



Welcome to the October edition of our monthly newsletter. This month is Mental Health Awareness!

Creating awareness, educating and reducing mental illness stigmas is the purpose around this month. We would like to encourage you to spread awareness and support for those who are struggling. Please know that you can reach out to us if you are in need of any help and support.

This edition shares insight into what mental health is, why it's important and a few tips for positive mental health. Also, a special feature by Debbie sharing her experience around mental health struggles.



Mental Health and why it's important



Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It helps us determine how we manage stress and relate to others. Importantly, it effects how we think, feel and behave.



Some SA Stats:



According to research by EAPA-SA and Wits Medical Research Council

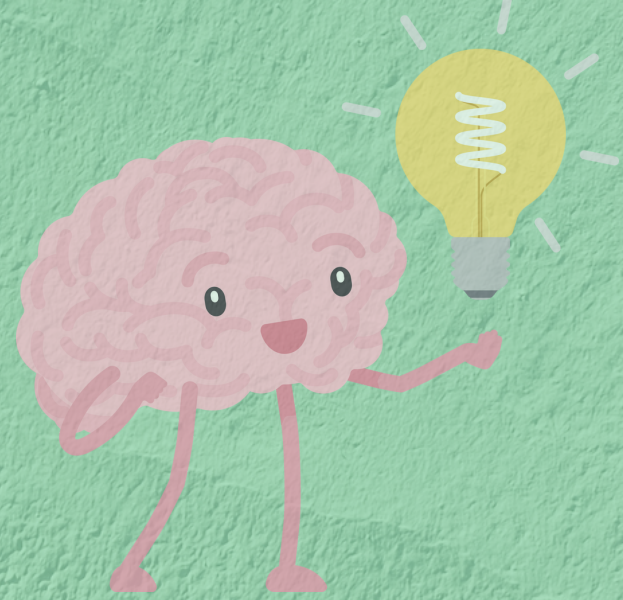
On the mental health wellbeing scale, South Africa has scored the lowest average score. The rate of mental illnesses has increased by 7.5%, from 28.5% in 2020 to 36%. Only 15%-25% of South Africans suffering from depression will seek out and receive help.

Resources:

visit these sites for information on mental health.

- [South African Depression and Anxiety Group \(SADAG\)](#)
- [Mental Health Information Centre](#)
- [SA Federation for Mental Health](#)
- [Inala Mental Health Foundation](#)



