

Bench<sup>®</sup>

# Mental Health Guide



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*This is a living document that will evolve as our team does.*

# Introduction

At Bench, we strive to support people in becoming their best selves. It's a key concept behind both the services we provide and the way Benchmates work together. There's a level of camaraderie here that you won't find in most companies and it's part of what makes us one of a kind.

Supporting each other holistically is what helps us succeed. We know from experience that happy, fulfilled individuals form motivated, powerful teams. "A rising tide raises all ships," the saying goes. When a Benchmate faces challenges, they should always be able to expect the support of their peers.



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Bench is growing, though, and changes are always on the horizon. Through these changes, we want to maintain the precedent we've set as an organization that cares about and supports its members. The mental and emotional well-being of every Benchmate forms the fabric of Bench. Without it, everything comes unraveled.

We are incredibly grateful that you've chosen to dedicate such a large portion of your time to Bench. And while we can't control all the sources of stress that might pop up during your time here, we're committed to making sure you have the tools and the environment you need to build a solid foundation of mental wellbeing.

This guide is meant to empower you and give you the resources you need to stay mentally strong and healthy while you take part in Bench's journey.

Inside, we've collected:

- Tools for identifying and addressing stressors in the workplace that affect your wellbeing
- A directory of professionals to contact if you'd like to explore your mental health in greater depth
- A detailed guide to using your Bench benefits to get the support of mental health professionals
- Examples of how Personal Days can be used to improve your wellness
- Tips for supporting fellow Benchmates when they're going through tough times

First, though, we'll investigate why it is that the workplace has such a huge impact on mental health.

# How Work Affects Your Mental Health

Your quality of mental health affects how you move through the world—how you think and act in your daily life, and how you affect the people around you. It's directly connected to your level of happiness day to day, and even has an impact on your physical health. When the mind is unwell, very often the body is, too.

Some factors that have a major impact on your mental wellbeing:

- Your attitude toward yourself, your life, and the world at large
- Your ability to solve problems and overcome challenges
- How effectively you are able to build relationships with other people
- Whether you feel it's possible to achieve your goals

These factors are bound to fluctuate over time; everyone goes through ups and downs. Employment is often pointed to as a major shaper of one's sense of self, so a dynamic workplace can be difficult to navigate mentally and emotionally. Good times at work—achieving goals, taking on new challenges and connecting

with teammates—can boost mental wellbeing. But during more trying times, when tasks start piling up and the path ahead is unclear, we often find our happiness in jeopardy. During these times it's especially important that you focus on yourself and make sure you aren't putting your mental health on the line.

If you'd like to take an external measure of your mental health, try [Help BC's Mental Wellness Quiz](#). Otherwise, one of the most important steps you can take is to identify workplace stressors that bring you down.



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# Workplace Stressors that Can Affect You

## PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT

Professional burnout is the result of:

- Feeling like you have an endless number of tasks to complete
- Lacking a sense of value or purpose
- Dealing with difficult clients
- Having the sense that your personal and professional values are not in sync
- Constantly chasing perfection

Constantly over-working yourself is bound to result in a sense of mental, emotional and physical exhaustion. This can manifest as:

- Low levels of career satisfaction
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor problem-solving abilities
- Insomnia
- Headaches and frequent colds

Everyone has their own limits when it comes to how much stress they can handle. And continually putting yourself in stressful situations will not raise that limit. To be your best self in both your personal and professional lives, you need to make space for self-maintenance and mental health. This means setting boundaries.

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**I find that when I continually compromise my own commitments in order to meet these perceived expectations, there's a lack of integrity and my mental wellness suffers for it.”**

*Jen Sissons, Operations Manager*



My ability to set boundaries was put to the test during my first week as an Ops Manager. My calendar was quickly filling up to the point where I was receiving proposals for meetings starting at 8AM. I accepted reluctantly and immediately felt a disconnect knowing that this would mean missing out on sleep or sacrificing the morning routine that I look forward to each day.

