

Returning to the workplace?

NOT
myself
TODAY®

Here are ten ways to take care of your mental health

Returning to work or the workplace can make for difficult transitions. Whether it's returning after an extended leave or following a global pandemic, many people will experience mixed emotions during these times of change. It is important for you to take care of yourself, so here are ten ways to look after your own mental health and well-being, using tools you already have from **Not Myself Today**.

1 Prepare physically.

Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating well, and staying active. Taking care of yourself physically can improve your ability to handle any stress you might feel making the transition back.

2 Prepare mentally.

Take some time to think about the changes and potential challenges you may face in the coming weeks and months. Create an inventory of the skills and tools you already have that will help with this transition, along with any resources that might help. Acknowledge potential challenges and notice how you are responding to them. The Resource Sheet *Coping with Crisis and Change* in the *Addressing Stress* learning module offers excellent suggestions for responding to change and stress.

3 Plan ahead.

Schedule things to look forward to — like days off, self-care, and breaks — and block them off in your calendar. This will give you time to refresh and recharge.



4 Adapt to new routines.

Here's one example. You may be worried or stressed about your commute. Why not practice? Try out the commute a few times in advance. You might want to go slowly and work your way up. If it's safe to take public transportation, try a short trip on transit (or however you commute) and then build up to your full commute.

5 Balance your priorities.

It's easy to get caught up in whatever you're dealing with at work. But you can get ahead of your stress by building in balance. Things like your family, a hobby, or something small like finding a few moments to laugh during the workday, can be part of this balance. Then make sure to dedicate time to your personal priorities: take your breaks and finish the workday on schedule.

6 Practice your coping skills.

Or develop new ones. Choose what works for you, whether it's mindfulness, breathing exercises, meditation, or physical activity. Maybe it's confiding in someone you trust, spending time with loved ones, or spending time outside. Then there's the simple and effective practice of breaking down overwhelming tasks into smaller, manageable steps. For more on how to build your coping skills, check out Not Myself Today's *De-stress Dice* in the *Addressing Stress* module.

7 Take your time.

The *Return to the Workplace Toolkit* is an excellent resource from CMHA Ontario. It advises organizations how to return to the workplace in a staged approach. Employees can do the same. Let yourself take your time with your personal return. Maybe your employer is offering flexibility during the phased approach. If so, you can make use of those flexible working conditions, if you need them.

8 Communicate.

Talk to your manager or employer if you're having difficulty, need support or accommodation, or if you have questions. They might not have the answer immediately, but if they're going to help, they will have to know what you need. Your colleagues may also be dealing with their own return to the workplace challenges, so maybe you can support each other. If you're unsure how to have this conversation, check out the *Let's Get Talking* cards or the newly updated Resource Sheet *Navigating Disclosure*, both in the *Talking Openly* learning module.

9 Be kind and compassionate.

Extending kindness toward someone can make their day, especially now when there's so much change. Don't forget yourself though. Take a minute to pat yourself on the back for the good work you do. You can read up on *Quick and Easy Ways to Practice Gratitude Every Day* in the *Building Culture* learning module.

10 Breathe.

We covered this in coping skills, but we think it deserves a mention of its own. Breathing exercises are an excellent way to take a quick, discreet moment for yourself. If you're unsure how to start, there are excellent sessions in *Mindful Moments Meditations* in the *Addressing Stress* learning module.

Citations

- 1 Brown, Robin & Abuatiq, Alham. (2020). *Resilience as a strategy to survive organizational change*. Nursing Management: 51(2). pp. 16-21. DOI: 10.1097/01.NUMA.0000651180.42231.ef
- 2 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (July 2021). *A third of Canadians report moderate to severe anxiety over return to pre-pandemic routines*. Retrieved on August 13, 2021, from: <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/a-third-of-canadians-report-anxiety-over-return-to-pre-pandemic-routines>
- 3 Hogger, M. S., Keech, J. J., & Hamilton, K. (2020). *Managing stress during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and beyond: Reappraisal and mindset approaches*. Stress and health: Journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress. 36(3), pp. 396-401. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2969>
- 4 Horan, K.A. (2018). *Mindfulness and self-compassion as tools in health behavior change: An evaluation of a workplace intervention pilot study*. Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2018.02.003>
- 5 Mickel, A. E. (2019). *Manage Stress to Tackle Mental Health Problems in the Workplace*. Archives of Psychology, 3.7. Retrieved on August 24, 2021, from: <https://archivesofpsychology.org/index.php/aop/article/view/126>
- 6 Riccardo, S., Arianna, C., Andrea, C. & Francesco, T. (2018) *How Do You Manage Change in Organizations? Training, Development, Innovation, and Their Relationships*. Frontiers in Psychology. 9(2018). pp. 313-24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00313>
- 7 Shaw, W.S., Main, C.J., Findley, P.A. et al. *Opening the Workplace After COVID-19: What Lessons Can be Learned from Return-to-Work Research?* Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation. 30, pp. 299-302 (2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-020-09908-9>