



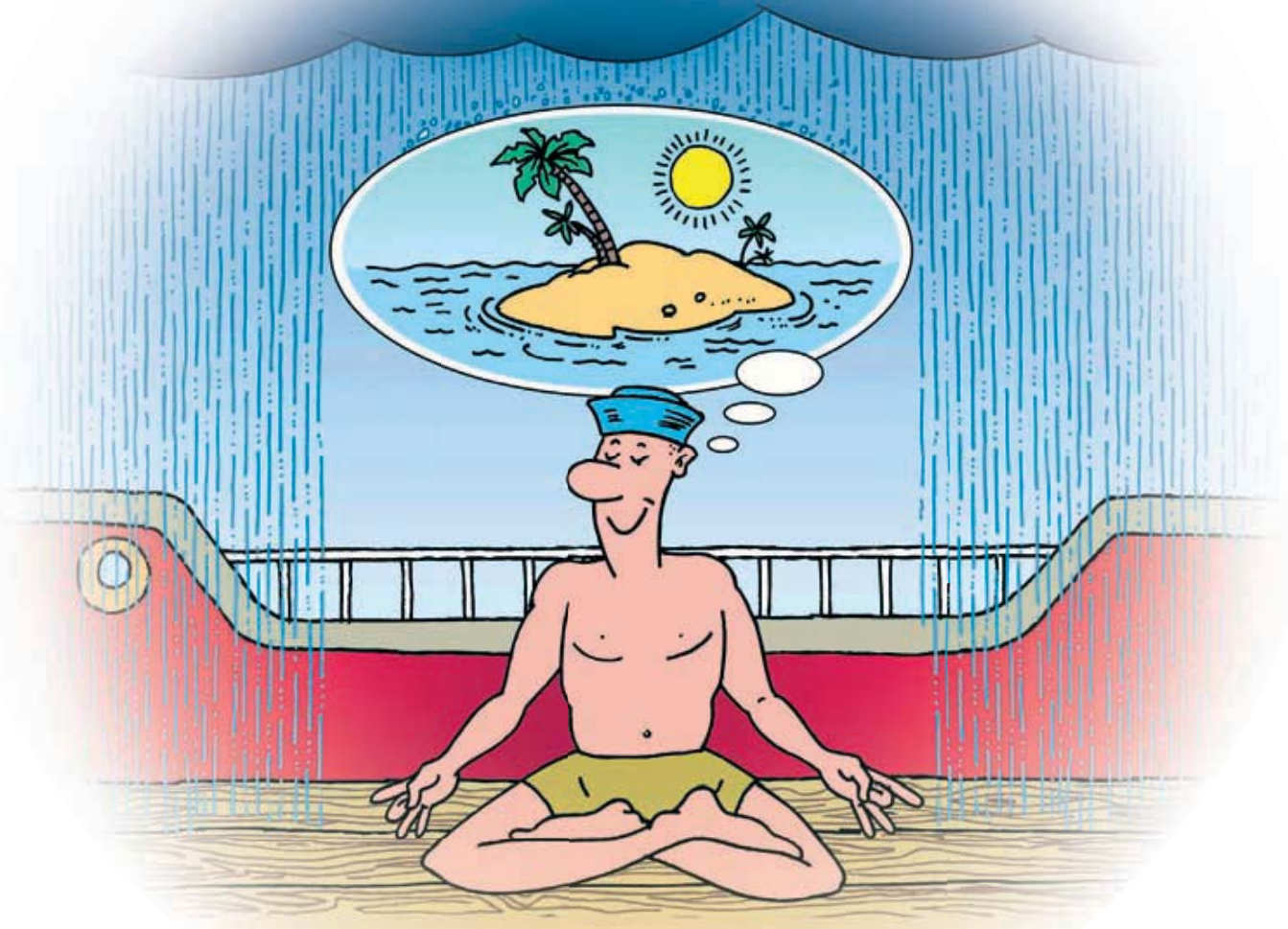
# mental care

*you are part of it ! ...*

Seafarers' Health Information Programme

Healthier, fitter, safer ...





# Mental Care, you are part of it!...

*Seafarers can help each other!*

Your mental state is part of your life.

In extreme cases true mental illness occurs and needs medical involvement.

It is therefore important that symptoms and signs of mental illness are noticed early and on board ship, crew members and friends are often well placed to form an impression of a seafarer's mental state.

Several risk factors onboard ship may have an influence on your mental state:

- increased work requirements
- reduced manning levels
- increased monotony
- fatigue
- job stress
- family pressure
- dangers at sea
- complexity of systems, automation
- fear of criminalisation
- shift patterns
- quality of rest
- Increased frequency of inspections, administration
- greater commercial pressure
- fast turnaround times
- increased use of multinational crews
- lack of common language
- reduced familiarity with working together

In addition, some seafarers are exposed to harassment and bullying onboard ship.

Alcohol or drugs also influence behaviour and emotions, and therefore pose safety risks onboard.

Whatever the cause, mental illness must be taken extremely seriously both to protect you and your fellow crewmembers.

# Monotony

An important risk factor in the modern maritime industry is monotony.

Due to the increasing trend to automate work environments onboard ship, jobs have tended to shift away from active to more supervisory roles.

Many tasks now rely crucially on the ability to concentrate for long periods of time.

Factors that have been proved to cause loss of concentration during watch keeping, are:

- Time- many accidents tend to occur early in the morning at the beginning or end of a shift when a seafarer is on watch alone
- The technology used: automated systems may reduce vigilance

Monotony may therefore lead to reduced vigilance and pose a safety risk, but it also has a negative effect on your mental state.



