

# STAYING AT THE TOP OF OUR GAME

**Mental health is important, for our wellbeing as individuals and how we perform as a team. We need the right tools and support to keep us healthy and able to do our job well. Being mentally healthy is not necessarily about being free from problems. Everyone feels worried, anxious, sad or stressed at various times in their lives; this is perfectly normal. However, sometimes these thoughts and feelings do not go away, and are severe enough to interfere with daily life.**

How we are going at a point in time is influenced by life's circumstances and our resilience levels. While we are a predominantly healthy population, sometimes the nature of our role or what is going on in our broader life can place extra demands on us. And sometimes it is the cumulative impact of events (our relationships, personal experiences, finances, physical health, job demands and family wellbeing) rather than just one thing, even in circumstances where we have previously thrived. Over time, and left unchecked, this can start to affect our health, including the way we think, feel and act. Even positive events like a promotion can sometimes be stressful and impact on things like our mood, sleeping patterns, confidence and interactions.

How we react will depend on the range of things going on in our lives, our prior experiences, resilience and coping skills, and levels of support. The NZDF Mental Health Continuum shows how mental health can shift over time in response to life events and other factors, and that at any point in time everyone will sit somewhere along the continuum between peak performance and mental illness.

None of us are immune to mental health issues; according to the Ministry of Health one in five New Zealanders will experience mental illness or addiction in any one year, and one in six will report a diagnosis of anxiety or depression in their lifetime. So that probably means that you or someone you know isn't at the top of their game right now.

So what can we do to stay at the top of our game, what should we do if we notice one of our mates is not

tracking so well, and what can what kind of support is available if we need it?

### What's available in terms of information and support?

The NZDF provides a wide range of information and support for health issues spanning the four domains of health (Te Whare Tapa Wha – Physical, Mental, Social and Spiritual Health).

These span a focus on prevention through education and training to promote resilience, early recognition and seeking help, as well as care. Health professionals, psychologists, chaplains, EAP and family and social service providers are located on Camps and Bases ready to provide support and assistance.

The NZDF also has a 24/7 helpline staffed by trained health professionals for veterans, all members of the NZDF and their families. We are also working on a range of new programmes and resources, so keep an eye out for new things coming your way soon.

### Defence Health Website – <http://health.nzdf.mil.nz>

This is our new website and it's accessible on the internet (so any member of the defence community including friends and family can access this). Here you can find a range of health information and tools spanning the four domains of health – Mind, Body, Soul and Whanau. There are also links to a range of additional self management resources and helpful support.

### Staying At The Top of Your Game

This is a new resource for the defence community that you can find on our websites or in hard copy at our defence libraries and Health Treatment Centres. SATOYG provides a range of health information and tools that span the four domains of health – Mind, Body, Soul and Whanau. You can read about common life challenges and diverse topics such as nutrition tips, why exercise is important, sleeping well, living life with meaning and

## The NZDF Mental Health Continuum

	HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<b>MOOD</b>	Normal mood fluctuations; Calm and takes things in stride	Irritable/Impatient; Nervous; Sadness/overwhelmed	Anger; Anxiety; Pervasively sad/hopeless	Angry outbursts/aggression; Excessive anxiety/panic attacks; Depressed/suicidal thoughts
<b>ATTITUDE</b>	Good sense of humour; Performing well; In control mentally	Displaced sarcasm; Procrastination; Forgetfulness	Negative attitude; Poor performance or workaholic; Poor concentration/decisions	Overt insubordination; Can't perform duties/control behaviour or concentrate
<b>SLEEP</b>	Normal sleep patterns; Few sleep difficulties	Trouble sleeping; Intrusive thoughts; Nightmares	Restless disturbed sleep; Recurrent images/nightmares	Can't fall asleep or stay asleep; Sleeping too much or too little
<b>PHYSICAL HEALTH</b>	Physically well; Good energy level	Muscle tension/headaches; Low energy	Increased aches and pains; Increased fatigue	Physical illnesses; Constant fatigue
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Physically and socially active	Decreased activity/socialising	Avoidance; Withdrawal	Not going out or answering phone
<b>HABITS</b>	No/limited drug and alcohol use/gambling	Regular but controlled drug and alcohol use/gambling	Increased drug and alcohol use/gambling – hard to control	Frequent drug and alcohol or gambling use – inability to control with severe consequences

purpose, and maintaining healthy relationships and finances. At the back of the resource you'll find links to useful apps and websites spanning a range of health topics. You can find a copy on our websites and at libraries and Health treatment Centres.

