

Spring & Mental Health

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND PREVENTIVE MENTAL HEALTH FOR FIRST RESPONDERS



HEALTH & EXERCISE

HEALTHIER EATING:

- Bring healthy lunch options to work (Remember, if it grows naturally that will usually be a healthy choice)
- Choose healthier options at the restaurants you frequent (For ex. when at McDonalds choose: Fruit & Maple oatmeal, egg McMuffin, southwest grilled chicken salad, Artisan grilled chicken sandwich)
- Always have nuts or an energy gel pack on your person for critical situations where you will not be able to get a break.
- Goal of 2-3 cups of vegetables and 1 ½ -2 cups of fruits a day.

EXERCISE OPTIONS:

- When possible, try to exercise when at work or create opportunities for movement.
- Stand rather than sit. Goal: Take a short walk or stand at least once each hour.
- Take the stairs or park farther from a store.
- Brush your teeth and do squats.
- Propose walking meetings.
- Socialize outdoors: i.e., walk your dog, play with your kids, meet friends for golf or join a league.
- Exercise while watching TV. For ex.- use weights, do calisthenics, sit-ups.

RELAXATION OPTIONS:

- Keep a positive, inspirational picture on your screen saver
- Look at funny or happy pictures or places.
- Plan a trip.
- Explore your “happy place” with your imagination with all 5 senses. A happy place is where you feel the happiest and most calm.
- Take a break and do deep breathing.
- Express gratitude from the smallest to the biggest areas in your life. (Enjoy your breath!)
- The happiest people are those who focus on what they have rather than what they do not.



SPRING AND CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS:

Being a first responder, you often have to work different hours, days, and/or shifts, which can negatively impact your mood and sleep. During spring, our circadian rhythms change with the increased length and intensity of sunlight, which also affect our sleep-wake cycles, energy, and mood.

Studies show that both suicide and manic episodes of bipolar disorder peak during the spring season due to the change in the circadian rhythm. During spring, we can also feel unhappy with our physical body in preparing for summer clothes and activities. Therefore, springtime is an important time of year to consider your mental health and trying new activities is one way to positively impact your mental health and fitness.

Due to the increase in sunlight, take advantage of outdoor activities. Challenge yourself in doing something new this spring for 30 to 90 days. Every day try something new, from something small to large. New things are good for our mental health and often gives us a release of dopamine, which is the feel-good hormone and neurotransmitter. Trying something new also can make us feel rewarded for our work and increase our overall confidence. Taking on a challenge often allows us to overcome our fears which often can stop us from trying new things.

New ideas List:

- Try a completely new food or recipe.
- Try a new route to and from work and/or parking spot.
- Learn a new skill (i.e. guitar, language, how to pick locks, juggle, computer software).
- Try a new activity in your community (painting, art, Pilates, yoga, stretch class).
- Volunteer or join a community group.
- Learn how to play chess or another challenging board or card game.
- Try EMDR or Virtual exposure therapy to combat anxiety and trauma.

SUICIDE RISK FACTORS:

Suicide also does not have one single cause. However, there are risk factors that increase the chance of trying or completing suicide which are:

- Increasing use or abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Expressing hopelessness or having no purpose
- Feeling trapped or unable to do anything
- Talking about ways to kill oneself, even jokingly
- Acting reckless/careless with one's life and/or others
- Withdrawing or isolating from others
- Rage/extreme irritability or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings
- Work deviance
- History of severe mental illness or prior attempts
- Watching/talking/reading/writing about death and dying; look on social media)
- Stigma about mental illness and getting help

It is common for people who have decided to kill themselves to talk about it, display signs, and may seem more at peace prior to the act. If you think someone is at risk, reach out and ask them or get professional guidance. Call FRWC at 630-909-9094 for guidance or use a 24-hour Crisis Line for First Responders

Safe Call Now: 1-206-459-3020

Cop-2-Cop: 1-866-267-2267

Illinois FF peer support 855-90-SUPPORT

Share the Load 888-275-6832





Being a first responder is hard work, this is why only about 1% of the population are first responders. You are part of the top 1% of the US population, congratulate yourself and your co-workers!

Another 8 reasons to seek therapy or encourage someone you know:

- 1) You or they are having nightmares or daymares.
- 2) You or they do not want to go to in progress calls and do things to get to the call late and/or to avoid them.
- 3) You or they are feeling like they do not care if they are alive or die today.
- 4) You or they fear they are going to hurt themselves or someone else but do not want to.
- 5) You or they are taking risks on calls that they usually do not do.
- 6) You or they have a noticeable rapid heart rate, high respiration, sweating, and trembling when thinking about a call or situation.
- 7) You or they are drinking alcohol to stop feeling emotions and to numb out.
- 8) You or they are not socializing for fearing they are going to be judged negatively or will be embarrassed by something they say or do.

First Responders Wellness Center Locations:

477 E. Butterfield Road Suite 408-410
Lombard, IL 60148

100 Tri State International Suite 260
Lincolnshire, IL 60069

1412 W. Washington Blvd. 2nd floor
Chicago, IL 60607

Telehealth (Any location, use from any phone or computer)

Contact: M-F 9-5 pm: (630) 796-2961
After hours: (630) 909- 9094
info@firstresponderswellnesscenter.com