



membership

For better mental health

ISSUE 03 **SPRING 2011**
www.mind.org.uk

news



Mind week 2011
Mental health
at work

**Eastender Derek Martin on family,
pets and why we should talk**

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In the next issue

The Great Outdoors: how keeping active can boost mental health. Running a marathon or digging spuds – whatever you do out of doors can improve your mood. Crosswords can also work wonders, so celebrate your indoor pursuits with us too. Tell us what you get up to at: membership@mind.org.uk



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welcome



Landing a job you love is a challenge for anyone. Having just been recruited – I'm delighted to say! – as the new Mind Membership News editor, I know how nerve-wracking interviews can be. Not to mention all the new faces when you start.

But a working life provides us with the opportunity to enjoy success, to contribute and to fulfil our potential. Being in work, and being happy there, should be an option for everyone.

At present, just one in five people with long term mental health problems is in work. Others – over 200,000 – flow onto incapacity benefit. Mental wellbeing at work is neglected: one in five employees calls in sick because of stress but hardly anyone admits to it.

That's why Mind week 2011 is tackling workplace discrimination against people with mental health issues. Read all about the campaign, Taking care of business, and how you can help, on pages 8-11.

On page 7 Derek Martin, aka Eastenders' Charlie Slater, is a voice for change – the more people understand, he says, the less they fear. And the magazine is packed with inspiring stories to show that the Mind family can, and does, make people's lives better.

Thanks for your support.

Jane McQueen, MMN Editor

Mind Membership team

Suzanne Page, Membership Manager

Your contributions make this magazine the great read that it is, so if you have a gripping tale to tell, a new service up and running, or a mammoth fundraising event looming – please get in touch!

Jennifer Haslam, Interim Membership Officer

The membership e-newsletter launches this month so make sure we've got your email address so you don't miss out!

Matthew Smith, Membership Assistant

With ambitious recruitment targets this year, we want the membership message to reach far and wide. Let me know if you have ideas on how we can recruit new members.

Mind relies on your generosity to fund our work.

To help us achieve better mental health for all, visit www.mind.org.uk or call **0845 456 1078**.

Just £40 could buy brushes and paint for an art therapy group, helping people experiencing mental distress express their feelings through art.

mind news

Win friends and influence people

In this time of cuts, local Minds are working harder than ever for funding to provide community mental health services.

The first step is to be noticed, and one group who really know how to do it is Mind in Croydon. They've raised their visibility so much that the local MP plans to hold constituent meetings in their centre.

For Richard Pacitti, the Chief Executive, it all starts with good relationships.

"The organisation positions itself as having something to offer service commissioners, making sure that they know about its services and activities. So when we approach them about an issue, there's a strong foundation to work from," he said.

Key tactics include inviting decision makers for tours of their services, to events, or just over for a cup of tea, and publishing a newsletter that celebrates their successes and the high quality of their services.

Their achievements can be seen in the innovative contracts they've won from Big Lottery, Comic Relief and others.



We want to help you – we're looking for Mind members to train in the skills you need to influence the people holding the purse strings.

To learn more about local influencing training get in touch with Nick Yates on: 020 8215 2271, or email at: n.yates@mind.org.uk or for more information about Mind in Croydon, check out www.mindincroydon.org.uk

Get active for Mind!



If you fancy a challenge, why not join us on one of our exciting fundraising events in 2011? Whatever you decide to do; run, cycle or trek, we'll be with you every step of the way.

Trekking

- 10-12 June UK Three Peaks Challenge
- 2-4 September UK Three Peaks Challenge

Cycling

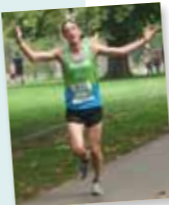
- 11-15 May London to Paris bike ride
- 11 June Nightrider cycle challenge (London)
- 22-26 June London to Paris bike ride
- 14-18 September London to Paris bike ride

Running

- 15 May Bupa Great Manchester run (10km)
- 30 May Bupa London 10,000 (10km)
- 18 September Bupa Great North Run (13.1 miles)
- 25 September Real, Berlin Marathon (26.2 miles)
- 9 October Royal Parks Half Marathon (13.1 miles)
- 30 October Great South Run (10 miles)

Swimming

- 15 May Great Salford Swim
- 11 June Great East Swim (1 mile, Suffolk)
- 17-18 June Great North Swim (1 mile, Windermere)
- 2 July Great London Swim (1 mile)
- August Great Scottish Swim



Find out more:

Call the events team on: 0871 872 1144 or visit www.mind.org.uk/events



Time to Change

2011 is a big year for Time to Change and we want you to be part of it!