It occurred to me that if I were to set an expectation that I was available for meetings at 8AM I would continue to be held to that standard. I knew that this compromise would indirectly impact my success in this new role, much more than missing or rescheduling these meetings would. The following day I spoke to the individuals who had proposed the meetings and explained the impact that attending them would have on my effectiveness. The response I received was supportive and respectful. My meetings start no earlier than 9AM which gives me the time I need to start my day at 100%.

*Jen Sissons, Operations Manager*

## LACK OF VALUE OR PURPOSE

People are happiest when they know they are valued and able to grow. Work begins to feel bleak when it seems like others don't respect your worth, or that there are no ways for you to develop your skills or grow as a person.

If you're feeling undervalued and stuck, it's time to do an audit. Ask yourself:

- Do I see a future with my current role in this company?
- Do I enjoy the activities that I perform on a daily basis?
- Does my work align with my personal values?
- Am I playing to my strengths?
- Am I able to delegate?
- Do I have management skills?

Leaving these questions unanswered tends to create gaps in your life that are bound to grow. How can anyone expect to do something five days a week without understanding the point of doing it and still feel happy? You can tell there are problems with your sense of value and purpose if you feel:

- Like you can't communicate well with the people around you
- That you seriously doubt your ability to do what you need to do
- As though you will never be able to reach your full potential

- Like everything in your life is disorganized
- That you're stuck in a rut and there's no way out

The best way to deal with this is to maintain long-term goals and intentions. You can get help with this by reading about goal and intention setting in the next chapter, or by booking a coaching session with the Coaching Network. Supporting each other can help us define what our individual journeys look like in terms of personal growth.

## CHALLENGING WORK RELATIONSHIPS

Since you devote many of your waking hours to Bench, you'll often spend more time around your Benchmates than your friends or family. It's only natural that the way you interact with them will have a significant impact on how you think and feel.

Let's be realistic: Conflict is bound to arise once in awhile. (Imagine how boring the world would be if everyone agreed all the time.) But in an environment like Bench, where we value communication and personal choice, those conflicts should be resolvable. If you feel like you've reached an impasse, and your relationship with your colleagues at Bench is making life more difficult than it has to be, something has gone wrong.

Luckily, we have tools in place to help address these issues. There are several courses of action you can take:

- Use the feedback process to deal with the problem one-on-one
- Speak with your manager
- Talk to someone from the Coaching Network
- Chat with a member of the People Team

Even the relatively small act of reaching out to someone for help can have a huge impact on your mental wellbeing and the health of the people around you. Don't hesitate to take action.

## STRESS AND ANXIETY



**When I didn't give myself adequate time and attention, I got to the point where I had an anxiety attack. I really needed to re-think how I handled the day-to-day.**

*Graydon Oshiro, Operations Manager*

Stress is an unavoidable part of our working lives. It is only natural, when juggling multiple tasks and striving toward multiple goals, to experience some amount of stress. But problems arise when we don't know how to manage

our stress —when it begins to overwhelm us.

If stress is taking over your life, it's time to begin a conversation with your manager or the People Team. Here are some signs you may need help:

- Your sleeping or eating habits have changed
- You often feel physically unwell (head/stomach pain, frequent illness)
- You become less productive, or have difficulty focusing
- You stop enjoying activities that used to make you happy
- You feel powerful sensations of anxiety.

Anxiety is best described as the feeling of worry or fear. It can be long and gnawing or short and sharp—always lingering at the back of the mind or blowing up when you least expect it. Here are some signs someone might be experiencing anxiety:

- Their skin has become pale and their body is tense
- They have difficulty concentrating
- They experience bursts of anger
- They have a strong aversion to certain situations or environments
- They experience mood swings

Check out our section below on Addressing Workplace Stressors, or the Resource Guide, to find out how you can better manage your stress and anxiety.





