

A close-up photograph of a hand gently holding a young green plant in a field. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, warm glow and lens flare. The background shows other plants in a field, slightly out of focus.

Rooted in
STRENGTH

Taking care of our families and ourselves



Recently Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton at the University of Guelph conducted a national survey of Canadian farmers.

The results reveal that:

45% were classified as having high levels of perceived stress

57% met the criteria for anxiety classification

35% met the criteria for depression classification



The good news? **Most farmers said they would seek help for their mental health** – but 40% reported they would feel uneasy getting help “because of what other people might think.”

Jones-Bitton, et al. “Stress, anxiety, depression, and resilience in Canadian farmers.”

Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 2019.

How often do you run on empty?

By Cynthia Beck

What is the one piece of machinery you can't do without in your day-to-day farming operation? Most people I ask say a tractor. Farmers know that working machinery needs maintenance to stay working. The oil needs to be changed. The motor needs to be maintained. The tires need to be in good condition, and the tractor constantly needs to be fuelled. What happens if a farmer doesn't take care of the equipment, like running on dirty oil, low tires, or without fuel? The tractor comes to a sputtering, grinding halt. It sits useless, and the work doesn't get done.

The human body can be compared to a running piece of machinery. Your

brain is like the motor in that tractor. Your organs and limbs are similar to the tires and moving parts. Your body also requires fuel. For some reason, we're far more prone to care for our machinery than we are to care for ourselves.

You are the most important machinery in your operation, and a little self-maintenance goes a long way. Eating balanced meals, staying hydrated, and getting enough sleep are all important in maintaining your physical and mental health.

Your mental health matters. 🧠

Message from Michael Hoffort

2019 was already an unusually difficult year for the Canadian agriculture industry. The stress and uncertainty around weather and trade access took a toll on the mental health of many producers and ag industry professionals.

And needless to say, 2020 has been an unprecedented challenge, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic we're all doing our best to endure. Perhaps you're struggling with some of this burden too.

Our hope is that this booklet can be a resource to you, that you can keep it for future reference, and that you will not feel alone in these struggles. No one should be expected to tough it out without help.

At FCC, our desire is to help lift the stigma around mental health by promoting awareness, encouraging dialogue and enabling people throughout the industry to seek support if they need it.

If you or someone you know is struggling, there's lots of support and people who care.



*Michael Hoffort, President & CEO
Farm Credit Canada*

Message from the Minister

Canadian farmers work hard to produce high-quality and delicious food and they deserve our greatest respect. I understand the pressures, and often high levels of stress, and the toll on mental health that come with the job. The well-being of farmers is something I care very deeply about, and I am committed to doing everything in my power to ensure they have a future full of promise.

I would like to thank farm families and everyone championing awareness on this important issue. We all play a part in a healthy future for farmers, farm families and communities, one that is rooted in strength.



*The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food*

In your words

When preparing for this publication, we asked people in the industry what they do to relieve stress in their lives. Here's what they told us.

"I make sure I **talk to people**. Sometimes family, sometimes strangers, sometimes a mental health professional. Get away from the farm – even for an hour. **A trip to Tim Hortons can do wonders!**"

"We try and have **10 laughs a day**. Find the humour in things around you and share them with friends and family."

"Plan my work so it can be completed in a reasonable time frame. **Set achievable goals.**"

"Having someone to talk to and share with is important. **A good vent or chat over the phone with a friend is therapy for the soul.**"

"Stop and take some deep breaths. **Enjoy the peacefulness of rural life** and how calming it can be. Remember how important our job is – we feed the world!"

"I take 30 minutes every morning to do something that I enjoy. **I also get in some kind of exercise five days a week**. A brisk walk does wonders for clearing the mind."

"Be aware. Address problems immediately. Be optimistic. Talk to people. **Get involved in community**. Reach out."

How do you reduce farm stress? Share your tips on social media using the hashtag **#RootedInStrength**.

Farmer fights stigma with openness and understanding

By Myrna Stark Leader

“Mental health is part of our overall health. Like physical health, we need to care for it,” says farmer and entrepreneur Kim Keller. She speaks with conviction. An advocate for mental wellness in agriculture, Kim saw a need through her own journey.

The 34-year-old returned to Saskatchewan in 2011, after a degree and an insurance career. She spent the next four years growing crops on the family’s 13,000 acres while also co-founding and running Saskatchewan Women in Ag and an ag tech company.