The theme of our latest campaign, launched this spring, is 'It's time to talk – It's Time to Change.' The campaign aims to stop people being scared to talk about their mental health problems.

Throughout 2011 we're holding events to highlight the campaign. We'll be running roadshows and working with organisations across England to encourage and support people with mental health problems to speak out.

We need you to be part of it!

Want to take action in your community? You can pledge your support, order free posters and postcards or come along to one of our events. Check out the simple things you can do at our new look website www.time-to-change.org.uk

time to change

let's end mental health discrimination

Ring the changes: new Mindinfoline number

Mindinfoline has changed – thanks to a generous donation from Marsh UK.

The new number is 0300 123 3393. Now all calls, even from a mobile, will cost the same as a landline. And don't worry, the old number will still work for a year while we're moving.

Wales to the polls



On 5 May 2011, the people of Wales go to the polls to vote for the Welsh Assembly.

Mind Cymru have put together a manifesto highlighting mental health priorities to the election candidates. They are asking all political parties to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the Welsh population and provide high quality services to support the one in four people in Wales living with mental distress.

High on the agenda are access to talking treatments, the fight against discrimination and work place mental health.

You can download the Welsh manifesto on the Mind website www.mind.org.uk, or request it by calling the Mindinfoline 0300 123 3393

spotlight

Food & mood

Each issue we're taking a closer look at ways to take care of your mental health. This issue, does what you eat affect how you feel?

Are you grumpy and sluggish when you're hungry? Jittery and on-edge after your morning latte? Blood sugar and caffeine are just two examples of how food affects your mood, behaviour and energy in the short term.

But what you put in your mouth can also have a lasting influence on your mental wellbeing.

It makes sense. Your brain needs a whole host of substances to function, from the neurotransmitters that allow signals to move around your nervous system, to the fats that make up the walls of your brain cells. Most of these are made using nutrients from the food you eat.

To keep your brain running smoothly, it's important to eat a varied diet, with plenty of fruit, vegetables and different sources of protein. Here's a short guide to some of nutrients that are key to mental wellbeing, and suggestions for how to include them as part of your balanced diet.

It isn't always easy to eat well, but the benefits for your brain are a great incentive to skip the biscuits and reach for fruit or nuts when you're peckish. Feeding your body well is feeding your mind well, too.

Track your diet

Keeping a food diary makes you more aware of your eating habits. It will help you spot any links between food and mood or gaps in your diet.

The simplest way to do it is to carry a notebook around and jot down whatever goes into your mouth and how you feel. If you want something a bit more hi-tech, there are plenty of online options.

Try www.tweetwhatyoueat.com

If there's a treatment or mental health service you'd like us to cover here, please tell us: membership@mind.org.uk

Next issue...Local Mind drop-in centres: who are they for & why are they important?

Further information

- Mind has published a booklet, 'Food and mood', which is available on the website or by calling the Mindinfo line on 0300 123 3393.
- For more on how specific foods affect mental health, the Mental Health Foundation has recently published a report, Feeding Minds: The impact of food on mental health, available via the website www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)

A lack of this is linked to depression, irritability, poor memory, stress

Good sources include:

Pork, poultry, cod, eggs, soya beans, milk, peanuts, oatmeal, wheat germ, wholemeal bread, brown rice, bran, potatoes, bananas.



Folic acid (vitamin B9)

A lack of this is linked to anxiety, depression

Good sources include:

Chickpeas, brown rice, broccoli, sprouts, peas, asparagus, spinach, savoy cabbage.