I'm already pre-disposed to being a pretty anxious person and spend a lot of time in my head, you may have noticed my blank stares into nothingness. I have always found it difficult to pinpoint at any given time what is stressing me out. Money, work, relationships, personal expectations, etc. can stew together until I'm unable to figure out what it is bothering me. At some point, something that I would typically be able to handle with ease would set me off and it would manifest in very negative ways in not just one, but all areas of my life.

When I finally got over my insecurities around visiting a counsellor, they helped me to compartmentalize and deal with issues in manageable pieces and give me tools to manage stress on an ongoing basis, rather than letting it reach a critical mass. It was oddly intimidating going the first time, but since it has been a crucial part of keeping healthy.

*Garrett Macdonell, Engagement Specialist*

## DEPRESSION

Depression is more than a case of the blues. It's a medical condition with emotional, physical, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms. It can last a long time and, if left untreated, have serious consequences.

About one in ten Canadians experience depression during their lifetime. Symptoms are varied, as are causes. The best way to deal with depression is to see a professional, but talking with a friend, family member or team member can be an important first step. The best thing you can do to treat depression is reach out for help.

If you need to reach out but don't know who to talk to, you can also call a support line. We recommend [Crisis Line for Vancouver](#) – (604) 872-3311. It's completely anonymous and available 24/7.

## Addressing Workplace Stressors

You can't always control your work environment, but you can control how you react to it. When it comes to increasing your emotional resilience and improving how you cope, don't rely on monumental changes. It's small changes

in your behaviour and attitude, adding up over time, that make the real difference and help you take ownership over your mental health.

“

**Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start.**

*Nido Qubein*

What follows is a collection of techniques for coping –small actions that will improve your mental health and sense of well-being both in a pinch and in the long term.

## DEEP BREATHING TECHNIQUES

*Sudarshan Kriya*

Deep inhale, hold for 5 seconds, deep exhale. Repeat for three minutes in an upright position with your hands facing upward on your knees. Very helpful for relieving stress and anxiety.

## *Square Breathing*

A simple exercise that can be done any time, anywhere. It consists of four breath segments, repeated while in an upright sitting position. An excellent way to calm your mind before sleep. Find the full instructions with a visual guide [here](#).

## EMPATHY LOG/JOURNAL

Over the course of a day, we experience a range of emotions. Often, we don't bother taking time to analyze them beyond our in-the-moment reactions. If you get home at the end of the day feeling exhausted and worried, how do you know what caused that feeling? Taking a few minutes at the end of each day to jot down your major emotional reactions and thought processes can give you better insight into what makes you think and feel the way you do, as well as help you recognize patterns that might be detrimental to your mental wellbeing. It's a simple, effective tool.

Start each entry by listing the five emotions that best captured your day. Follow a format like "Today I felt \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." Try to be honest and reflective, keeping in mind that the goal is not to judge your experiences but to acknowledge them.

Example: "Today during the afternoon I was feeling overwhelmed at work due to the workload that I've been assigned lately."

Goal: Improving your ability to extract and identify your emotions.

This technique is especially helpful for addressing feelings of being undervalued, depression, or challenging work relationships.

## DOWNLOAD AN APP

There are a number of apps out there that can help you cope with and control the mental and physical effects of anxiety. A few of our favourites:

### *BellyBio*

This free app guides you in breathing exercises with audio rhythms similar to the sound of crashing waves fluctuating in sync with the movements of your belly. Charts help you keep track of your progress.

### *Headspace*

This digital service leads you in meditation sessions and mindfulness training.



I personally struggled with stress and anxiety. Bench is a demanding, ever-changing environment, so you really need to allow yourself some time and focus for your own wellbeing. When I didn't give myself adequate time and attention, I got to the point where I had an anxiety attack. I really needed to re-think how I handled the day-to-day. I did some reading on mindful meditation, which led me to my decision to purchase the Headspace app. This app allowed me to find the time I needed to take better care of myself and be at peace. I am now more attentive and aware of what's going on around Bench with a clearer and calmer focus.