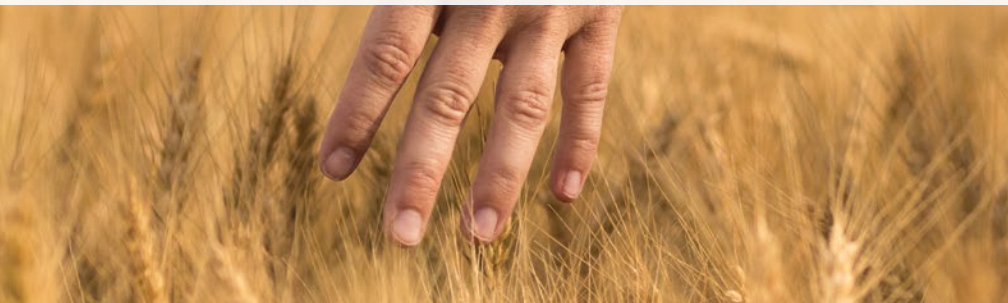
Then Kim got a call from a close friend, upset that a neighbouring farmer had died by suicide. This compelled her to speak out on social media and to co-found Do More Ag, a non-profit focused on mental health in agriculture.


While she now advocates for greater understanding about mental well-being, talking about her own life is hard. Kim was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease and later, anxiety.



People who live with a mental illness can and do thrive, just as people without a mental illness may experience poor mental health.

Taken from CMHA National Mental Health for Life





“At first, I didn’t understand it – not being able to sleep, racing thoughts and my increased heart rate. But when I started to talk to others I trusted, they’d be like ‘I don’t think that’s normal,’” she says, adding, “sometimes, I think we just accept it because we’ve been living with those feelings for so long.”

Shifting her thinking

Today, she’s able to more easily identify when anxiety starts creeping in.

“Like I manage my physical health and see a doctor for my Crohn’s, I care for my mental health, because both are integral to my well-being,” Kim says.

At the same time, she knows that talking with medical personnel can be intimidating. She credits her doctor.

“She made it like a regular part of my health care. She asked what I wanted help with. I didn’t have to know what I was asking for. She said, ‘Are you experiencing any of these things?’ That took the pressure off me.”

Kim likens caring for mental wellness to caring for any other health matter.

“If you don’t feel well for more than a week, you go to the doctor. You don’t let it go until you end up with pneumonia,” she says.

Treating herself with care

Today, she practices self-care and checks her own well-being.

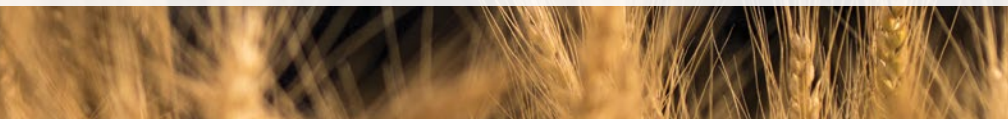
“People think self-care is touchy-feely stuff like yoga and meditation. It’s not just that. For me, it’s taking five minutes to stretch or walk around and making sure I’m making the most of the sleep I’m getting,” she says.

“Some days I wake up and I know it’s going to be a tough day and other days are normal and good. It’s really important to realize and recognize our stressors so we can identify when they’re happening. Also, that we have the skills and tools to cope through them,” Kim explains, noting that in busy periods like seeding and harvest she still needs to remind herself to check in.

Reaching out

“I’m not going through this alone, and no one else has to,” Kim says. “No one is the only one feeling stressed or anxious or battling a wellness issue. And there are others in this industry, in your community, in your family who are there to support you.”

On the other hand, she says supporters must recognize when someone may need help.





"I manage my physical health and ... care for my mental health, because both are integral to my well-being."

can learn signs and symptoms, then I think we'll have more success in reaching people when they need to be reached."

She promotes noticing when someone deviates from their normal baseline behaviour and checking in with them in a genuinely compassionate way.

"It's OK to say, 'Hey, I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately,'" Kim says, explaining it opens the door for conversation.


She acknowledges people sometimes don't ask because they don't know how to respond.

"We tell everyone to reach out if they need support, but when you're experiencing a mental health challenge, being able to reach out is not easy. If those around you

"That's where we can start looking to education and building capacity in ourselves and our communities. Things like mental health first aid courses, talks, training – things that build real tangible skills in family, friends and the industry," Kim says. She acknowledges there's still fear.

"I don't know how many times in the last year people have shared their experience with me and then say, 'Please never tell anyone this because I'm going to lose my financing, my landlord, my retailers. My neighbours won't talk to me anymore.'" Kim is determined to make that fear a thing of the past.

"Anxiety is something, just like my Crohn's, that I will live with the rest of my life. You live with it. You figure it out and thrive and succeed. It doesn't stop me from what I want to do." 🌟

A person wearing a bright yellow hooded jacket and blue jeans is walking away from the camera through a field of lush green plants. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the field and some distant trees under an overcast sky.

3 tips for taking care of yourself

Take care of your body: Regular exercise reduces symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety, especially if your work means you spend a lot of time sitting.

Ask for and offer help: Assess your mental health from time to time and ask for help if you need it. Learn to recognize when someone else may be having problems and assist them in contacting resources for support. Helping others boosts their self-esteem and improves resilience.