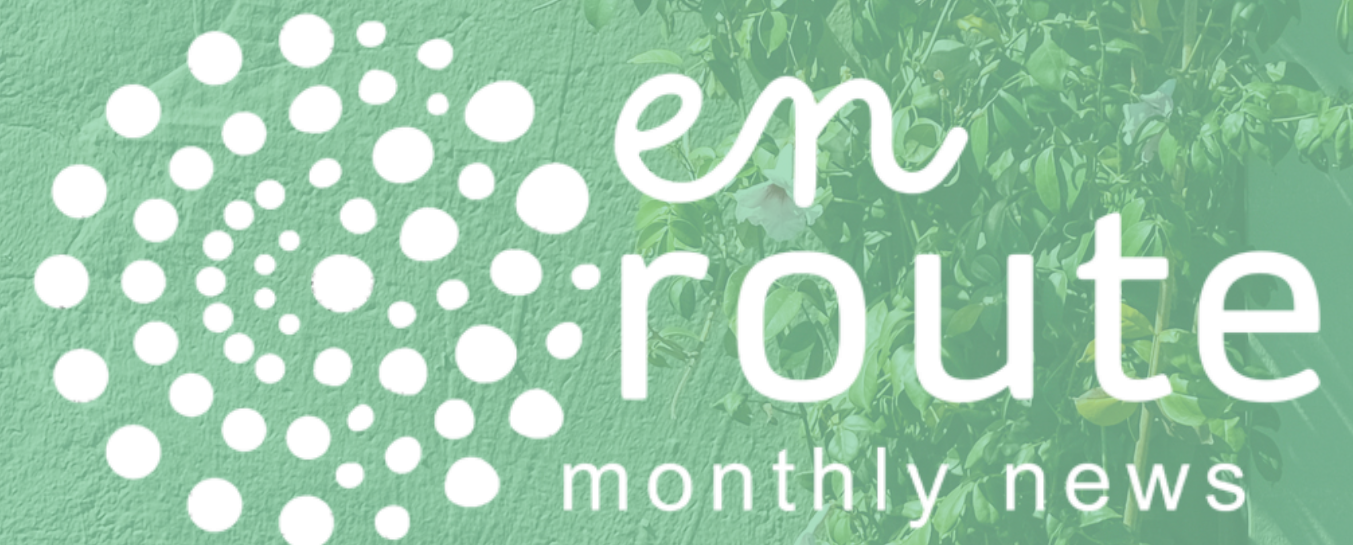


Mental Health is Integral

Tips for positive mental health:

- Talk to someone you trust (open up to close friends and family for support).
- Identify what you are feeling and possible reasons why.
- Stay active (physical health improves mental health).
- Don't compromise your sleep (get those hours in).
- Avoid unhealthy foods and eat regularly.
- Prioritise your self-care and do activities you enjoy!
- Recognise that you are not alone and limit your self-judgment.

When we are mentally healthy, we can realise our abilities, cope with stress, work productively, and contribute to society.



Vulnerability is key

By Debbie Wheal

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I always start any conversation about Mental Health Awareness, with complete vulnerability and disclosure. I have personally dealt with Depression and Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), since my first diagnosis at 18 years old. This vulnerability comes with courage, a truck load of courage.

I have not always had an accepting and healthy relationship with my depression and GAD. At the time of my diagnosis in 1989, the stigma around Mental Health was so strong that I quickly retreated into denial. Especially when discussing this with my mother, who simply exclaimed: “Oh what rubbish, it is all in your head!”

With this overwhelming lack of understanding, acceptance and support, I dismissed the diagnosis and declined medical assistance. I didn't stand a chance though, with a genetic predisposition to depression and GAD, and then further experiencing a divorce in my 20's. I had to face facts and begin medical assistance. In the 1990's the medical assistance was certainly not as sophisticated as it is today. I was placed on pure serotonin-based medicine and slowly began to feel better. The GAD however, was left untreated.

This led to a dangerous game I started to play with my mental health. As soon as I felt better on the medication, I started to feel anxious that I would become reliant on this medication and never live a 'normal' life again. So, I would simply take myself off the medication. I am a cautionary tale here, please never simply take yourself off medication of any kind and certainly without the assistance of a medical practitioner.

Predictably, I would land up back in the doctors' rooms feeling close to death, only to start the process again. In 2016, I had a stint in the Sandton Clinic Psychiatric ward. This was the lowest I had ever been and felt. I have become stronger and built my life since then, and not only live and thrive but flying the banner for Mental Health awareness.

I have broken this destructive cycle now and I am highly functional and living with full acceptance of my depression and GAD. It does not stop me from achieving anything I wish to. I have learnt how to read my body, listen to my mind and feel my emotions, to regulate my life as required, to remain healthy.



So, why did I say it is courageous to be vulnerable?