## Job Stress

Job stress causes harmful physical and emotional responses when you are unable to meet the requirements of your job.

Typical symptoms of job stress can be:

- insomnia, lack of sleep
- loss of mental concentration
- anxiety
- substance abuse
- extreme anger and frustration
- family conflict
- physical illnesses such as heart disease, headaches, stomach problems, and back problems.

Risk factors that can cause work related stress:

- the demands of the job;
- the level of control you have over your work;
- the support received from management and colleagues;
- relationships at work;
- your role in the organization;
- change and how it's managed.

When under severe stress, you may be unable to take clear-cut decisions, re-evaluate and reassess priorities and lifestyles, and ultimately, fall into unproductive distractions. This can be described as a classic case of 'burnout'.

You may be at risk of burnout where:

- you find it difficult to say 'no' to additional commitments or responsibilities
- you have been under intense and sustained pressure for some time
- you find it difficult to delegate to assistants
- you have been trying to achieve too much for too long
- you have been giving too much emotional support for too long

## Anxiety

Anxiety isn't always bad: it can help you to stay alert and focused, spur you to action, and motivate.

However in anxiety disorders, constant or overwhelming anxiety interferes with relationships and activities. Not everyone who worries a lot has an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety is more than just a feeling, and since anxiety sufferers may also experience physical symptoms, they often mistake their disorder for a medical illness and visit many doctors and hospitals.

Anxiety attacks usually peak within ten minutes, and they rarely last more than half an hour

Common *emotional symptoms* of anxiety include:

- irrational and excessive fear and worry
- trouble concentrating
- feeling tense and jumpy
- anticipating the worst
- irritability
- restlessness
- watching for signs of danger
- feeling like the mind's gone blank

Common *physical symptoms* of anxiety include:

- pounding heart
- sweating
- stomach upset or dizziness
- frequent urination or diarrhoea
- shortness of breath
- tremors and twitches
- muscle tension
- headaches
- fatigue
- insomnia



Anxiety and depression often go hand in hand.

Encouraging your fellow crewmembers to share their problems can help enormously. Listen sympathetically to what they have to say, remain objective and use your common sense.

# Depression

It's impossible to escape life's ups and downs. Feeling unhappy or sad in response to disappointment, loss, frustration or a medical condition is normal. Many people use the word "depression" to explain these kinds of feelings, but that is really **situational depression**, which is a normal reaction to events around us.

**Clinical depression**, however, overwhelms and engulfs your day to day life, interfering with your ability to work, eat, sleep, and have fun.

It is unrelenting, with little if any relief.

You may be emotionally up one day and down the next to the extent of being morose and even sullen.





Very depressed people may commit suicide. Suicidal individuals often give warning signs or signals of their intentions. Play a role in suicide prevention by pointing out the alternatives, showing care, and getting a professional involved. It is also essential that correct precautionary measures are taken, such as removing potentially dangerous medicines, sharp objects and items such as string and rope.

Depression in men is very often expressed in anger, aggression, reckless behaviour and violence

If you identify with several of the following signs and symptoms, and they just won't go away, you may be suffering from clinical depression.

- you can't sleep enough or you sleep too much
- you can't concentrate or find that previously easy tasks are now difficult
- you feel worthless and hopeless
- you can't control your negative thoughts, no matter how much you try
- you have lost your appetite or you can't stop eating
- you are constantly irritated or become enraged even at small things – and this is new for you
- you have thoughts that life is not worth living, or have a plan for how you would end it (Seek help immediately if this is the case)

# Harassment and bullying

Harassment is unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

All seafarers have a responsibility for ensuring that their ships are free from harassment and bullying.

Bullying frequently involves a misuse of power or position and is often persistent and unpredictable. It can also arise when a person is unaware of the effect that their behaviour is having on other people.

# Fatigue

Fatigue reduces well-being and is a major risk factor for mental health problems such as depression. It also increases the risk of acute illnesses, and life-threatening chronic disease, such as cardiovascular diseases.

Fatigue can influence performance, and, certainly when combined with high or low workloads, can lead to an accident.





## Psychosis

A mentally ill person may experience **delusions** or **hallucinations** so that what is experienced as a reality by the patient, is not what is really happening or what is experienced by anybody else. In this case a patient is called psychotic.

If you recognise these symptoms in a fellow crewmember, it is wise to assume that their behaviour may be so unpredictable as to become violent or suicidal, possibly without provocation or warning.

Paranoia is often associated with psychotic disease and typically includes unwarranted fears of persecution and threat.

In such cases on board, the seafarer should be monitored continuously, although in case of agitation the presence of another person may cause more upset and isolation may be necessary.

You should be aware that patience and a reassuring tone and attitude are important and may have a beneficial effect.

# Drugs and alcohol

Drug and alcohol policies require shipping companies to have random and emergency 'for cause' drug and alcohol testing systems in place.

Since a mental problem or change may be caused by drug or alcohol abuse, routine testing of urine, saliva or blood onboard is important in the assessment of a mental problem onboard...



# Job satisfaction

Having a useful job as member of a mutually supportive team can be one of the best protections against mental health problems.

Sensitivity to the mental problems of your fellow crewmembers remains at the heart of good management and efficient ship operations.

If you become aware that you or a fellow crewmember may have a mental problem, you should encourage them to seek help, not only on-board but also from ship visitors and welfare workers in port, who can very often not only give mental support but also spiritual and religious guidance.

Contact with family and friends also helps to lessen the feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Ensure you have enough time for rest and don't sacrifice that time for more shore leave or to catch up on tasks.

Seek professional medical advice if you notice signs and symptoms of mental problems and behavioural changes.