Have some fun: Once a week, do something you are passionate about. Having interests that are all-consuming and that we can “get lost in” bring us into increased happiness and creativity.

Adapted from: hr.UBC.ca



Be in the driver's seat with smartphones, social media

By Peter Gredig

Smartphones and social media have reinvented the way we communicate, source information, shop, make decisions and spend our time.

Platforms like Twitter and Facebook are popular because, by nature, we learn by sharing experiences and looking for better ways to do things. Social media expands the conversation beyond the coffee shop, the arena and church to a truly global community. This is powerful.

Social media has many positive aspects, but we need to be mindful of how we use it and what we take from it. For children growing up in the social world, building an online persona can become an obsession and negative feedback can be devastating, potentially leading to depression or low self-esteem.

The immediacy of our connected lives means we can multi-task like never before.

You can buy an e-book, sell grain, check the radar for rain, catch up on the news, text your kids and look at a used tractor for sale – all in the 10 minutes you're waiting for the dentist. Wow! But can you turn it off? Do you get restless if you're not interacting with your device?

Our brains get a mini-dose of “feel good” every time the phone vibrates or a new text or tweet arrives. If we allow it, our relationship with our smartphone and all it delivers can evolve to where it dictates daily life minute-by-minute. An extreme example is a reported increase in child drownings attributed to parents who are distracted by their smartphones.

It can be energizing and invigorating to get so much done so easily and efficiently, but it should not be compromising safety, personal relationships and our health and well-being. We know that being “on” all the time is not healthy.

The objective in all of this – and it will become increasingly important as new technologies continue to come at us – is to find a balance where the technology is working for us, not the other way around. Proactively setting boundaries may be unpopular with your family and employees,

but being in control of technology use will ensure you're maximizing the benefits and limiting the negatives.

Take control of how you use this technology, so you can always be present for the people who are right in front of you. 🧠

4 simple ways to take control



Don't mix holidays and work via your smartphone.



Be disciplined about setting aside time to be disconnected.



Program your smartphone to shut down all functions (except calls or texts from select contacts) after 6 p.m.



Ask family members to put their devices in a basket, on a high shelf or near the front door during mealtime – anywhere out of easy reach.

3 signs you might need a break

Adapted from Business Optimizer

Careless mistakes

Tiredness and stress can lead to poor performance that has nothing to do with your ability to do your job. If you find yourself making frequent mistakes, schedule a decent break.

Resentment towards farm and family

Stress or tiredness can affect your ability to cope. When you start to resent the chores you need to do or feel you're just going in circles, that resentment creeps into your behaviour towards others. And that puts all your relationships at risk.

Fantasies about quitting farming

It's natural to have plans for the future, but if you spend hours dreaming about quitting this industry you once loved – without any plans about what you're going to do next – take it as a warning sign.

My dashboard

By Dr. Georges Sabongui © 2018

Green

Healthy | Optimal



Physical

Good sleep
Good appetite, want to eat healthy
Want to take care of physical health
Rarely or never sick

Yellow

Reacting | Stress

Mild insomnia
Tired
Attracted to junk food often
Unmotivated to exercise
Trouble relaxing without a drink



Mental

Mentally clear
Focused
Good concentration
Creative problem-solving
Sees solutions

Easily distracted
Excessive worry
Procrastination
Avoidance
Sees obstacles



Emotional

Motivated
Excited
Good social network

Irritability
Loss of sense of humour
Discouraged
Impulsive
Seeing people is a chore



Strategies

Self care: physical, mental and emotional
Serotonin boost (see p. 22)
Take a work break or vacation

Reaching out to friends and family
Doing something to relax
Seeing your family doctor

Balance is extremely important when dealing with stress. When you look at your internal dashboard, do you see all green lights? Are there any red lights tipping you toward overload and stress? Let's all take care of ourselves so we can continue to do what we enjoy most.

Orange

Injured | Burnout

Moderate insomnia
Exhausted
Binge eating
Drinking too much alcohol
or using drugs to relax
Various aches and pains

Chronically preoccupied
Inability to concentrate
Impaired decision-making
Memory loss
Constant focus on problems
Always negative

Anger
Anxiety
Low mood
Overwhelmed
Avoiding social situations

Peer support, assistance
programs, mental health
first aid

Red

Illness | Depression | Mental illness

Constantly sleeping or periods of no sleep at all
Constant aching in body
Immune compromised: always sick
Trouble getting off the couch or getting out of bed
Only moments of relief come from excessive drinking
or drugs, or over-the-counter medication

Impaired judgment
Paralyzed decision-making
*Suicidal thoughts or actions
**If you're having suicidal thoughts,
seek help immediately and call 911.*

Apathy
Hopelessness or helplessness
Out of control: explosive-implosive, holding it all in
Feeling like a burden
Isolating yourself from friends, family, and
your community

Professional or clinical support: doctor,
psychologist

It felt like a heart attack

As told to Owen Roberts



Our gratitude to the Alberta grain farmer who shared this story of his fight to bring wellness and balance back into his life.