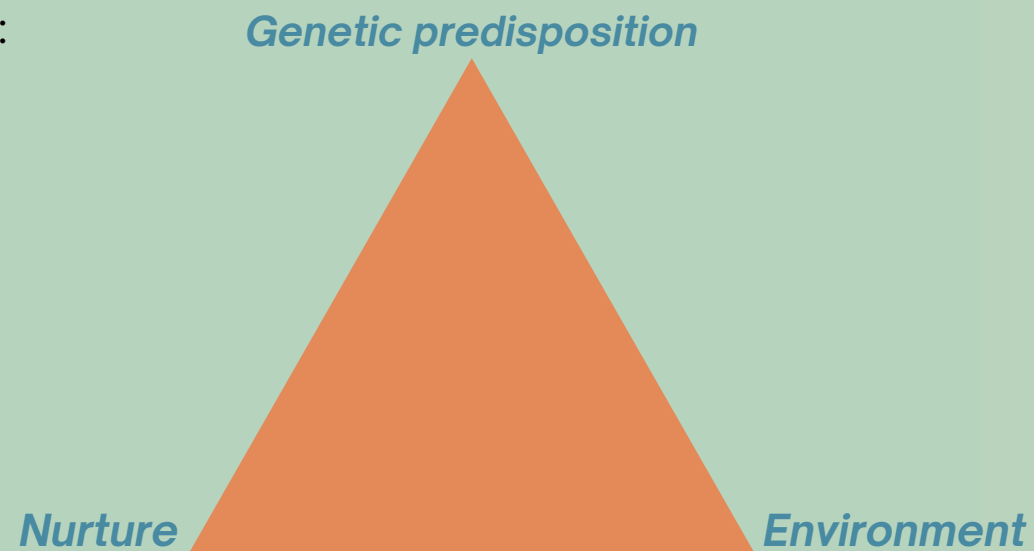
Because it is! People are still judgemental, judging others and themselves as well. This past weekend I was visiting a friend, whose son is a successful travel Youtuber. Her son and his girlfriend have travelled the world, gathering thousands of followers and creating incredible content. Until 3 months ago, when he collapsed at an airport, believing he was having a heart attack. However, he was having an equally lethal panic attack. Although a panic attack is not immediately lethal, untreated anxiety and possible depression is! I watched his latest Youtube video on Sunday with his mom, my friend. He and his partner explained their absence from posting for the last 3 months was due to burnout, anxiety and possible depression that they were both feeling.

I applauded their courage! My friend's son's partner explained that she has always suffered from anxiety and he had not. She expressed her devastation at losing her strong partner. He then went on to explain how disappointed / gutted he felt about himself, that he has succumbed to anxiety and depression. I was mortified at what I was hearing. The message that is being sent out to the thousands of followers, that burnout and depression is something to be disappointed / gutted about, possibly even a sign of weakness.

Another anecdotal tale I have to tell is of a conversation I had with Liberty Life (LL) (yes, I am naming them, as this is a true story). A conversation centred around my medical history for insurance for my new bond. Considering that LL have all my medical insurance, Life insurance and Dread Disease cover, I assumed this would be an easy conversation.

I fully disclosed that I have depression and GAD, which took us down a rabbit hole of questions: When was I first diagnosed; am I currently in a treatment plan; have I ever been hospitalized due to depression and anxiety. However, the best question for me had to be around my first diagnosis at the tender age of 18: What was the cause of my depression? By this stage I was horrified, absolutely horrified. Such ignorant questions! Yes, I understand this is a tick box situation for the ignorant person on the other end of the call, none the less, they need to revisit this process.

When I look at the cause of depression, I believe it is the a triangle:



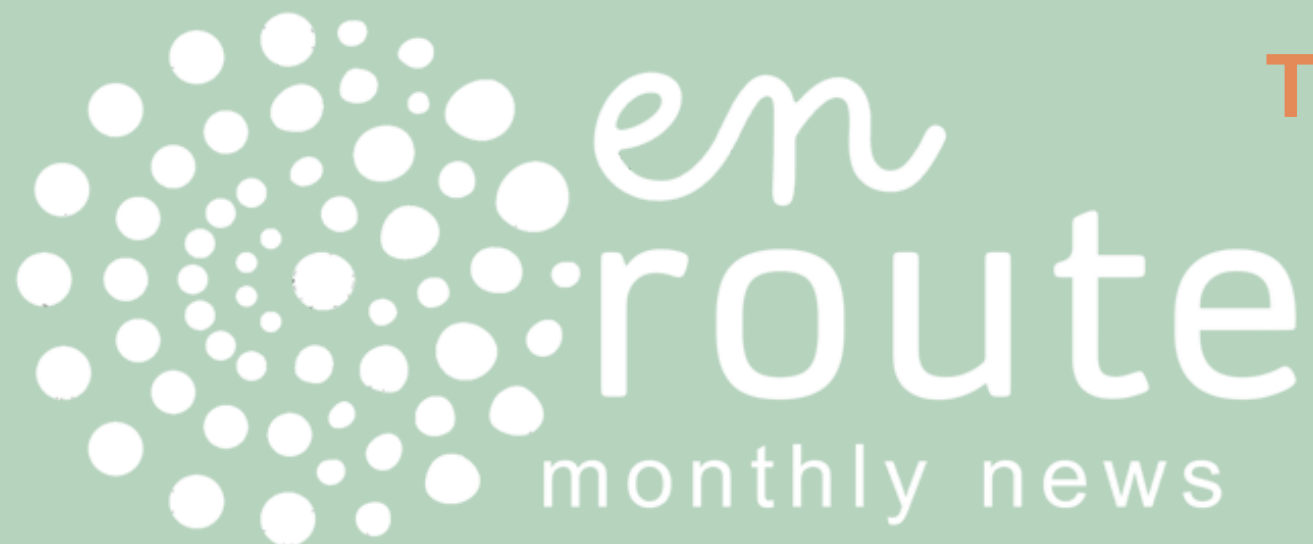
I certainly have the hat-trick. From evidence of genetic predisposition in my family history, the way I was brought up and various traumatic, and stress-filled, anxiety inducing situations in my life.

