anxiety.

Pro Tip

It may seem like effort, but every aspect of your life will benefit from exercise. By dedicating just half an hour a day to movement – which is less than most people spend on social media – you get less stress, better sleep, improved muscle tone, better self-confidence, better brain function, and a healthier body overall. In both the short term and the long run, it's a great bargain!



Many people do not want to speak about suicide because they worry the discussion may trigger suicidal tendencies. This concern, however, is a myth. Studies have shown that acknowledging and discussing suicide can, in fact, have the opposite effect.

Pro Tip

Talking about suicide can actually reduce, rather than increase suicidal thoughts. It may also lead to improvements in mental health in populations that lack mental health treatment.



The importance of self-care during difficult times

With so much going on in the world, our attention is taken away from normal life and self-care. This is only normal as difficult times are likely to disrupt your essential self-care routine. Without proper self-care, you can easily find yourself going down a slippery slope of unhealthy habits which can have harmful effects on your overall wellbeing.

Pro Tip

Adopt the habit and attitude of making your mental and physical wellbeing a priority. If you feel overwhelmed questioning where to start, you can simply start by sleeping enough, eating food that nourishes your body, and being more active.



Managing your emotions

Have you ever said something out of anger that you later regretted? Do you let fear talk you out of taking the risks that could really benefit you? If so, you're not alone. Emotions are powerful. Gaining control over your emotions will help you become mentally stronger. Just like any other skill, managing your emotions requires practice and dedication.

Pro Tip

Managing your emotions is tough at times. There will likely be a specific emotion, like anger, that sometimes gets the best of you. But the more time and attention you spend on regulating your emotions, the mentally stronger you'll become. You'll gain confidence in your ability to handle discomfort while also knowing that you can make healthy choices that shift your mood.



The importance of setting goals

If you want to increase your self-confidence and resilience, setting a goal might be just what you need. Trying something new or taking on a project is a great way to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

Pro Tip

Before you choose a goal, take some time for self-reflection. Consider your hopes, fears, resources, and any obligations you may have to others. This step is especially important if the goal you're setting requires a long-term commitment (such as buying a home or studying towards a degree). Keep in mind that you are more likely to accomplish goals that are detailed and specific. After you have chosen a goal, create a plan for completion.



Coping with Loneliness

Loneliness is bad for your health in the short and long term. You are likely to feel pessimistic about life in general and will be prone to depression and a suppressed immune system. Because you already feel rejected, you are likely going to find it difficult to make new connections with others or to deepen existing ones. Instead of letting yourself be, you are more likely to retreat into your own little world and avoid any situations that will expose you to further rejection.

Pro Tip

The most important first step to take when you feel alone is to take the initiative to make contact. You might feel scared to take this step, but it involves taking small emotional risks which have a decent chance of giving positive results in the long term.



Dealing with mental health stigma and discrimination

Stigma is a major cause of discrimination and exclusion. It affects people's self-esteem, disrupts their family relationships and limits their ability to socialise and obtain housing and jobs. It slows down the prevention of mental health disorders, the enhancement of mental wellbeing and the provision of effective treatment and care. It also contributes to the abuse of human rights.

Pro Tip

Other's judgments almost always stem from a lack of understanding rather than information based on facts. Learning to accept your condition and recognise what you need to do to treat it, seeking support, and helping educate others can make a big difference



26

Building healthy relationships

There are multiple reasons why you may be experiencing relationship issues such as communication issues, dealing with disagreements, financial issues, etc. Dealing with such issues is an individual process and unique to every person and couple. Every couple is faced with their own challenges within their own relationships and different things may work for different couples.

Pro Tip

Often you don't know the strength of your relationship until you are presented with a difficult situation. If you want your relationship to last, build a strong bond that can weather the storm and recover from the aftermath. The success of your relationship depends on how you respond individually and as a couple to the changes and challenges that life presents.



Understanding conflict

Conflict can arise at any time. How you utilise conflict resolution strategies depends on both your conflict style and conflict resolution skills. There are many different ways to respond to conflict situations; some conflict styles involve a considerate or cooperative approach while others involve either a competitive or passive approach.

Pro Tip

When you understand how you handle conflict, you can begin to understand when your approach is effective and when it is not. Then you can learn to adapt your behaviour and draw from different conflict resolution styles as the situation demands.



Overflow of information during COVID-19

It is important to stay up to date with the news and reports on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, at times it may feel like you are being overloaded with information all at once. For the sake of your wellbeing, you will need to manage the overflow of information.

Pro Tip

You can deal with information overflow by checking in with yourself and assess how you are doing, physically and mentally, ensuring that you are empowering yourself and those around you with the right information and finding a balance the information you engage in.