Rural people help each other out. It's not unusual for an able-bodied person to be part of a volunteer fire department or ambulance service in rural Canada. A core of trained volunteers make a huge impact; without them, these services would be extremely limited.

But for me, the impact of answering emergency calls resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental condition sometimes associated with military personnel who return from treacherous duty. It occurs when either experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event.

The condition snuck up on me, expressing itself without warning as a huge anxiety attack that I thought was a heart attack. I had crushing chest pains, nerve pain

everywhere and a splitting headache. But medical personnel who attended to me found that physically, I checked out as normal. Further evaluation led to a psychological assessment that was ultimately diagnosed as PTSD and anxiety.

To start getting better, I needed professional treatment – and I had to stop worrying. I worried about things that are on most people's minds, like money and family. But I also worried about things I couldn't change or control, like the weather. And if I was going to get better, I needed to accept the fact that some things are out of my hands. I've done that, and feel better for it.

But I'm also taking measures to better deal with things I can control, such as financial management, with more spreadsheets, cost analysis and better records. And I'm always looking for distractions to get out of the office, especially in winter, like snowboarding. Winter is tough for grain farmers; you can easily get cabin fever.















In farming, we're taught to tough it out, to deal with things ourselves and figure them out. But sometimes that's not possible. I didn't even know what was affecting me, let alone how to fix it. Seeking professional help is OK, starting with your family doctor. After 18 months, I'm healing, and maybe I always will be. ●

Common stressors on the farm

Source: *The Agricultural Health and Safety Network*

What would top your list of stressors?

Identifying the cause is the first step to better managing stress.

-  Finances
-  Volatile markets
-  Handling dangerous goods
-  Family disagreements
-  Industry regulations and paperwork
-  Frustrations of technology not working properly
-  Weather
-  Uncertain crop yield and forage production
-  Unreasonable personal goals
-  Long hours
-  Machinery breakdowns
-  Livestock well-being
-  Lack of sleep
-  Workload

Did you know?

Stress can cause people to feel overwhelmed and leave them unable to make any decisions. This can interrupt or stop business activity, impact productivity and change family interactions. 🧠

Adapted from Managing the Pressures of Farming, University of Sydney



When finances keep you awake



Financial stress snowballs. Maybe it starts with sinking commodity prices, maybe weather issues. Before you know it, you're having trouble paying the bills.

Here are three steps you can take when finances are starting to stress you out:

- **Don't wait!** Act as soon as you realize money concerns are keeping you awake at night. Stewing about the problem while hoping it will go away on its own isn't going to work (which some part of you already knows, or you wouldn't be stressing about it).
- **Share your concerns with key stakeholders.** Whether it's a business partner, spouse or family member, the stress of hiding financial truths in any relationship can be crushing. Sometimes just the act of sharing can alleviate some of the worry.
- **Talk to your financial institution right away.** It's often possible to extend the term of a loan, lower the payment amount or decrease payment frequency. The longer lead time your lender has, the greater the number of options they'll be able to offer.

And know you're not alone. Almost everyone experiences financial stress at some point, especially in an industry we love but where so much is out of our control. One thing you can control? Your response – how you deal with a situation, and how much help you're willing to accept to fix it. 🎯

DO YOU KNOW YOUR RISK TOLERANCE?

How can you grow your business and still sleep at night? We have guides, templates and tools that can help with these questions, and much more. fcc.ca/LoanEssentials





Turning to community in difficult times

As told to Owen Roberts

We thank Jean-Claude Poissant, producer and former parliamentarian, for his openness and candour on this topic.

We get up every morning feeling stress. Our first thought is always, “Are the animals okay? Is everything alright with them? Did anything happen during the night?”

Producers get used to a certain level of work-related stress, but the build-up can take its toll. You check out completely and lose sight of where you’re at.

That’s what happened to me. And at the same time, I got divorced. But as fate would have it, I read about *Au cœur des familles agricoles*, a Quebec non-profit that supports producers and their families. It had an ad asking, “Are you going through a difficult time?” with a list of stressors (finances, herd, weather, etc.). I met with a rep from the organization who knows agriculture and comes from the agricultural community. She said I needed to be confident in the people that I would choose to surround me and help me on the farm.

I also met with my bank manager. I had large amounts of money to manage and he told me not to worry, to start by looking after myself. He understood the situation and he would defer the payments if needed. Once I got back on my feet, we’d push on.