I believe one should never be asked what has caused any mental health disease, other than discussing the situation in a psychologically safe space with a professional who has insight, knowledge, compassion and who is non-judgmental.

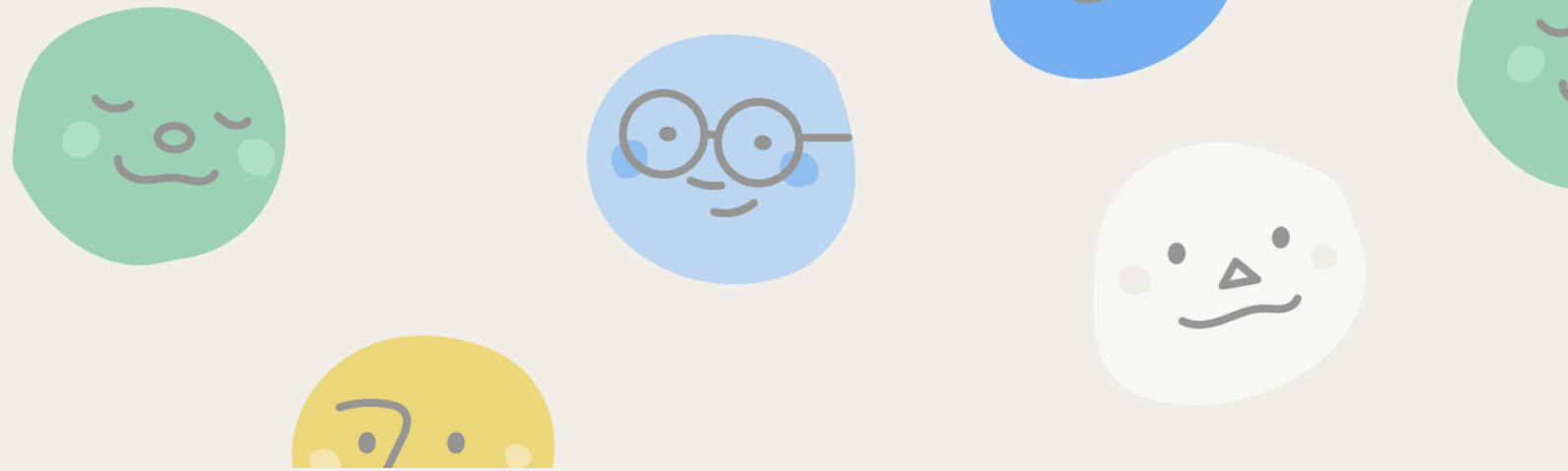
So, the end of the story with LL is that they refused me insurance on my bond for 1 year, due to my collective health issues. That means, LL does not think I will live out the year from the time our conversation was held (in June). This is October of the same year, I am here and doing fine thank you LL. Luckily, there are other insurance companies that don't ask stupid questions and I do have insurance on my bond!

I end this article with encouragement to all, to be courageous and vulnerable. Start the conversation and look out for each other. Most importantly, reach out to a professional if you need to. I did, and it saved my life.

Thanks for reading :)



Mental Health Matters.



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Checkout our various articles titled 'stress & burnout', 'the art of sleep', 'selfish or self-care' and more on our website.

www.routescoaching.co.za

Reach Out To Us

There is no shame in admitting you need help. Let's break the stigmas and create awareness for mental health and support those around us.

If you are struggling and need someone to talk to, please know that routes coaching is here for you.