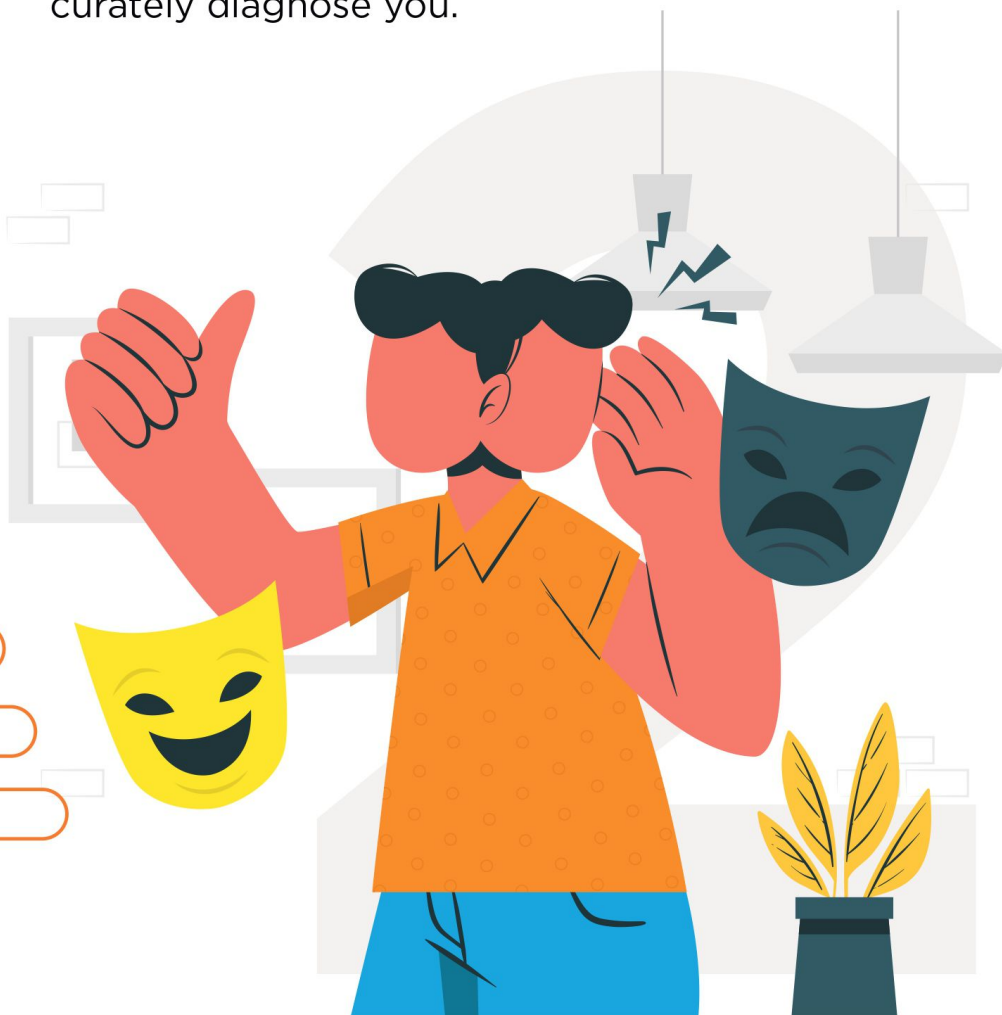


Living with bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is one of the most stigmatised and misunderstood of all the mental health conditions. Affecting every aspect of the individual's life, it can impact greatly on their everyday productivity. It also rarely stands alone and is most often accompanied by depression and anxiety. And it's highly unlikely that any two individuals living with the condition will experience it in the same way.

Pro Tip

Bipolar is not a rare medical condition. If you think you may have bipolar disorder, it is important to reach out to a licensed psychiatrist who can accurately diagnose you.



30

Dealing with financial stress

If you are experiencing financial stress, especially due to COVID-19, you may be tempted to use unhealthy coping behaviours to manage your stress. While these behaviours may feel like stress reducers at first, they may ultimately add more anxiety to your life. Common unhealthy coping behaviours include overeating, excessive drinking, overuse of over-the-counter medications, excess caffeine consumption, smoking, gambling and shopping.

Pro Tip

Unhealthy coping behaviours may lead to health complications, emotional stress, and even more financial worries. Instead of helping, these behaviours could make the situation worse. It is important to focus on healthy ways to cope with stress, financial and otherwise. These include exercising, eating healthy foods, listening to calming music, taking a long walk, writing in a journal, doing yoga, using meditation or breathing techniques, reading or talking to a trusted friend or family member.