When you surround yourself with good people, it’s easier to get through the tough times. When people wait too long, they can pass the point of no return and act on

“Establish ways to recognize the warning signs of distress ... and use them to self-assess.”

their thoughts. It’s important to establish ways to recognize the warning signs of distress, depression, etc., and use them to self-assess. If there is any doubt in your mind, don’t drag it out. Find qualified people who know farming.

Family is very important in situations like this one. When I had my burnout, my brothers immediately came to the house



and took away the firearms. They knew that people in the area had committed suicide and wanted to play it safe.

People will give us advice and support us. The best people to help are those we see all the time, such as the veterinarian and the feed supplier, people who we end up confiding in a lot.

The other important point is to think about how young people are affected. I saw my father go through times that were even more difficult than mine. Our young people have to find ways to make a living and maintain balance in their lives. Their parents still have a place and a role to play. 🧠



HOW DO YOU REDUCE YOUR STRESS?

Have you ever been passed a book by a friend who stated “You need to read this! It will change your life!” Or another who says “You should take up running. Running clears your mind.” Or “You should meditate.” And as a result, you try them out but they feel like a too-small pair of boots. That’s OK.

Give yourself permission to experiment. Find what works, even if it’s nothing you’ve ever been told before. Try it, you might find it effective. But if it isn’t – just try something else. The key is to keep searching for your own solutions.

Adelle Stewart

Mental well-being is the combination of:



- How you feel about yourself, the world and your life
- Your ability to solve problems and overcome challenges
- Your ability to build relationships with others and contribute to your communities
- Your ability to achieve your goals at work and in life

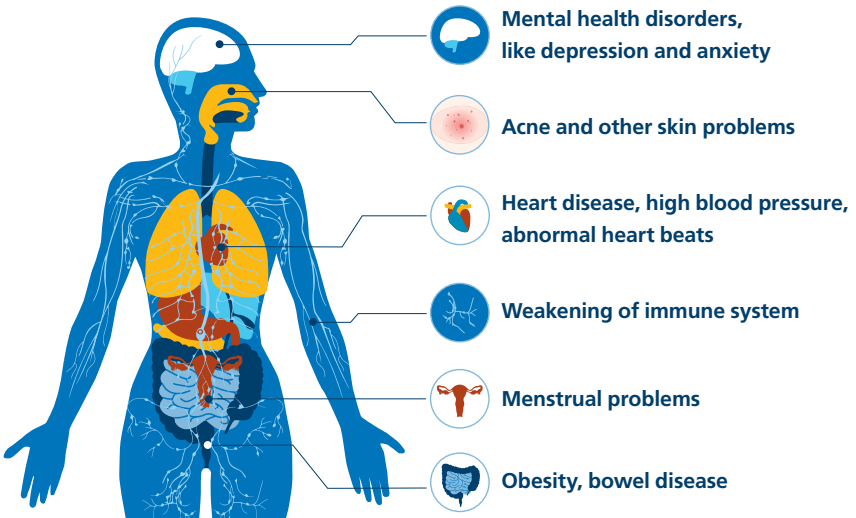
Adapted from: hr.UBC.ca

How stress impacts your physical health

Source: *The Agricultural Health and Safety Network*

Feeling stressed for periods of time can take a toll on your mental and physical health. Our bodies respond to stress by releasing stress hormones. These hormones make blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar levels go up. The first symptoms are relatively mild, like

chronic headaches and increased susceptibility to colds. However, with increased exposure to chronic stress, more serious health problems may develop. Some stress-influenced conditions include but are not limited to:





Take Mental Health First Aid

The Mental Health Commission of Canada offers Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for individuals across the country. MHFA is like CPR training, but instead of learning the basics of helping someone in physical distress like a heart attack, it helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis, such as suicidal behaviour.

More than 400,000 Canadians have been trained since 2007.

Participants who take this course are well prepared to interact confidently about mental health with their family, friends, communities and workplaces.

If you'd like to attend a course or become a certified trainer, visit mhfa.ca.



Be a Mental
Health First Aid
provider

Are your cows worth more than you?

By Pierrette Desrosiers ©2018

What producer, wanting the best performance from his cows, would consider giving his best animals hay that was cut at the end of the season and left lying in the rain? Who would use the same tractor oil all season? Would you expect an abundant harvest every year without adding any fertilizer?

Some producers treat their bodies that way.