*Graydon Oshiro, Operations Manager*

## EXERCISE

You've seen the research. Regular physical activity has a huge positive impact on the way you think and feel. Taking time to exercise frequently will improve your ability to make decisions, react calmly to emotional situations, feel confident and just lead a better life overall.

Try taking one hour three times a week to go for a run along the Seawall, take a spin class, or hit the gym. Treat this time the same way you would an important meeting, one that you definitely cannot get out of.

## GOALS

Setting goals is one of the best ways to establish a sense of self-direction and control. When you're overwhelmed with the demands of personal and professional life, having long-term plans helps put things in perspective. Put aside time to set goals for yourself that are specific but realistic.

Use the SMART system:

S: Specific

M: Measurable

A: Attainable

R: Relevant

T: Time-Based

Don't load yourself up with goals that are hard to define or impossible to achieve. You'll only be adding stress to your life. If you'd like more guidance, or would like to learn more about goal-setting at Bench, talk to the People Team or [Jen Sissons](#) for info about Vision and Goals workshops.

## INTENTIONS

Intentions are the fluffy, cuddly, short-term cousins of goals. A goal is focused on how you will be in the future you are trying to make happen. An intention is focused on where you are and what you are doing in the present moment.

Some examples of intentions:

- I intend to be more mindful and aware of my emotions when I am told to take on new projects
- I intend to organize my schedule to make time for the things that keep me happy, healthy and grounded
- I intend to operate from a place of love, not of fear

They're a way to frame the here-and-now and keep you on track toward what you'd like to achieve. Setting intentions can supplement your longer-term goals, as well as chase away the nagging feeling that whatever you're doing isn't good enough.

It can be tough sticking to your goals or intentions. Staying on track sometimes means taking extra steps.

Try setting visual reminders – a vision board, sticky notes on your mirrors, etc. Share your goals and intentions with people you trust, so they can help and support you, and hold you accountable if you don't follow through.

## TALK IT OUT

Aaron Beck is a founder of [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#), one of those most widely-practiced methods for addressing anxiety and depression. He says that talking to someone is one of the best ways to organize your thoughts so that you can act on them in a way that makes sense.

Often, in order to feel independent from other people, we will bottle up and hide our emotions. But it isn't realistic to go through life hiding what you feel. Just finding a good listener you can trust and opening up to them about what's bothering you can provide a lot of relief. They may not have the answers to all your problems—and you shouldn't expect them to—but letting your feelings out into the open is the best way to keep them from turning toxic.

## TASK PRIORITIZATION

Bench is a dynamic, incredibly active workplace, and at any particular moment, you're bound to have a stack of "to-do"s on your plate. Task prioritization is one of the best ways you can ensure that stack doesn't become overwhelming.

The best approach is to sit down with a teammate or a manager with a pen and notebook and go through your list of tasks together. Having another person there will give you an outside perspective and make certain you don't get hung up on low-priority or even redundant tasks.

Go through these six steps:

1. Write down all of your tasks.
2. Rate them each in terms of urgency and importance
3. Assign each a value in terms of necessity. Ask yourself, What would happen if I didn't complete this task?
4. Order the tasks by the effort you estimate will be required to complete them.
5. Remember to stay flexible. Tasks come and go, priorities change. Be ready to adapt.
6. Think about and/or discuss each task, then remove or redistribute them based on what you discover.

You can learn more about task prioritization [here](#).



Our brains interact with our anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry, which sets the stage for our state of mind. The mind-body connection is so important. Most people are aware of the fact that some exercise will make you feel good, but I've always underestimated how much of what we think and feel depends on chemical reactions that we can control!

One of my favourite habits for supporting mental health is running. I've never experienced a better way to level my mood and sharpen my focus. It gives me my baseline of mental wellbeing. I wager that I could get the same results from cycling, swimming, lifting, or any other deliberate physical routine.

