



# Advice from a Medical Director: Six ways to start a conversation about your mental health

**COVID-19 is having an indirect but profound impact on people's mental health. Social isolation, concerns over contracting COVID-19, financial uncertainty and an endless stream of bad news are leading to increased levels of anxiety, depression, stress and post-traumatic stress disorder around the globe. Know that you're not alone. And know that help is available. Consider this advice from Dr Nairah Rasul-Syed, vHealth Medical Director and Family Medicine Consultant. To get medical support today, book a doctor's appointment via a virtual health service, such as vHealth\*<sup>1,2,3</sup>**

## **Talk with your employer<sup>4,5</sup>**

Employers are increasingly offering mental health support, not just as a bolt-on benefit or service but as an integral part of your policy cover. Your manager or HR department can connect you with available support and may be able to provide other resources. Here's how to start a conversation.

**1. Decide who to talk to.** Consider who in your organisation would be the most helpful. This might be your boss or line manager, a mental health first aid employee liaison, an HR representative, or a trusted co-worker.

**2. Consider your situation.** Do you simply need to ask for a personal day or two so you can clear your head? Or do you need someone to help you figure out where to turn for help and how to go about it? Approach the conversation with a goal in mind and read up on your policy cover and benefits to find out about the support available to you.

**3. Choose the right time and place.** This is an important meeting. Try to schedule it in advance and meet in a setting where you won't be rushed or interrupted.



## Talk with a doctor

It's important to seek support for your mental health concerns or persistent feelings of low mood or anxiety. Leaving them untreated can impact your physical health, cause you undue worry in the short-term and could cause greater issues later. Many people are currently concerned about attending a clinic or doctor's office in person. Virtual health services (such as vHealth) offer quick, convenient, at-home access to quality medical support. Whether you make an appointment with your family doctor or choose to connect digitally with a qualified doctor via a virtual service such as vHealth\*, here's how to approach the conversation.<sup>7,8</sup>

**1. Approach the visit like any other doctor appointment.** Have your insurance card and list of your current medications handy. Check your confirmation email for key information. Make a list of questions you want to ask. Prepare to wait a few minutes if your doctor is running late.

**2. Be prepared, open and honest.** Your medical consultations are confidential. To give your doctor the best chance to give you the most appropriate support, be honest about your situation. Keep notes about your circumstances, experiences and emotions handy. Expect your doctor to ask about your medical history and physical health, as well as questions about changes to various aspects of your life, from sleep and your appetite, to your enjoyment of life and concentration levels.

**3. Find a quiet, well-lit place for the visit.** Choose a location where you are relaxed and free from distractions. If you're having a video appointment\*\*, turn the lights up so your doctor can see you. Do a test run with your camera and microphone. Be sure your battery is charged.

\*Check your policy document or ask your employer to find out if you're eligible for vHealth.

\*\* Only telephone consults, and not video consults, are available via vHealth (Dubai).

1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7413844/>

2 <https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome---mental-health>

3 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

4 <https://www.psych.com/how-to-talk-to-your-boss-about-your-mental-health/>

5 <https://www.themuse.com/advice/heres-how-to-have-an-honest-talk-with-your-boss-about-your-mental-health>