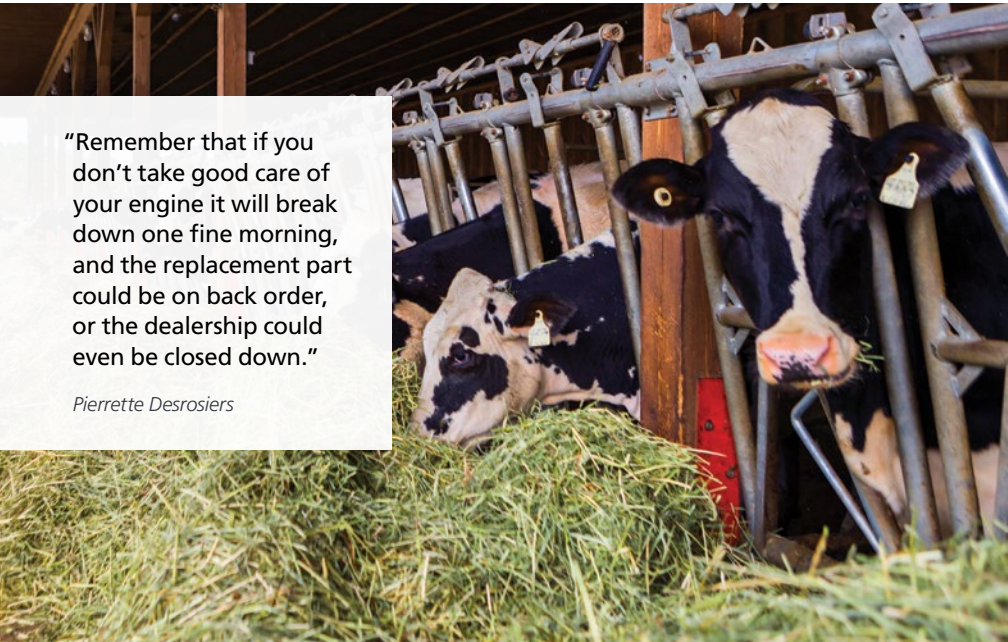
In the busy times, they fuel themselves with nothing more than sugary drinks, caffeine and greasy fast food.

There are producers who don't get enough sleep. Many are in bad physical shape and think working out is a waste of their time.

Finally, it seems, stress prevention is good for their cows, but not for them.

But they want to perform well and live healthy lives for as long as possible.

Well, producers, in a way you are like your cows, pigs, fields and tractors. You can't continue producing at your maximum physical and psychological potential if you mistreat yourself. It's just a fact. 🐮



“Remember that if you don't take good care of your engine it will break down one fine morning, and the replacement part could be on back order, or the dealership could even be closed down.”

Pierrette Desrosiers

Take courage – talk to your teens

As told to Owen Roberts

Our thanks go to this Ontario farm family who found the strength to talk to us about their son's struggle with mental health.

In teens, sometimes the signs of mental illness are obvious, such as increased sullenness and withdrawal. However, that wasn't the case with our teenage son, who was active, talkative and engaged. He worked hard like all farmers do, like the rest of our farm family does. But we always took Sundays and evenings off, so he could do other things for entertainment and exercise. He was a 17-year-old boy turning into a young man.

When he died, everyone was shocked. His school principal said he was the last student he would have ever suspected of having serious mental health issues that would lead to his death. There were no warning signs at home or at school.

So I'm glad mental health is becoming discussed more in the farm community. It

They think admitting they have issues is a sign of weakness. But actually, opening up takes strength.

opening for our son to open up about the problems he was dealing with silently.

needs to be talked about openly, and not just when there's an obvious problem. We've wondered if raising the topic around the dinner table in a general way would have provided an

What would have happened if we'd talked over dinner about someone else we knew who was dealing with depression? Would that have drawn him out?

People quietly trying to figure out mental health issues on their own might need that kind of a little push to share what they're going through. While they may not open up immediately, a conversation could plant the idea with them that it's OK to talk about mental health. Later, that could end up being a conversation with a teacher, a coach or a friend. After my son died, I found out he'd told a friend he didn't open up about his problem because he didn't want to worry me. That helped explain why he hadn't said anything.

The farm community is strong. It prides itself on its strength. And that may be the very reason some people with mental health issues are reluctant to open up. They think admitting they have issues is a sign of weakness. But actually, opening up takes strength. You're strong when you do it. It might be the most courageous thing you ever do. 🧠

BUSTED

That myth that says talking to someone about suicide causes them to think about killing themselves? It's false.



Source: *Calgary Centre for Suicide Prevention*

5 simple ways to boost serotonin

By Dr. Georges Sabongui ©2018

Serotonin, sometimes known as the happiness chemical, is a neurotransmitter believed to help regulate mood, sleep, memory and more. So it's no surprise that many antidepressants increase serotonin in the brain.

Here are some ways you can build resilience by maximizing your natural serotonin levels.

1. Sleep

While we sleep, melatonin is transformed into serotonin. A very recent study showed lack of sleep has two significant effects: we become more emotional due to over-stimulation of the amygdala, and less rational due to under-stimulation of the left frontal cortex.

