

# 5 signs it's time to take a mental health day

Nearly two-thirds of Australians believe that workplace factors have negatively impacted their mental health. We uncover the five signs that show it's time to take a mental health day and how to ask your boss for one.

Talking about mental health and wellbeing is still not common in the workplace. But these conversations are more important than ever.

Recent SEEK research uncovered that 72% of Australians believe that workplace factors have negatively impacted their mental health, and more than half (55%) have felt the need to take a mental health day but haven't actually done so.

## **How your mental wellbeing impacts your work**

People with positive levels of mental health and wellbeing at work are usually those who can cope with normal stresses, are productive and tend to realise their full potential. "In contrast, mental illness is associated with higher levels of presenteeism (when you're not well at work and are not as productive), absenteeism, high staff turnover, and reduced work performance and productivity," says psychologist Sabina Read.

For many of us, if we see something that compromises our physical safety at work we do something about it. Our mental health should be no different.

"The reality is that we need to attend to our mental health everyday," says Read. "As parents, we can't ignore our children 50 weeks of the year, then hope a trip to Disneyland will create a loving relationship. Likewise, our mental health requires regular attention to keep us feeling motivated, productive and able to cope with the demands of life."

## **The 5 signs it's time to take a mental health day**

According to Read, it's important to distinguish between taking a mental health day because we are being proactive with our mental health, as opposed to if we can't be bothered going to work.

"Taking a mental health day often reflects the behaviour of someone who is being proactive with their mental health and may actually be well versed in identifying the signs that it's time to refill the tank," she says.

Read says there are five emotional, behavioural, physical and cognitive signs that show it's time to take a day off work:

1. Negative or pessimistic thinking, or personalising other people's negativity, comments or feedback
2. Feeling frustrated, short-tempered, stressed, intolerant or low
3. Withdrawing socially
4. Increasing frequency of physical issues including gut and gastro-related ailments, headaches, skin conditions and a compromised immune system
5. Sleeping concerns including trouble going to sleep or waking throughout the night

## **What mental health days won't fix**

"One day away from work can help to create perspective and re-set," says Read.

"However, ongoing strategies are needed to ensure a more long-term and sustainable sense of wellbeing."

For people with moderate to severe mental health conditions, a mental health day can form one part of a long-term management strategy that also involves the input of mental health professionals.

## **Asking your boss for a mental health day**

It's not always easy asking for a mental health day. SEEK research found that one in

four (24%) of Australians have lied about taking a day off for their own mental health, despite most agreeing (83%) that their colleagues should be allowed a mental health day.

When speaking with your boss, simple and direct communication is usually best. “There’s no need to offer specific details of mental health issues if they aren’t directly impacting your job, however it’s useful to share that you’re feeling overwhelmed or struggling, and addressing this through taking a day (or more) off to attend to your wellbeing is important,” Read says.

Ignoring mental health concerns doesn’t make them go away, and in fact, not looking after your mental wellbeing can compound the issues. By looking out for the five signs that you need a mental health day and speaking openly and honestly to your boss about it, most of us can quickly feel revitalised and reengaged at work.