Vitamin B12

A lack of this is linked to poor memory, poor concentration

Good sources include:

All meat products, salmon, cod, milk, cheese, eggs and yeast extract.



Vitamin C

A lack of this is linked to depression

Good sources include:

Peppers, broccoli, oranges, kiwifruit.



Magnesium

A lack of this is linked to insomnia, depression, irritability

Good sources include:

Fish, meat and dairy products, peanuts, pistachio nuts, walnuts, sunflower seeds, poppy seeds, spinach, peppers, cabbage, broccoli, sprouts.



Sources: Cornah, D. (2008) Feeding Minds: The impact of food on mental health. Mental Health Foundation and Sustain Diet – Vitamins and minerals. NHS Choices. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diet/pages/vitaminsandminerals.aspx>, accessed 24 January 2011.

opinion

Derek Martin

Eastender Charlie Slater is no stranger to mental health issues. Off-screen, actor Derek Martin shares his real-life experiences in the hope that we can encourage people to open up about mental illness.

...on living with mental health problems

My son, David, has been living with depression for 12 years now. He used to have agoraphobia too, but that's much better now.

Because David lives with me, I live with his mental distress 24/7. There are good days and bad. When he has a bad day, I'm right there with him. Sometimes I feel a bit helpless. As a father, I want to make him better – I wish I could give him a couple of paracetamol to make him feel better.

One of the things I find hard is that there's no sure path to recovery. It's not like a broken leg that keeps improving until you can walk again. There's no simple cure, the doctors can't tell you how long it's going to take until you'll feel well.

...on the low points

My low points are David's low points. There have been times when he has harmed himself, even attempting to take his own life. He had a setback last year when he was arrested after a row with his former business partner – this all came about because, he believes, his mental health problems meant he was taken advantage of. The police didn't seem interested that he had mental health problems. I reckon they thought he was trying to pull a fast one, just because he wasn't behaving strangely at the time.

The episode has aggravated his condition. Maybe if there was better understanding around mental health problems, the outcome would have been different.

...on how to get through

What helps David most is talking. He sees a psychiatrist at the hospital and a counsellor comes to the house to chat with him. It's different from talking to me, I'm his dad.

He can say things to them that he wouldn't say to me. He talks to his friends too. With his real friends, he knows there's no judgement.

The other thing that helped, especially with the agoraphobia, was a new dog. We got Giles 12 years ago from Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, on the psychiatrist's recommendation. David walks him every day unless it's raining – Giles hates the rain! He gets chatting to other dog owners and gets some exercise. I'll go too when my knee's been fixed, I love walking.

...on Eastenders and mental health

Obviously, I've dealt with mental health storylines on screen. Having personal experience has helped my acting in these stories.

I think Eastenders handled Jean and Stacey's bipolar disorder well – the BBC worked with Mind to get the symptoms right. So many people have written in to say they've got a daughter or a brother just like that. Helping people recognise mental health symptoms can bring issues to the fore and encourage them to seek help. There are documentaries that cover mental health well too... but they don't get 10 million viewers!

Not knowing about mental illness, it worries people. There's a fear of the unknown. And for people with mental health problems, there's a fear of being judged. That's why we've got to talk more openly about it – to stop people being frightened.

More information

If you'd like more information about dealing with the police on mental health issues, Mind produces a booklet called 'Police and mental health: how to get it right locally'. This is available on our website www.mind.org.uk

If you'd like to help Mind reduce stigma for people who experience mental distress, please pledge your support to Time to Change www.time-to-change.org.uk



the issue

Mind week 2011

Mind week 2011, 14-21 May, is just around the corner – but what's it all about? Here's an in-depth look at the aims of the week and the campaign it's supporting.

What is Mind week?



Duncan Bannatyne

Mind week is when the whole Mind family comes together over a common cause.

It's an extra push to arrange activities that get people talking about a single mental health topic, harnessing newspapers, TV and radio to spread the message. The aim is to bring about a shift in understanding, which can change policies, practices and services for the good of everyone's mental health.