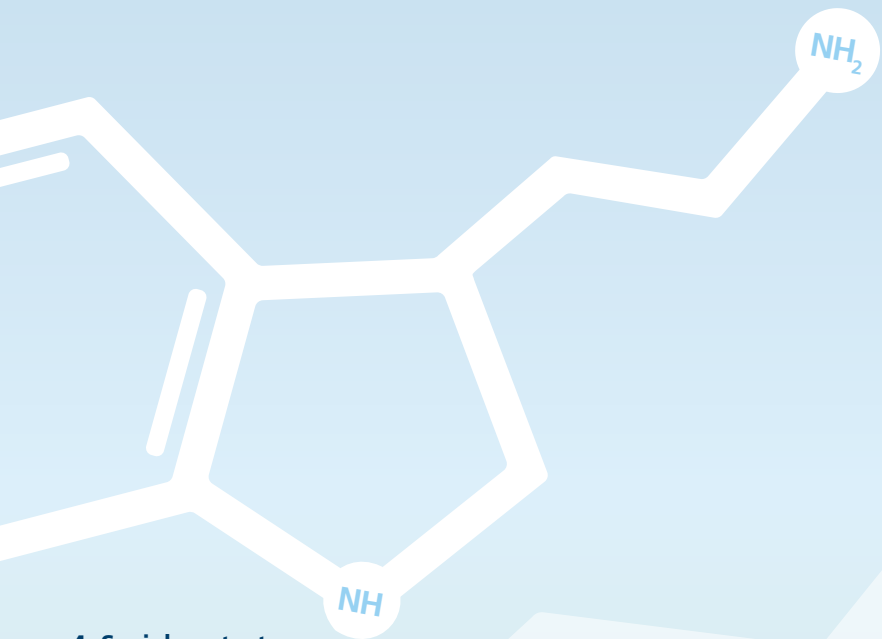
2. Smile

Researchers studying the effect of facial expressions on mood asked participants to hold a pencil between their teeth, forcing them to contract their cheeks in imitation of a smile. Another group held it between their lips. When asked, the group holding the pencil between their teeth reported feeling significantly happier.

3. Sports

Cardio and aerobic exercise is good for the heart, while very brief, very intense exercise to the point of exhaustion is ideal for the brain. In this anaerobic zone, your body burns protein and uses metabolites bound to the protein to manufacture serotonin. Seven minutes with a heart rate about 160 beats per minute is all it takes.

Most of these studies were conducted among military personnel required to maintain a high level of operational performance in extremely demanding environments.



4. Social contact

People with a broader social network secrete more serotonin and are much more resilient when it comes to dealing with stress. Of course, we're talking interactions with real human beings, not virtual interactions like Facebook or Twitter. And, research shows a lack of social contact can reduce life expectancy by 10 to 15 years.

5. Spirituality

Spirituality is a broad concept with room for many perspectives. In general, it includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves. Science used to shy away from research on spirituality until we discovered that people with a strong spiritual practice are happier than others. Your religion doesn't matter, the same positive effects have been observed among Catholic nuns and Buddhist monks. 🧠

DID YOU KNOW?

Low serotonin is associated with these mood disorders:



- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bipolar disorder
- Fibromyalgia
- Aggressiveness
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

Not struggling in silence anymore

As told to Owen Roberts

We thank this farming couple from Saskatchewan for giving us a glimpse into their wellness journey.

Weather is extremely important for growing a successful crop and farmers have zero control over it or severe weather events. This is very stressful for farmers.

We had a hard year in 2016. We had five times our annual rainfall during our growing season, and come harvest we couldn't get into our fields because it was too wet. Then we got hit with a hail storm that decimated our crops. To top it off, we had one insurance policy that didn't pay out and we really needed it. It felt like we were digging our own graves trying to follow our dreams of farming. It was out of our control.

Turning to certain friends for support made me feel isolated, because until you have been through one of those really hard years, you just cannot get it. It hurt when they compared us losing an entire crop to hail to that time they had hail damage in their vegetable garden.

As a couple, both of us were struggling in silence trying to protect the other. We were each blaming ourselves for our hard farming year and financial stress. It felt like we had failed at farming, failed at supporting our family, even though it was out of our control. We both felt as though we were only worth our life insurance policies.

LETTING GO

Sometimes letting go is even more important than taking action. Let go of unhealthy behaviours and unnecessary activities. Learning to say no can be an important goal.

Pierrette Desrosiers



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A turning point came when we started to talk to each other. We realized we felt the same way, and yet neither of us put blame on the other. So why, we asked, were we putting it on ourselves? Getting that out in the open relieved some pressure and helped us handle some of the stress. It wasn't an easy conversation, but it was important that we were able to talk. No matter how hard things get, we learned we need to lean on each other.

Talking to other producers helped too. They're like a safe place, a community of people who have been where you are and understand, or who have made it out the other side and can offer encouragement and support.

Writing about my feelings and sharing them on social media also helped me express myself and helped me connect with other producers. In some cases, I've been able to talk to their spouses and learn how they help support each other.

