



IoH Broadsheet

The Institute of Hospitality Broadsheet is a thought-leadership article written by a Member or Fellow of the Institute. Celebrating the wealth of professionalism, knowledge and expertise within our diverse, worldwide hospitality family. The IoH Broadsheet is published exclusively for members.

Chefs and mental health: practical coping strategies that work on and off the pass

Chef Rajeev Arora MIH has been a member of the Institute since February 2025 and is Global Head Chef Indian Cuisine at DO & CO Event and Airlines Catering. With more than three decades mastering complex Indian flavours and delivering flawless five-star dining at 30,000 feet, he has led teams in high pressure environments across Delhi, London,

North America and South Africa.

In this month's IoH Broadsheet: **'Chefs and Mental Health: Practical Coping Strategies That Work on and off the Pass'**, Rajeev explores practical ways chefs can protect their mental health in intense kitchen settings while sustaining performance, creativity and joy in the craft.

The Challenge

Professional kitchens are intense, noisy and relentlessly time bound. Heat, split shifts, long hours and perfecting standards can amplify stress and fatigue. Chefs often look after guests, teams and margins first, leaving little time to look after themselves.

As an international chef who travels extensively, here are some of my personal key coping strategies that any chef can use to manage stress and protect their mental health while working in the demanding culinary industry.



Prioritise Physical health

Sleep

Aim for at least 6–8 hours of quality sleep, even if working late shifts. Short naps can help if full sleep isn't possible.

Nutrition

Eating regular, balanced meals, not just quick snacks or drinking caffeine helps sustain energy and mood.

Exercise

Even light exercise like stretching, walking, or yoga can reduce stress and improve mental well-being.

Hydration

Staying hydrated is crucial, especially in hot kitchens. Set boundaries and balance.



Setting Boundaries & Work-Life Balance

Taking Breaks

Step away, even for five minutes, to clear your mind and reset.

Learning to Say No

Avoid overcommitting to shifts or extra tasks that lead to burnout.

Make Time for Hobbies

Engaging in activities outside work such as music, art, reading, etc. can provide much-needed mental escape.

Maintaining Relationships

Staying connected with friends and family helps build emotional support.

Managing Stress Effectively

Mindfulness & Meditation

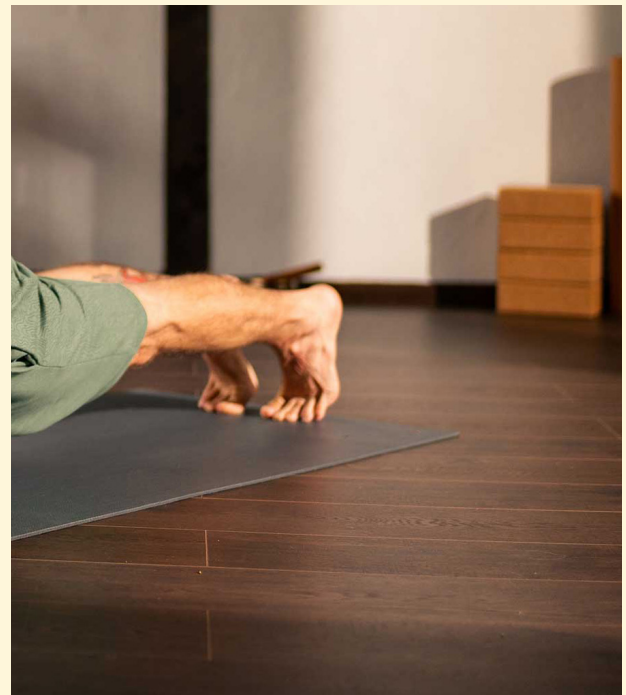
Practices like deep breathing, guided meditation, or gratitude journaling can reduce stress.

Healthy Outlets

Instead of turning to alcohol or drugs, try journaling, creative cooking, or physical activities to relieve tension.

Therapy & Support Groups

Talking to a professional or joining a support group like Ben's Friends or Burnt Chef can help process emotions and help you gain perspective.



Changing Mindset & Work Approach

Focusing on the Present

Avoid dwelling on past mistakes or worrying too much about future shifts.

Celebrate Small Wins

Recognising achievements, even small ones, can improve self-esteem.

Ask for Help

Seeking mentorship, discussing concerns with colleagues, or talking to HR about workload issues can make a difference.

Planning for Long-Term Well-Being

Setting Career Goals

Having a vision for the future, such as opening your own business, moving into management, or teaching, can keep motivation high.

Exploring Alternative Schedules

Seeking workplaces with better work-life balance, such as private catering, corporate dining, or personal chef roles, can reduce stress.

Investing in Personal Growth

Learning new skills, attending workshops, or expanding beyond the kitchen e.g., food writing, consulting etc. can add variety and fulfilment.

The IoH offers free mentoring to all IoH members. Just register to take part here.



Conclusion

Excellence in the kitchen relies on excellence in self-care. Small daily habits, clear boundaries and timely support are not luxuries. They are performance tools that protect your craft, your team and your life beyond the pass. Start with one change, make it repeatable, then build from there.

About the Author

Chef Rajeev Arora MIH is a renowned culinary artist, celebrated for his innovative approach to traditional and contemporary cuisine, and has dedicated his life to mastering the art of cooking.

A graduate of IHM Pusa New Delhi in 1988, he began his career as a chef at The Claridge's, New Delhi, a five star property in the heart of the city.

For more than three decades he has worked in India, Kenya, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom, leading multi-site teams and delivering luxury dining for airlines at 30,000 feet and for elite international events as part of the Formula One Paddock Club.

Currently Global Head Chef Indian Cuisine at DO & CO Event and Airlines Catering, he combines new product development with event leadership, spanning menu creation, recipe development and supply chain collaboration. His passion for food is matched by a commitment to teaching and inspiring the next generation of chefs, sharing his knowledge and championing chef wellbeing so that teams sustain creativity, consistency and guest delight.



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Help and Support

[IoH and MIND Mental Health at Work Toolkit & Information Advice and Guidance hub](#)

[I'm In podcast Episode 33 Managing Mental Health - also available on all major podcast platforms for non-members](#)

[Fellows Broadsheet – Boosting Mental Health in Hospitality](#)

[Careerscope Hospitality Support Hub](#)

[The Mind Body Stress Reset e-book - Free to members to download from our IoH Library](#)

[Hospitality Action confidential helpline and training on mental health awareness](#)

[The Burnt Chef Project education, free resources and Academy app](#)

[MIND UK emergency helplines](#)

[Befrienders Worldwide international network of over 90 help centres worldwide](#)