In the past, our focus has ranged from debt and redundancy – In the red (Mind week 2008) – to Motherhood and depression (Mind week 2006). In Mind week 2009 we turned our gaze to the guys with Get it off your chest: men and mental health.

Last year's target was mental health in the workplace, promoting our five-year campaign, Taking care of business. Mind week 2011 will build on last year's success.

Mind week 2010

Dragon's Den tycoon Duncan Bannatyne, who knows a thing or two about business, supported Mind week 2010. He joined us on a picnic rug one London lunchtime, as we made sure to reclaim our lunch break.

"I think Taking care of business is a fantastic campaign," he said. "You've got to look after your staff. If you haven't got staff, you haven't got a business. It's as simple as that."

The Mind family across England and Wales organised a host of other exciting events, from free training sessions to relaxing lunch time drop-ins.

Response to the campaign was fantastic. Our major triumph was the move to outlawing the pre-employment questionnaire, in which would-be employees had to state any mental health difficulties and open themselves up to potential discrimination.

There are other signs that employers are getting on board with the message. After Mind week 2010:

- 20 organisations signed up to officially support the campaign, including AXA, BT and NHS Employers
- 2000 employers received our employers' guide 'Mental health in the workplace'
- 38 million people heard our message through newspapers, TV and radio
- 15,000 people viewed our campaign film 'Put a happy face on'

A survey soon after showed that four out of ten recipients of our employers' toolkit had already made changes at work.

What next?

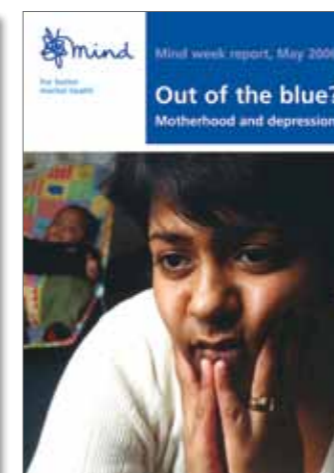
Building on 2010 success, Mind week 2011 is all about tackling employment related discrimination.

The scrapping of the pre-employment questionnaire goes a long way to helping people choose if, when and how they tell their employer about their mental health difficulties – this will help reduce discrimination. But we want to do more.

We want to remove the stigma attached to mental ill health at work. We want a working world in which people can apply for jobs without fear, and discuss mental health problems without being terrified of how the boss will react.

We'll do this by:

- giving all employers the information and tools they need to recruit and support employees with mental health problems
- helping put policies and practices in place that will support people with mental health difficulties in landing the ideal job and keeping it



Mind week 2011 activities

Mind week 2011 runs from Saturday 14 May until Saturday 21 May.

Targeting employers, we're running a brief conference bringing together business policy makers and government decision makers. The focus will be on breaking down stigma and tackling discrimination.

Our local Minds are promoting the message through their networks and holding their own events to mark Mind week.

And our Mind charity shops are our voice on the high street. Why not pop in?

Reclaim your lunch break, London, 2010

Taking care of business: what employers need to know

My employees are fine – aren't they?

One in four people live with a mental health problem – that's one in four of your employees. One of the most common work-related issues is stress.

One in five workers has called in sick because of stress, but almost all (93%) blame their absence on something else. They're worried about loss of respect, a missed promotion, or even job security. So, if your workforce is silent about stress, you can't assume it's not a problem. To read up on work stress, turn to page 15.

When it comes to other mental health problems, like depression, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder, both your staff and job applicants are likely to keep quiet, fearing they will be judged.

So don't be fooled by the smiles: mental health is still taboo at work and many people put a brave face on. Take a look at our video 'Put a happy face on' at www.mind.org.uk/employment

What can employers do?

Build a healthy workplace

- Policies and practices that can help include:
- carrying out a staff survey to assess current mental health
 - ensuring that workloads match employee abilities and experience
 - training managers about mental health, the causes of stress and how to support their staff
 - talking openly about mental health with employees to develop a supportive, inclusive environment

There are loads more suggestions in the employers' guide and toolkit (see Mind can help).

Don't discriminate against people with mental health problems

At present, just four in ten employers would consider employing someone with mental health issues. But it makes bad business sense to exclude someone with the skills and experience you need. With support from employers most people with mental health problems can make an important contribution in the working world and can benefit hugely from being in employment.



