

Working Through the Bad Days

Every one of us has them: a tough day, a hard week, a turbulent time at home. We can't always head them off. As a result, there are times when we all need help getting through the workday. Here are some ways to get through those hard times.

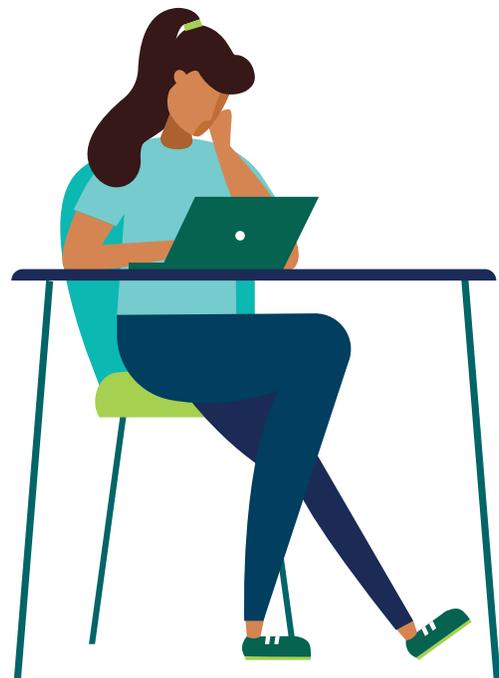
While at work:

1

Change things up.

When it's possible, change your workflow on days when you're struggling. Depending on your role: ^{1, 2, 3, 6}

- Try working on the simpler aspects of your job, such as tasks you generally complete when there's downtime at work, instead of something that requires a lot of energy or attention to detail.
- If you're having trouble making progress or getting started, try switching to a task that piques your interest or that you feel is a meaningful part of your work.
- Try adding memory aids or other supports. So, if for example, you find you're forgetting things, try taking more detailed notes.
Tip: Did you know you can automatically transcribe your meetings (in programs like MS Teams)? That way you can focus on listening in the moment and refer to the notes later.



2

Set reasonable expectations for yourself.

When you are having a bad day or a tough time, it can be hard to perform to your usual standards. Don't make it harder by beating yourself up. Try a little reset of your own expectations and respond to yourself with a little kindness and compassion. Recognize that certain tasks might need more time or a different approach, and that's simply ok. ^{1, 4, 5, 6}

If you're having trouble resetting expectations either for yourself or for your day, try consulting **Not Myself Today's** *Train Your Brain* resource. It can help you pinpoint where you might be getting stuck.

3

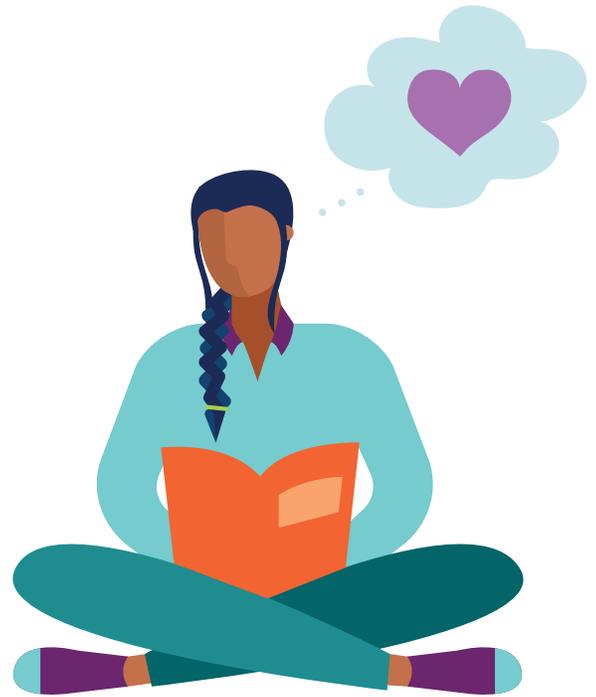
Take the day (and your tasks) one step at a time.

When you're already feeling bad, getting through the entire workday — or even a single task — can seem daunting or even impossible. Try breaking things down into smaller, easier-to-manage steps. So, for instance, instead of thinking about your whole day, decide what you'll work on in the first half of the day (or experiment with how to split up your workday). Then identify the first thing you'll do, and then the very first step of that task. Then, the next step and the next after that. After your first task is complete, move on to Task #2, and then 3 and 4. Before you know it, you'll have conquered your to-do list.^{3, 4, 6}

4

Connect with others.