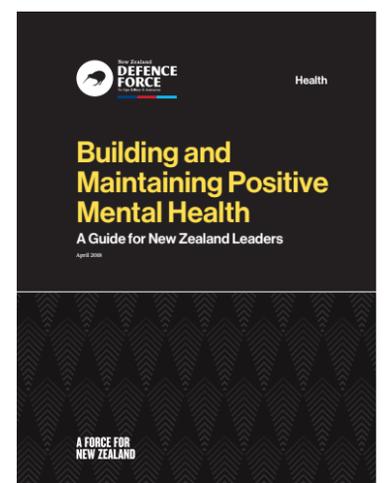
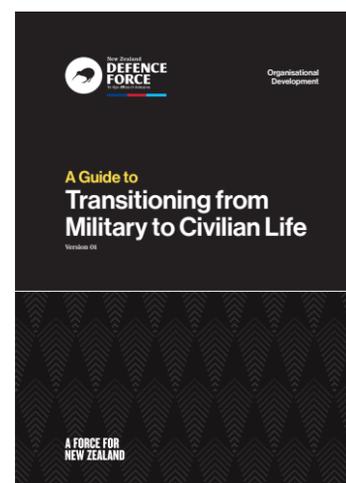
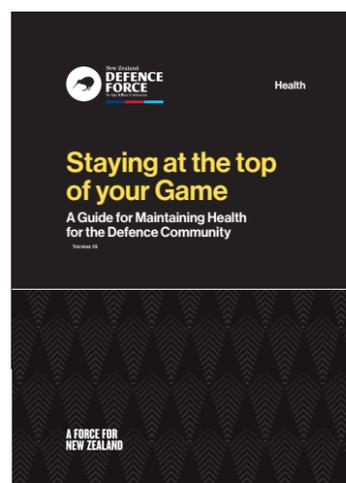
### Mental Health Pocketbook

This has a list of signs to look out for that might indicate when we are not going ok (changes in behaviour, mood, thoughts etc), as well as tips and helpful resources. – You can find a copy on our websites and at libraries and Health Treatment Centres.

### Mental Health Website – <http://orgs/sites/nzdf-mh/default.aspx>

Here you can find a range of self management resources and information about recognising the signs of mental health issues (what we are feeling, thinking and doing), how to take action, and where to go for help if we need it. There's also information for families and a resource toolkit with a list of helplines, useful phone apps and websites, and links to the Mental Health Foundation toolkit with information about your rights as an employee and your responsibilities as a manager.

## Information & support resources





### Stigma and Asking for help

Sometimes we don't ask for help because we don't recognise we have a problem or we don't think it's a biggie and we can sort it ourselves. Most of us don't want to be a burden or the centre of attention, and chances are we're also worried about what others might think and how it might affect our career. We forget that sometimes we can't go it alone, seeking help early will help get us back on the top of our game more quickly and that it's a sign of strength to call for reinforcements and the right thing to do for ourselves, our team and our loved ones.

We don't treat mental health the same way as physical health but we need to. We'll go to a doctor if we sprain an ankle but if we aren't sleeping properly and flying off the handle at work and at home, things will usually need to hit some crisis before we ask for help.

### Leaders guide for building and maintaining positive mental health

We don't need to be in a formal leadership role to be a leader. This guide can be found on our internal websites (Mental Health, Institute for Leadership Development, and HR toolkit) and provides tips for leaders about maintaining positive mental health in the workplace. Included in this guide is information about how to recognise the signs that people are not going ok and what you can do to support them.

### Resilience training and the Big 4

Resilience training is now included in all recruit training and subsequent promotion courses. This covers off a range of information about staying resilient, signs to look at for when we are not tracking ok, and what we can do to help ourselves and others. You can find more information about the Big 4 tools for staying resilient (tactical breathing, flexible thinking, optimism and healthy habits) in the Pocketbook or on the mental health website.

### Force for Families – <http://nzdf.mil.nz/families/>

A website for friends and families who support our soldiers, officers, aircrew, sailors, and civilians.

### Transition Guide

A resource for supporting people through transition to help prepare for transition and make it a positive experience. You can find a copy at our libraries or electronically on the HR toolkit.

### Veterans – [www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz](http://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz)

Here you can find out more about your eligibility and entitlements for support as a veteran.