Mind can help

- Don't know where to start? We can help. The following are available for employers:
- a bespoke consultancy, 'Mind Workplace', for businesses wanting to invest in improving the mental health of their staff, available on: 0250 8215 2365 or email workplace@mind.org.uk
 - a comprehensive employers' toolkit, 'Mental health in the workplace: an employer's guide', available for £15.99 at: www.mind.org.uk/shop or on: 0844 448 4448
 - a shorter booklet 'Taking care of business: Employers' guide to mentally healthy workplaces', available free at: www.mind.org.uk/employment/employers or on: 0300 466 6463

For workers and would-be workers

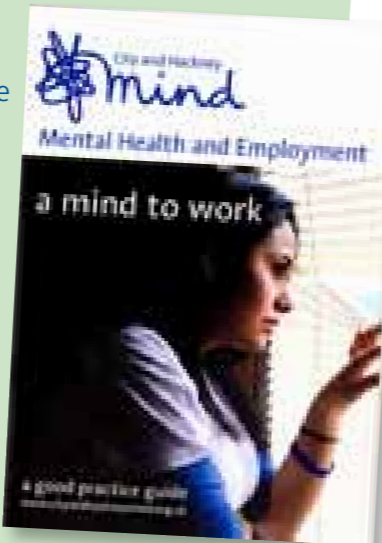
Many people find themselves dealing with mental health problems due to stress which can creep up on them. Are you keeping quiet for fear of stigma? If you're stressed out, you don't need to suffer in silence. Turn to page 15 for how to deal with work stress.

If you live with a long term mental illness and you can't find work, you're not alone – just one in five people like you are in employment. We're working hard to improve this – get behind the campaign and give us a hand!

Mind publications

You can access our publication 'Mental health and employment: a mind to work', at www.mind.org.uk or by calling the MindinfoLine 0300 123 3393.

This guide, produced by City and Hackney Mind, provides a comprehensive look at new thinking around employment and mental health.



MindinfoLine
Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm
0300 123 3393

work stress my story

Mike was a social worker in a busy inner city psychiatric team when he developed serious work-related stress and was diagnosed with clinical depression. He shares his story.

Ten years ago, I suffered a complete mental breakdown. It started when layers of intolerable stress were added to my already demanding job. I was covering for a colleague who was off sick so my day to day workload was high, I had several management commitments and I was also running a support group for people bereaved through suicide.

The pressure was immense. But I'm a conscientious person – I wanted to get it all done. I used to get home at night after 7pm and wonder why I was so hungry and thirsty – then I'd realise that I hadn't had time to eat or drink all day. Amazingly though, I was coping. I had a very supportive boss.

But then came the final straw – my fantastic boss left and a new one came in. He was a real bully, very intimidating. I was the union representative and I had colleagues literally crying on my shoulder. It was my duty to do something about it, to take them through the appropriate grievance procedures. I had lost my support, but was expected to support others.

On top of all this, I was suffering from sleep apnoea, so my sleep was constantly being interrupted. I was exhausted.



"Finally, it got too much, I cracked. Overcome with stress and anxiety, I didn't sleep for 10 days straight. I felt like a dead man walking."

In the end, I was diagnosed with major depression. Working in psychiatric services, I thought I understood mental distress. Little did I realise how things could look from the other side."

Jobs that involve witnessing other people's suffering are particularly stressful. Mike now teaches a session on strategies for promoting and protecting the mental health of social workers. He's pushing for the topic to be included in the National Curriculum for social work courses.

Mind week blog

We're looking for guest bloggers for our Mind week blog. So if you're a budding blogger and you've got a story to tell or thoughts to share on workplace mental health, please get in touch with Matt Taylor at: m.taylor@mind.org.uk

Mel's Mind marathon



Mel training with Sammy Wanjiru, marathon Olympic record holder

Melanie Brooks, Mind Trustee, has just run the London marathon for Mind. She has supported the charity for 15 years, so the decision to raise money for mental health was easy.

