

Complex dynamics of mental health can be avoided, advises Thebemed

Absenteeism costs the South African economy between R12 billion and R16 billion a year, according to Statistics South Africa. Stress has been identified as one of the primary causes of this epidemic of ill health. In fact, South Africa is the world's second-most stressed country, says a research study by Bloomberg.

February is Healthy Lifestyle Awareness month, the perfect opportunity to take stock of the impact our high-stress environment is having on our lives, and particularly on our ability to be productive. Workplace stress, burn-out and high anxiety levels can impact our ability to work, and thus harm our careers and add to the burdens of our colleagues.

“If we often find ourselves in stressful environment, we are bound affected and the effect can be both mental and physical, robbing us of so much,” says Sibongile Mamafha, Principal Executive of Thebemed. “While the dynamics of mental health are complex, there are some simple actions we can take to give us the best chance of living the best life possible.”

Mamafha offers the following five steps to better mental health:

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Get good nutrition.** “You are what your food ate,” she says. “Understand the food groups and how to combine them properly. Your body and mind are closely linked.”

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Exercise regularly.** Exercise keeps the body limber, but it also helps to promote well-being and reduce stress. It doesn't mean joining an expensive gym, either—a brisk 30-minute walk five times a week will get the blood flowing and clear the mind, especially if done in the company of a family member or friend.

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Get enough sleep.** The more stressed we are, the more sleep we need—and don't get. “Stress and the always-on digital lifestyle overstimulate us, making it hard to sleep, but seven or eight hours is necessary,” says Mamafha. “There are certain techniques to promote sleep, and your medical aid can help you find them out.”

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Take “me time”.** Low self-esteem and

job insecurity can mean that people take on too much at work or home. It's important to set some time aside to do things that you enjoy, and just to be quiet and connect with yourself. Holidays are also important for mental health, and thus the finding by Ipsos Global and Reuters that more than half (53 percent) of the South African working population does not take its annual leave is concerning.

[if !supportLists]· [endif]**Talk about it, and ask for help if necessary.** If you do feel you are not coping, talk about how you are feeling to a trusted friend, colleague or family member.

“Remember too that employers and medical aids are very aware of the problem, and will have programmes on offer to help—use them,” says Mamafha. “They are totally confidential, so you won’t run the risk of your boss finding out!”