*Adam Saint, Co-founder and VP, Design*



I think it's important to set small, attainable goals when feeling overwhelmed. When I ran marathons in the past, I got overwhelmed just thinking about running 42km. Instead, I broke the race down into smaller 5km pieces and just focused on getting to certain milestones. I run 5km all the time so it became a very familiar and achievable goal.

*Greg Deignan, Operations Manager*



# Digging Deeper

## SEEKING A PROFESSIONAL

Some jobs are best left to the pros. Professional mental health workers are equipped to handle difficult conversations, ones you might not feel comfortable having with friends or teammates. If you would like professional help managing your mental health, [Counselling BC](#) has an extensive list of practices in Vancouver.

Clicking the “Areas of Practice” will give you a list of professionals sorted by areas of expertise, so that you can find someone whose focus fits closest to what you’re experiencing.

Before visiting a professional, it’s helpful to think about what you’d like to achieve. For instance,

- Do you need help balancing the demands in your life (life balance)?
- Do you need help figuring out what direction you’d like your life to take (personal growth)?
- Is your mental health reaching a critical state that needs to be addressed immediately? Or are you more interested in developing strategies for long-term resilience—dealing with life’s ups and downs?

Remember, you may not always mesh well with the first professional you see.

If it doesn’t feel right at first, that doesn’t mean the process is broken. You may need to see a few different people before you find someone you’re truly comfortable with.

## We Have You Covered

If you are a full-time Benchmate, and you’ve completed your 90-day probationary period, a wealth of options is available to help support your ongoing mental health and wellbeing.

### GWL

Under your [Great Western Life \(GWL\) plan](#), you have \$400 per year to spend on psychologists, social workers and other mental health professionals. This is also the only paramedical coverage category



**Making lists for myself really helped with my mental wellness. Deadlines can be really stressful when it comes to bookkeeping and this was something that worked for me.**

*John Nguyen, CU Accounting Associate*



Without getting too specific, at times in my life I've struggled to handle stress in a healthy way. The stigma I felt around asking for help not being able to even start to look into where I could access help, because I felt that meant I had failed because I wasn't strong enough to deal with things myself. Looking back, I wish I would've considered the option to go months earlier when I felt things we're starting to become more than I could handle by myself in a healthy way rather than when things were bad.

Taking care of yourself and your mental health doesn't always mean talking to a counselor, it can mean many different things, but it is one way that can make a huge difference. For me, I see someone regularly and I kind of think about it like going to the gym, which would make my counselor like having a personal trainer, someone I can reach out to help me to be better, consider things I haven't yet, and reminding me what happens if I stop putting in the work. I check up on my mental health regularly and do the work to stay strong, to keep myself aware of the bad patterns I have sometimes slipped into over the years with stress and anxiety, and remind myself of the ways to be mindful of myself and what I need to stay at my best. It was and still is the best decision I ever made for myself.

*Denea Campbell, Learning and Development Manager*

without per-visit caps, meaning that if you would like to see a specialist, you've got some wiggle room in terms of cost.

It's important to remember that this plan only applies to registered psychologists and qualified social workers. To be eligible under GWL's plan, the person you're seeing must belong to the regulatory body for the province in which they practice. For the province of BC, the regulatory bodies are:

College of Psychologists of British Columbia (CPBC)  
British Columbia College of Social Workers (BCCSW)

A Registered Counselor would not be part of the provincial regulatory body because they are not a psychologist or a social worker.

Here's a cheat sheet to help you keep track of the professionals GWL covers:

- ✓ R Psych Registered Psychologist
- ✓ RSW Registered Social Workers
- ✓ RCSW Registered Clinical Social Worker
- ✗ RCC Registered Clinical Counselor
- ✗ CCC Canadian Certified Counselor
- ✗ AAMFT American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
- ✗ MFT Registered Marriage and Family Therapist

## WELLNESS FUND

As a Benchmate, another one your self-care options is our [Wellness Fund](#). Any counseling related to mental wellness can be expensed through it. This is especially useful if the professional you would like to see is not covered under GWL, as shown above.