Talking and learning to listen – really listen – helps. 🧠

Helping a loved one

Adapted from Mental Health Resources for Winnipeg CMHA 2017

Having a family member with a mental illness is stressful. In addition to coping with day-to-day living, families can experience tremendous guilt, fear, grief, anxiety, self-doubt and uncertainty.

Each family member may react differently to the situation, but it's important everyone understands that the person dealing with a mental illness must always be treated with dignity and respect.

- Keep notes about what has been happening; it can help you see patterns, etc.
- Make a list of questions you may want to ask the doctor.
- Offer choices to the person such as, "Will you go to the hospital with me, or would you prefer (name a friend) go with you?"
- Have a plan for dealing with crisis situations such as who to call, what services are available, and who can support the person and family through a crisis.
- Make sure you are looking after yourself too.

If you're struggling to help someone you love, call your local branch of Canadian Mental Health Association or go online for resources. Many self-help organizations offer information and support to families. CMHA.ca/Resources ●





A positive attitude, a proactive approach

By Pierrette Desrosiers ©2018

Studies show that proactive people are healthier, claim to be happier and enjoy better relationships.

Why should we become more proactive? It can help us endure extreme pressure during trying times. Thanks to a proactive attitude, we can address various unpleasant situations (such as mad cow disease, a bad hay crop or even a conflict with our teenager) in many different ways.

Proactive people know themselves well

They have a life plan and have set goals for themselves in all areas of their lives (work, spirituality, personal life, family life, spousal life). They have a sense of control over their lives. Their sources of motivation, standards and values come from within.

Proactive people:

- Take responsibility
- Anticipate and prepare for different events
- Make a distinction between what they can control (their actions, words, daily choices), what they can influence (their relationships, finances, health) and what they have no control over (the weather)
- Know themselves (values, motivations, strengths, weaknesses, interests, etc.)
- Take initiative

To learn to be more proactive, ask yourself:

- How did I react to the situation?
- What have I learned from the situation?
- What could I do differently next time?
- What habits can I change to achieve my goals?



Reactive people are often affected by their physical environment

Trends and the opinions of others influence them tremendously. Their emotional state is greatly affected by how the people around them behave. To a large extent, reactive people blame others for their mental state. Their motivations come primarily from external sources.

Passive people wait

They wait for things to happen, or for events to resolve themselves on their own, or for people to change. They feel that's what will make them happy. They expect others to do things for them, like they are powerless. 🧠



Proactive language

I will
I believe
I choose
I commit myself to
I decided to
I don't want to

Reactive language

I am being controlled
It is their fault
I was forced to
I can't help myself
I am ashamed by her
I cannot be happy because
I don't know

Passive language

If you want
Some day
I'd really like to but
I really wish that
I could but
I don't have choice,
I have to

Information provided in this booklet is general content and is not a substitute for professional advice. Concerns of anxiety, stress, depression and other mental health impacts should be discussed with your doctor or other mental health professional.

Contributors

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What to expect when you call a help line

Provided by John McFadyen – Mobile Crisis Services Inc.

- Crisis workers will listen to you talk about what is worrying you
- They may ask you to provide information about your current situation, past situations, your current and past supports (family, friends and professionals)
- They will help you tell your story
- They will keep all aspects of your conversation confidential
- They will help you prioritize the issues you have identified, not judge you for what you're going through
- They will assess what has worked well and what hasn't
- They will help you determine what needs to be addressed and what can wait
- They will help you determine what you have control over and those issues you have no control over
- They will problem solve with you and identify alternatives

The hardest part is that decision to pick up the phone and call. See our list on the next page to find a number for your province. 📞



CALL 911 NOW

if you feel this is an emergency for you or someone else.
Don't hesitate. Trained first responders are available to help.

Mental health help lines

Call now if you need help or you're wondering what to do.

British Columbia: 1-800-784-2433

Alberta: 1-877-303-2642

Saskatchewan: 1-800-667-4442

Manitoba: 1-866-367-3276

Ontario: 1-866-531-2600

Quebec: 1-866-277-3553

New Brunswick: 1-800-667-5005

Nova Scotia: 1-888-429-8167

Prince Edward Island: 1-800-218-2885

Newfoundland and Labrador: 1-888-737-4668

Yukon: 1-844-533-3030

Northwest Territories: 1-800-661-0844

Nunavut: 1-800-265-3333

Get more information

domore.ag/resources

Do More Agriculture Foundation

[4H Canada Healthy Living Initiative](https://4h-canada.ca/HealthyLiving)

4-h-canada.ca/HealthyLiving

[Kid's Help Phone](https://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

1-800-668-6868

[CrisisServicesCanada.ca](https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca)

1-833-456-4566

[fcc.ca/Wellness](https://www.fcc.ca/Wellness)