If you feel the impulse to isolate, know that connecting with a colleague can help you feel better. It's also a chance to ask for help or support if you need it. You don't have to go it alone. Ask a colleague to have a virtual or in-person coffee break together. Give a close and trusted colleague a quick call. If there are social events at work, try to go.^{5, 8}



5

Take feel-good breaks.

It's important to take your allotted breaks, and it's equally important to make them count. Take time to move away from your work area, do some stretches or other movement, listen to music, meditate or ground yourself. You can try different options. They're your breaks, so you get to choose.^{4, 5, 6}

For more ideas, check out the Resource Sheet [*Tips to De-Stress at Work*](#) on the **Not Myself Today** Portal.

6

If you need help, ask for it.

Trusted co-workers or supervisors may be able to offer assistance or guidance when you are struggling. Are there wellness programs, like an EAP (Employee Assistance Program)? Make good use of them. If you have extended health benefits, use them to access help from a professional.^{4, 7}

Take a breather if you can.

A little extra time for yourself could make the difference. Do you have sick days, work-life balance time, vacation, or other paid time off available? Are flexible working hours possible? Be sure you know what you're entitled to and make use of your entitlements when you need them.^{2, 4}

Keep in mind that if you need extended sick leave or accommodations related to a mental illness, you should speak with a health care professional. You may also want, or need, to discuss it with someone in your workplace. For more information on having these conversations see the Resource Sheet [Navigating Disclosure, Accommodation, and Related Conversations](#).

Remember it's okay to have bad days.

You are not alone. Everybody has them. Remind yourself that it's okay to feel down. Putting on an "I'm okay face" all the time is likely to weigh on you, further sapping your energy and mental resources.^{3, 5, 7, 8}

Besides what you can do at work, here are some strategies for taking care of yourself off the job:

- 1 Focus on things you can "stabilize." Basic routines around food, hygiene and activities you enjoy can give you a sense of stability when life feels chaotic. And continuing to care for yourself when you're not feeling well can help you bounce back more quickly.^{2, 4, 5, 7}
- 2 Make time for yourself. Whether or not you are able to take extra time off work, make good use of the time you do have to care for yourself. Do the things that bring you joy or allow you to rest. It can be difficult to prioritize the things you do for fun or to relax, but spending time and energy on things you enjoy can improve your well-being both inside and outside of work.^{4, 5, 7, 8}
- 3 Ask for help if you need it from a doctor or therapist, or even a trusted friend.

Please keep in mind, if you've had many 'bad days' in a row or you're struggling with symptoms of a mental illness, there is help available. The following resources might be a good place to start.

- **Not Myself Today** Resource Sheet: [Mental Health and Mental Illness 101](#)
- How to find help, CMHA National cmha.ca/find-help/how-to-get-help
- Information on Mental Illnesses, CMHA National cmha.ca/find-info/mental-illness
- Information on Mental Health, CMHA National cmha.ca/find-info/mental-health
- Find your local CMHA cmha.ca/find-help/find-cmha-in-your-area
- Find support at Wellness Together Canada and through the app, PocketWell, wellnesstogether.ca

Citations

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- 2 Carré, L. (August 2019). *How to manage your mental illness at work*. New York Times: www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/smarter-living/how-to-manage-mental-illness-at-work.html
- 3 Johnson, E. (April 2017). *Living with depression: how to keep working*. National Alliance on Mental Illness: www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/April-2017/Living-with-Depression-How-to-Keep-Working
- 4 Lindburg, S. (December 2021). *How to take care of your mental health on the job*. Healthline. www.healthline.com/health/depression/work-depression#what-you-can-do
- 5 Mickel, A. E. (2019). *Manage Stress to Tackle Mental Health Problems in the Workplace*. Archives of Psychology, 37. Retrieved from: <https://archivesofpsychology.org/index.php/aop/article/view/126>
- 6 Gallow, A. (October 2015). *How to turn a bad day around*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2015/10/how-to-turn-a-bad-day-around>
- 7 Howatt, B., Bradley, L., Adams, J., Mahajan, S. & Kennedy, S. (2018). *Understanding mental health, mental illness, and their impacts in the workplace*. Mental Health Commission of Canada and Momeau Shepell: www.momeaushepell.com/sites/default/files/assets/permafiles/91381/understanding-mental-health-mental-illness-and-their-impacts-workplace.pdf
- 8 Bertilsson, M., Petersson, E.L., Östlund, G., Waern, M. & Hensing, G. (2015). *Capacity to work while depressed and anxious – a phenomenological study*. Disability and Rehabilitation, 35(20), 1705-1711. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2012.751155>