## MSP

Psychiatrists are doctors, and typically covered under [BC's Medical Services Plan \(MSP\)](#), but you'll need a referral from your family doctor or mental health program in order to see one. Many psychiatrists also do counselling.

Clinical counselors and social workers are not usually covered by MSP unless it's through a hospital program or mental health team.

## ADLER CENTER

You may also want to consider the [Adler Center](#) on West Broadway. They offer low-cost counselling services to people in Greater Vancouver. Your first session (and subsequent sessions) cost a maximum of \$50. You'll work with a counsellor, trained at the Master's Degree level, who is currently completing their internship under a Registered Psychologist.

# Taking Personal Days

When you need time away from work to focus on your mental health and wellbeing, you can always take a personal day.

## WHAT IT MEANS TO ASK FOR ONE

Through [Namely](#), every Benchmate is assigned Personal Days under the Time-Off Section, to be used when needed. If you would be more comfortable booking a Sick Day instead, that's fine too. The important part is recognizing when you need a mental break, and then actually going ahead and taking that time off.

## WHY YOU MIGHT TAKE ONE

"I ran out of the medication I take to control my anxiety and help me sleep. I haven't been able to see a doctor yet, so I've only been getting a few hours of sleep each night. If I could take a day to see a doctor, get a prescription refill, and rest at home, it would set me on track for the rest of the week."

"I've been trying to wrap up all of my clients this week, which means I've been working really long hours. It's making me feel really burnt out, so I'd like to meet someone on Monday to talk about task

prioritization and managing my workload. Taking a Personal Day will help me get to the root of my burnout and learn how to better manage time and stress in the future."

"Someone in my family passed away yesterday, and I'm having a hard time processing everything. I need to take a few Personal Days this week so I can have some time to grieve."

You don't have to provide a comment in [Namely](#) when you book a Personal Day, but as long as you're comfortable with it, it doesn't hurt to inform your manager so they can do the best job possible supporting you through the situation. If you don't feel comfortable speaking with your manager, but would like someone at Bench to be filled in, you can always let a member of the People team know.

## TAKING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE

If you're experiencing deeper, more serious issues in terms of mental health, an extended leave of absence may be necessary. Your direct point of contact for this is our Director of People Operations, [Sarah Blackmore](#). She can answer your questions and help you navigate your time away.

# Supporting Your Peers

It's not always easy to tell when someone is struggling. That's why it's important to stay sensitive in our interactions with other Benchmates, without necessarily demanding the specifics of their personal lives. Try to stay open, and available to have a conversation with a teammate or friend who might need it.



**Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.**

*Ian Maclaren*

Sometimes it's obvious that a person is struggling, but there's no way to learn the details of what's going on without having a conversation. In which case, it's more important to respond sensitively, and be a good listener, than try to reach some kind of diagnosis. By being available to have an open, honest, safe conversation with a Benchmate, you're making a huge contribution to the mental wellbeing of the people you work with.

## EXAMPLE SCENARIO

“Someone I work with seems emotionally unsettled, and getting worse every day. They often look tired or upset, and seem

distracted. I'm worried about them, but not sure what I should say or do.”

## STEPS

### 1. Exploring the situation

- Tell them they don't seem like themselves, and specifically describe what seems different. “You seem a little down today? Are you doing alright? Would you like to grab a coffee and talk?”
- Avoid making any judgements about what's going on. Instead, give them a chance to talk about what they're going through, and try to be an active listener.
- You might have the urge to offer them advice on what to do. Resist it. The best thing to can do is let them express what is going on. The best steps to recommend are those which would get them further support for their specific situation.

### 2. Moving forward

- Try to guide your Benchmate toward solutions that might get them back on track – for instance, finding professional help or raising the issue with the People Team. If they're uncertain, offer some ideas, but make sure they choose their own way forward.
- If your colleague is dealing with conflicts or harmful relationships at work, try to guide them towards

productive resolutions rather than potentially damaging, spur-of-the-moment reactions.

