



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

TAKING CARE OF YOU

Serving your community as a fire fighter/paramedic is both a stressful and rewarding job, that places great strain on your physical health, mental health, and relationships. To thrive today, tomorrow, and well into retirement, prioritize these strategies for self-care now:

FIND A DAILY DIVERSION FOR STRESS

Find something enjoyable that helps you unplug and do it daily. Twenty minutes of your favorite hobby, music, sports or playing with your dog can go a long way. Both purposeful and mindless activities have a role to play in creating a mental buffer against the impact of cumulative stress.

STAY CONNECTED

The role of your support system in coping with personal and occupational stress cannot be overstated. While isolating may seem more comfortable in times of severe stress, good relationships with your crew, family, and friends are essential to your longevity in the highly stressful occupation you have chosen. Don't wait until you are in crisis to develop supportive relationships.

GET MOVING

Exercise not only releases feel-good endorphins (chemicals in the brain), but has been shown to reduce rumination, improve confidence, and strengthen socialization. Do not assume because you are a fire fighter, you are exempt from a daily exercise routine. Start simple and consider using an accountability partner.

ENSURE PROPER FOOD AND FLUID INTAKE

A balanced diet and adequate hydration is essential to your daily functioning, mood, and cognition. Start each day with a healthy breakfast, plenty of vegetables and whole grains, and be sure to drink enough water throughout the day by carrying a bottle with you.

BALANCE BUSY TIME WITH DOWN TIME

While many fire fighters work two jobs, do charity work, or have other civic engagements, too much activity can become an effective but unhealthy strategy to avoid feeling anything. Try to schedule at least one day a week of mostly down time, where you can rest, process, and recuperate.

ASSUME PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Regardless of your specific circumstances, only you can take charge of your wellbeing and self-care. Decades of research on trauma survivors has identified this quality—the willingness to assume personal responsibility for one's wellbeing— as a key predictor of resilience in the aftermath of severe trauma and adversity.

CHALLENGE NEGATIVE THINKING

We each have a daily internal dialogue or “self-talk” that unconsciously impacts our mood, functioning, social interaction, and behavior. Especially during difficult times, we tend to think in overly negative, simplistic, and dysfunctional ways. While learning to “just think positive” may be unrealistic, you can learn to catch unhelpful thoughts and replace them with more balanced, rational ideas.

KNOW WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP

Feeling persistently agitated, hopeless, or apathetic toward daily life is not a “normal” part of working hard or getting older. These experiences may be symptoms of a treatable behavioral health problem that requires attention. Know the warning signs and when it's time to ask a peer, loved one, or healthcare provider for help.

REACHING OUT: WHERE TO ASK FOR HELP

IAFF RESOURCES

- Contact BehavioralHealth@iaff.org for a clinician referral
- [IAFF Online Recovery Meetings](#)
- IAFF Center of Excellence: 1-855-900-8437

AT WORK

- Peer Support
- Chaplain
- EAP

CRISIS NUMBERS

- Firestrong 24/7 Firefighter Family Crisis Support Line: 1-844-525-3473
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988