"I hope that the money I raised by running London for Mind will help in a small way to improve someone's mental health" she said.

Melanie first tied on her trainers after gaining weight during her second pregnancy. She was determined to regain the fitness she'd lost and get back in shape.

She gradually built up from walking 10 minutes a day – it took a year before she had the confidence for her first run. After a month of running, she made her first mile, and she's never looked back.

Aspirations – it's really working!

Bedfordshire and Luton Mind are raising Aspirations, running a programme to help people in mental difficulty fulfil their potential and get into work or study.

Programme organiser Jeanette Skipsey explains, "The Aspirations project develops interpersonal skills, boosts confidence and encourages wellbeing, helping people identify and achieve their own education and employment ambitions. Participants devise a personal development plan and each member can have a volunteer mentor to support them in taking their plans forward."

The programme is accredited by the Open College Network and learners receive a certificate in 'Work Preparation Skills' on completion.

around
& about...

"I'm obsessed with running!" she admits. "It is key to my mental and physical health. It helps me relax, feel good about my body, learn to be patient and set goals. It gives me time to concentrate on myself – I love it."

The London Marathon was her second, after the Rutland Water Marathon in November 2010. Well done Mel!

People like you by Joe Leyden

A soft and pretty girl
What are you doing here?
Your eyes blue silver like a pearl
But filled with pain and fear
Your skin is white and soft to the touch
But tightened around your bone
A girl like you shouldn't be crying much
Nor sitting on your own
You have the face of gorgeous youth
And yet the face of nerves
Come here and tell me girl, the truth
Why has life treated you so unfair?
Give life to yourself, smile one more time
Every journey starts with a step; stay strong and you will shine.



Beds and Luton Mind have so far supported 110 people through Aspirations. The project is, for many, life-changing. One participant said, "By attending the Aspirations course I feel that I have a purpose in life," and another, "Thank you for the opportunity for me to excel at something at last."

For more information contact Jeanette Skipsey, Bedfordshire and Luton Mind on: 01525 844 160 or at: Jeanette@bedsandlutonmind.org.uk



The SAM project

Hit the airwaves: SAM radio

The SAM project has a live radio show and they're inviting you to join them.

SAM, a service for people recovering from mental distress, has a regular slot on Ipswich Community Radio – listen out on 105.7 FM at 2pm every Thursday. This February the programme went live and SAM is looking for inspiring and interesting guests.

Perhaps you could use some air time to promote Mind events and activities, sing the praises of your support group or simply share your story. They particularly want to hear from service users, carers, family members and mental health workers – but anyone with a mental health hot topic to discuss is welcome.

There are three ways to get your voice heard:

- Live: Join SAM on Thursday afternoons from 2pm – 3pm, though of course, you will not need to speak for the whole hour!
- Pre-recorded: You can be recorded at a location convenient to you and we can edit and slot you into the show.
- Telephone: You can do an over-the-phone interview that can be streamed onto the show.

SAM is an Ipswich-based programme to socially engage those recovering from mental health problems and help (re)integrate people into employment. It's supported by the European Social Fund. The group organises social events, football sessions, music workshops and conservation groups as well as offering a variety of training courses to boost employment prospects.

Inspired to air your thoughts? Want to be part of SAM or volunteer? Contact Faye Smith, Project Manager SAM at: fsmith@csv.org.uk or on: 01473 418036

Art and soul

Milton Keynes Mind art group provides the perfect space for art enthusiasts to meet, explore ideas, learn techniques and develop ideas.

Group organiser Steve McNay says, "Seeing people with mental health difficulties develop as artists, alongside their development as people, is great. The pleasure that people gain from producing something that's theirs is powerful."

With tutor Emma Wilde, a professional Milton Keynes artist, the group looks at a specific artist, style or technique each week, from Matisse to Gauguin, modernism to collage, and even French knitting!

They have been involved with some really exciting projects. The French knitting led to a display in the centre: MK and the group produced the Milton Keynes Mind Christmas cards to raise funds for art materials.

Volunteers Sue and Colin support the group and produce some wonderful stuff themselves! MooCat Studio (www.moocatstudio.co.uk), run by local artist Tim Fawcett, is also a kind donor.