- Encourage your Benchmate to take regular breaks. Even during times of emotional struggle, the work day is easier to manage when it's broken up with a walk outdoors or some time playing guitar. It will also making concentration easier.
- Focus on small steps forward. Trying to fix every problem at once can be overwhelming and ineffective.
- Help them prioritize their tasks. Offer to help them go through the task prioritization exercise described in this guide, and encourage them to bring the list to their manager.
- Ask if they've considered taking a personal day. It might help if you explain the importance of taking time to recharge and get healthy.

## SEEKING ADDITIONAL HELP

Use this Guide as a resource to support your fellow Benchmate. Have they read it? Could they benefit from going through it with you? It can be intimidating to get support from a professional. Offer to help your colleague find a practitioner who might suit their needs, and stay with them while they book an appointment.

## MAINTAINING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Help your Benchmate to find the resources they need and reach out further for help, but remember that their problems are not your own. The act of helping someone else improve their wellbeing shouldn't compromise your own.

## TALKING TO COLLEAGUES

You've realized that you're feeling off and you want to regain control of your mental health. If you need to have a safe conversation with someone, Amanda Giesler and Sarah Blackmore are always available to chat. Your wellbeing is a major priority, and they can lend a friendly, helpful ear if you'd like to talk it through. Or if you need further support and don't know where to start, they can help point you in the right direction to find the resources you need.

And remember: Benchmates are not physicians, therapists, or counselors. While they are great starting points for discussing challenges and exploring the help that's available to you, you should always seek professionals for serious mental health concerns.

# Recommendations

This section points out resources that Benchmates have found helpful for improving their mental health. These resources have been curated for the purpose this Guide, but none of them are officially affiliated with Bench.

## APPS

### SAM

Garrett recommends [SAM](#) to help you understand the sources of your anxiety, monitor your thoughts and behaviour over time, and manage anxiety through self-help exercises and private reflection.

### Cooking

Adam recommends the [NY Times Cooking App](#). In his words, “Everything I put in my body changes the way my brain works, so I like to put some thought and care into how I fuel myself.”

### Buddhify

Chloe recommends this app for guided meditation exercises. [Buddhify](#) can help you de-stress, sleep better, and become more compassionate and aware in all parts of your life.

### Noiz

Lyndsey recommends [Noiz](#) to produce background noise, blocking out distractions and keeping you focused.

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**It can be overwhelming trying to get into any of these activities, but I've found success through leaning on the incredible tools that are out there. For me, they're Runkeeper, New York Times Cooking, and Headspace. These habits become so much more attainable when you use software to put them on rails.**

*Adam Saint, Co-Founder and VP, Design*

## CLEARING YOUR HEAD

1. Meditation – Give it a try with [this video](#).
2. Pictures – For a quick break browsing weird/funny photos, John Nguyen recommends [Imgur](#).
3. Videos – Come across something funny on YouTube? Post it in our #random channel on Slack. [This](#) is a good spot to get started.
4. Sensory deprivation tanks – Book an hour and a half to spend alone with your thoughts and decompress, free from distractions. Paul recommends [Floathouse](#).

## COUNSELLING

[Willow Tree Counselling](#) – Clayton recommends visiting Megan Sutherland for a friendly, non-judgemental conversation. She has lots of experience with the LGBTQ community.

[Changeways Clinic](#) – Graydon recommends Dr. Nancy Prober for quality conversations about stress and anxiety.

## DOGS

We almost always have a dog hanging around the office. Go and pet one.

## EXERCISE

1. Spin Studio – Hannah recommends taking a class with Jess at [Eastwood](#).
2. [30 Days of Yoga With Adriene](#) – Sim recommends this YouTube instructor to anyone who prefers doing yoga at home.
3. Run – Chloe finds that going for a run during lunch break makes a huge difference in her day. She recommends this [app](#) to help you get started.
4. Adam recommends [RunKeeper](#) for setting and meeting running goals.
5. [Classpass](#) – A Bench favourite, and a great way to try lots of different activities.
6. More yoga – Some of our Benchmates are yoga instructors. Talk to Lauren Tietze or Nicole Ling for tips and tricks.
7. Barre – Sarah and Amanda love squeezing in a Barre class during lunchtime to help bring some mindfulness and physical activity into their day. They recommend Johanna at [Body Balance](#).