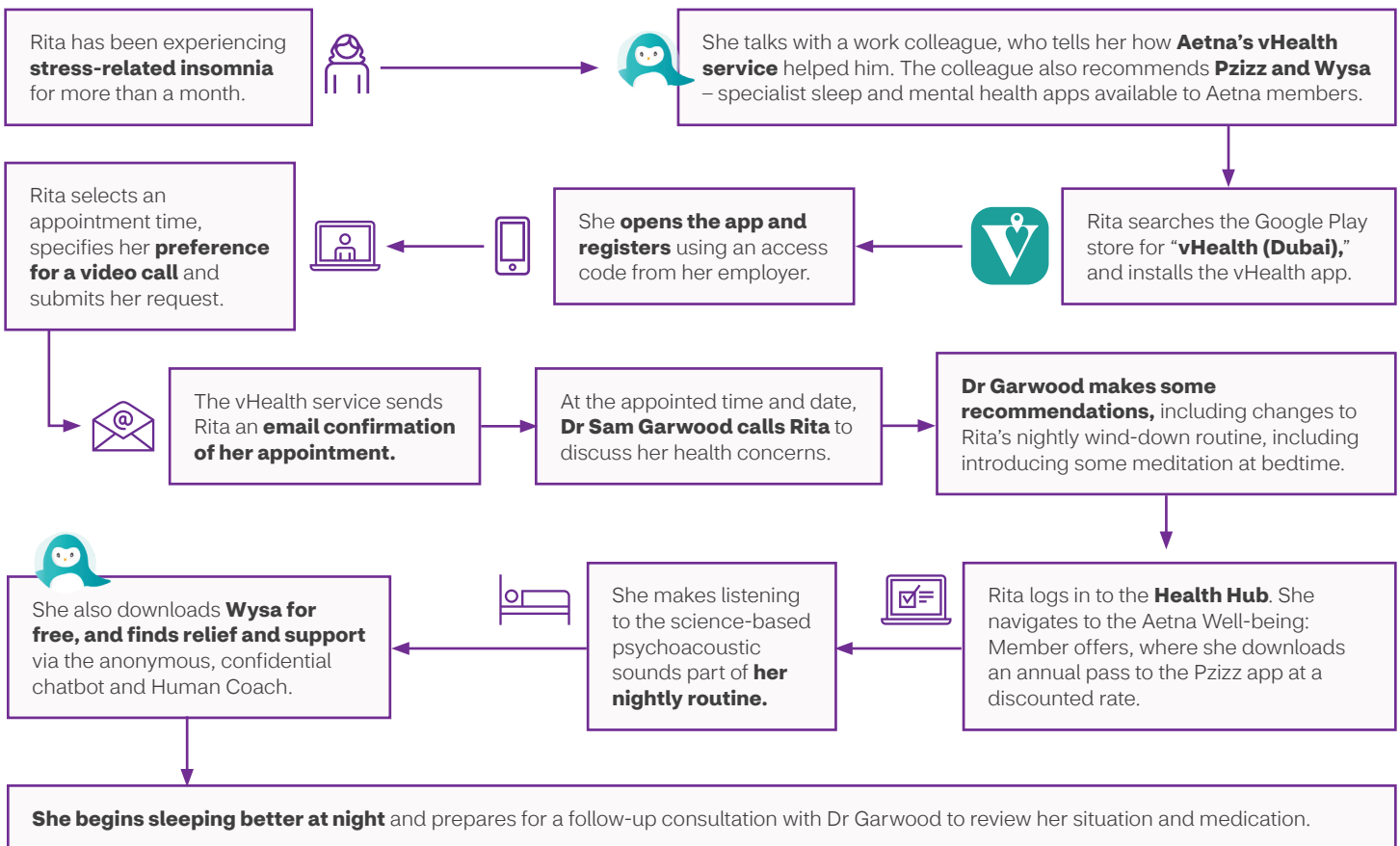
6 <https://www.thehrdirector.com/features/health-and-wellbeing/reality-bites-so-its-time-to-get-digital/>

7 <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/four-tips-for-maximizing-virtual-health-care-visits/>

8 <https://health.sunnybrook.ca/covid-19-coronavirus/virtual-care-checklist/>

## How vHealth can help\*

Help for stress, anxiety, burnout and depression is at your fingertips – whether you have a mobile, tablet or laptop. Here's how Rita, a 27-year-old Aetna International member living in Dubai, got the support she needed.\*



## Do you need help?

If your mental health has been affected by COVID-19, know that you're not alone. Rather than suffer in silence, reach out to those who can help.

As an Aetna International member, you can call us using the number on the back of your member ID card. Login to the [Health Hub](#), your secure member website, to find out more about vHealth\*, to contact the Aetna CARE team to ask health care questions or to search our directory of in-network hospitals or clinics. Download the [vHealth by Aetna](#) app. In Dubai? Download the [vHealth \(Dubai\) app](#), contact the tollfree number on 8000 35704672 or email [support@vhealth.co.ae](mailto:support@vhealth.co.ae). In Thailand? Download the [vHealth \(Thailand\) app](#). A member in the U.S.? [Get free access to Teladoc](#). To download Wysa for free, access therapeutic counselling through the Employee Assistance Program, or take advantage of member offer discounts, login to the Health Hub and visit the Aetna Well-being: Mind section. For more information about your health care and well-being benefits, contact your plan sponsor.

## You're not alone. Getting help today makes for a better tomorrow.

**Mental health resources:** <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/workplace-mental-health-support-resource.html>

**Health Hub:** <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>

\*For those eligible for vHealth | All vHealth apps (vHealth by Aetna, vHealth (Dubai) and vHealth (Thailand) can be downloaded from the App Store and Google Play.

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66.03.532.1 (11/20)