To get involved, contact Steve McNay at: smcnay@mkmind.org.uk or on: 01908 678540



What have you been up to?

We're really interested in you. From art groups to Zen, whatever you've done in the name of Mind and mental health, we want to know about it. Get in touch! membership@mind.org.uk

on top of the world

Ashley's story

In September 2010, Ashley Bourne from Harpenden in Hertfordshire, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. He did it for Mind, who helped him out after the loss of his dad. Here's his story.

Lonely... beautiful... high! Just some of the words people have used to describe the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. How did Ashley feel?

"I felt great to have reached the top... but really uncomfortable!" Uncomfortable is putting it mildly. He suffered hallucinations and nausea during the final night time push to the summit. And when the sun rose, sunglasses were not enough to stop the effect of the glare on his pounding head. "The last five days weren't as hard as I'd expected," he said, "but the summit night was a completely different ball game."

Ashley trained for 6 months to help him cope with the 5895km climb up the Uhuru Peak, and the trek itself was a gruelling 7 days long.

Despite the personal discomfort, he said, "The trip was fantastic and I would recommend it to anyone – but I'd have a long hard think if I was asked to do it again!" He chose to support Mind because of the help his family received after the loss of his dad.

"Mind helped my family a lot after Dad passed away in 2003. It was nice to know there are people out there willing to listen instead of just prescribing antidepressants."

Ashley's effort was well worth it – he managed to raise an amazing £3,400 for Mind. And he's not stopping there. "I hope to do another challenge in 2012. Either Machu Pichu in Peru, or a trip to Zambia. And I will definitely be supporting Mind."



Ashley at the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro



'The trip was fantastic' Ashley

a - z of mental health: work stress

A-Z

Stressed out over work? You're not alone. Stress is the number one reason for taking time off work.

A bit of pressure at work can provide job satisfaction and spur you on to get things done. But too much pressure can cause stress.

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as 'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.'

What are the signs?

Stress affects everyone in different ways, but if you're worried that you or someone you know is under too much stress, here are a few symptoms to look out for.

Emotional symptoms: anxiety, tearfulness, feeling low, mood changes, indecision, loss of motivation, increased sensitivity.

Physical symptoms: tiredness, indigestion, headaches, appetite and weight changes, joint and back pain.

Behavioural symptoms: more smoking and drinking, withdrawal from social activities, aggression, lateness, recklessness.

Of course, many of these symptoms can be caused by other conditions, and you should see your GP if you're worried.

What can I do about it?

There's a lot you can do to stop work stress getting on top of you.

Coping with stress

- Breathe deeply – take deep, slow breaths through your nose

- Escape – remove yourself from the stressful situation if you can: get away from your desk or the meeting room
- Learn relaxation techniques – some people find yoga or Tai Chi great for winding down, so give them a try if you can
- Listen to calming tunes – music can do wonders for your mood and is also the perfect distraction from chatty workmates or noisy machinery
- Talk to friends and colleagues – if you have issues with work overload or bullying, the chances are your colleagues do too, so you can support each other
- Take time out – preserve your full lunch break, take other breaks throughout the day and use all the annual leave you can
- Contact your occupational health service, GP or a counsellor if stress symptoms are affecting your life

Addressing the cause

- Be assertive – don't take on too much
- Make lists – write down everything that you need to do. Keep it realistic, and try to prioritise according to how important each task is for you to reach your goal. Can you ignore or delegate anything on your list?
- Talk to your manager – try to resolve unrealistic goals, organisation problems or impossible deadlines
- Talk to your HR department, trade union representative or other relevant members of staff if you can't sort things out with your manager
- Create clear boundaries between work and home – if you work at home, designate a separate area for work and stick to it

More information

If you are concerned about work stress you can find more information at the following websites, Mind: www.mind.org.uk, Health and Safety Executive: www.hse.gov.uk, The Stress Management Society, www.stress.org.uk or call the Mindinfoline on: 0300 123 3393.

Next issue...
Hearing voices: living with auditory hallucinations

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