It took a while for me to start noticing the effect exercise was having on me in how I showed up to work. I experience so much more confidence in myself at work and it helps prevent things like post-lunch slumps that are typically unproductive. The best thing I've found is Classpass where I pay a monthly membership to get access to almost any fitness studio around Vancouver. I get to do yoga, spin, bootcamps, boxing, use the gym, HIIT, dance, circuit training, etc.

There's a growing Classpass community at Bench where a bunch of us will go to classes together. The app makes it easy to find and book classes, and it's really fun being able to choose what class and studio you want to attend.

*Chloe Tarbet, Recruiter*

## GREAT WEST LIFE

1. If you're having trouble at work with your concentration, stamina, relationships, etc., you can learn how to manage them more effectively through the [Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace](#).
2. Massage – Depression and stress-induced anxiety can lead you to develop pain in your body. Amanda recommends Joy at [Sinclair Wellness](#) for a massage. Joy bills directly to GWL.

## TRACKING YOUR HABITS AND PRODUCTIVITY

Balanced – Denea recommends the [Balanced](#) app for tracking the things you wished you did more often—and motivating you to actually do them, too. Productive—The [Productive](#) app helps you build good habits and organize your life.

## WRITING

Morning pages – This technique consists of writing out, in longhand, three pages of stream-of-consciousness reflection immediately upon waking. Write about whatever crosses your mind, with no filter; it's for your eyes only. Denea

recommends [Morning Pages](#) for its ability to provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritize and synchronize the user's mind.

Journaling – Lyndsey uses [this site](#) to journal daily, and says it has improved her mental wellness.

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**We all recognize the need to clean our homes and organize our surroundings, but we often ignore the same task for our minds. Meditation doesn't have to be mystical; it's just a method for tidying up and giving yourself space to think.**

*Adam Saint, Co-Founder and VP, Design*

## OTHER AWESOME STUFF

- One of Lyndsey's favourite mindfulness blogs is [Zen Habits](#).
- A [TED talk on vulnerability](#)
- A [TED talk on restoring emotional authority](#)

- Some Benchmates, including Ian Crosby, have attended [Landmark](#) in order to improve their overall wellbeing. People have had varying levels of success with this program, so do some research to determine if it's a good fit for you.

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**It is too easy to fill your day up with work and other activities, and not set aside time for yourself and your wellbeing. Try taking 20 minutes, sitting or lying down, and focusing on your breathing. Actively setting aside time to relax and let go of your stress can make a huge difference in your life. Meditation gives you time to rest both physically and mentally, and it has a direct effect on your entire nervous system. I try to meditate at least 2 days a week with my Bulgarian roommate. We lie down on yoga mats in our living room, turn down the lights, and put on a guided meditation video. After the 20 minutes, we both feel refreshed and have a whole new lease on life.**

*Ada Vaccaro, Senior Onboarding Specialist*

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

[Crisis Line for Vancouver](#) – (604) 872-3311. Anonymous, and a great way to receive 24-hour support.

[BC211](#) – A catalogue listing both paid and free therapy and support for people in British Columbia who need it.

## Thank you

No single contributor or department made this guide happen. It truly was (and will remain) a Bench-wide effort to ensure that mental wellbeing is discussed openly, that mental unrest is de-stigmatized and that the mental health of those we share our days with is always supported. This is a delightfully diverse workplace; let's revel in the ability we have to come together for a greater purpose. The individuals who not only welcomed a dialogue around mental wellbeing but agreed to share their experiences and self care tips in this guide are helping to shift the way communities and workplaces view mental wellbeing. So, thank you.