### Where can I get help?

Sometimes we can't go it alone but asking for help can be hard. Most of us will ask for help with physical injuries but are less likely to do so when it comes to mental health and some of life's broader challenges like relationships or financial problems). It's important to remember that there is no shame in seeking help when you are not going ok, and not doing so may inadvertently lead to letting your colleagues or loved ones down. No matter how difficult the space we are in seems, there's always a way forward. Even the more extreme mental health conditions seen in the NZDF respond well to treatment, and this is especially true if we come forward for help sooner rather than later. Read about other members journey's to recovery on our Our Stories page <http://health.nzdf.mil.nz/mind/our-stories/>

Talk to someone – your boss, a mate or a family member, or you can pop in or make an appointment for a chat with your local camp Chaplain, Psychologist, Social Worker, or a member of the Health support team. There's also a list of help lines and support resources you can go to if you don't feel comfortable approaching the NZDF for help. You can find these on our website or check out the Mental Health Foundation website.

0800 NZDF4U is a confidential helpline service 0800 NZDF4U (0800 693 348 or 0800 189 910) that offers telephone support for all members of the NZDF and their families. It's available 24/7 and is staffed by trained (external) health professionals. If the help you need can't be provided over the phone, follow up support is arranged using an external provider for up to three funded confidential sessions.

### What happens when we ask for help?

So what happens when we ask for help? You might initially approach your boss, PTI, padre, social worker, psych or someone else you know, but chances if you are uniformed you'll end up meeting with one of our doctors and if you are a civilian you'll be encouraged to go to EAP or your own doctor. They'll ask you to describe what is going on for you in order to diagnose the issue/problem. Sometimes being able to talk about what is going on helps and a recovery plan is quite straight forward. Chances are there's been a lot going on in life and it's a matter of taking some time to reflect and work out a plan of action. Sometimes, just as with a physical illness, you might need some time off work, you may be prescribed some medication and/or you may be referred externally for additional assessment or support.

During your recovery period it may not be wise for you to deploy, or there may be some other employment limitation placed on you. This is sometimes hard for people to get their head around but when you think about it just as it doesn't make sense to be walking carrying a rifle or driving a vehicle with a broken arm, it doesn't make sense to put you into a stressful environment if your resilience needs recharging. Your medical grading

is sometimes adjusted to reflect this, but once you have recovered, your medical grading will be reviewed and in most cases any restrictions lifted. Sometimes your command will need to be informed eg. if you need time off work or your deployability has changed, and sometimes, with your consent it will be helpful for your command to be involved in more detailed discussions about how to support your recovery (eg. about work duties and hours of work).

### Buddy support – What's Up? I'm here for you

Sometimes when we are in the thick of things we don't recognise we have a problem or think about things as clearly as usual – we can't see a way forward or even believe we are worth helping. Sometimes we don't notice how we have changed but others do – for example withdrawing from friends and family, become overly titchy or moody, or just not having the same get up and go. This is where our mates and family come in.

We need to keep an eye out for our mates and loved ones and expect them to do the same for us. Sometimes it's hard to know what to say, or be sure we are saying the right things. However it's surprising how helpful just being able to talk with someone we trust is for getting things off our chest and working out a plan of action. The main things are – listen and support, and ask what you can do to help. The Mental Health Pocketbook is a great resource for guiding discussion.

If you are worried about someone don't try and go it alone. You can get confidential advice from one of our health professionals (medical, psych, chaplains, social workers or for defence civilians speak to a HRA (Human Resource Advisor) about options for support. It is important that if you are really concerned about someone that you talk to your boss or one of the Health team. If you as a family member are concerned about the wellbeing of a loved one, you can call our 0800NZDF4U helpline number.

### Remember

- The 0800NDF4U is a 24/7 helpline available to all members of the defence community including our veterans and families.
- If you are a civilian you can also contact EAP (Vitae) directly on 0508 664 981 or find out more about EAP on the HR Toolkit at [http://orgs/imx/hr-toolkit/LP/ww\\_w\\_ws\\_eap.aspx](http://orgs/imx/hr-toolkit/LP/ww_w_ws_eap.aspx).
- If you are a Veteran you can call 0800VETERANS
- If you are a family member check out the Force4Families website – [www.nzdf.mil.nz/families/default.htm](http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/families/default.htm)
- In an emergency call 111