

Employee Enhancement Newsletter

Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program

February 2014

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Prioritizing Self-Care: The Key to Stress Management



Self-care is a crucial part of stress management. Regardless of the reasons for your stress, practicing regular self-care will dramatically improve how “stressed” you feel as well as how effectively you deal with the sources of your stress. It can also combat the negative physical and mental health consequences of stress.

Everyone needs to spend some time focusing on self-care, but many people tend to put everyone else’s needs ahead of their own. These people commonly include doctors, nurses, therapists, teachers, and others whose job it is to focus on helping other people. This pattern is also common for parents and other caregivers, as well as for women in general (though many men also ignore their own needs).

The following tips can help you reduce stress by learning how to take care of your own needs first, since only then will you be strong and healthy enough to truly be there and care for others:

1. Not taking good enough care of yourself often happens because you aren’t paying attention to self-care. Just making a decision to prioritize self-care will greatly benefit you and those around you. To start, keep track of how much time each day or week you actually spend on self-care so that you can be made aware of just how little time is devoted to this. You may even want to enter this time in red ink in a daily planner or appointment book to give yourself a visual representation of how well you are (or aren’t) taking care of yourself.
2. Many people feel that when they are relaxing, they are “doing nothing.” On the contrary, taking time to relax is very important, restorative and essential to physical and psychological well-being. Try to make sure that you give yourself a little “downtime” each day. If you find it difficult to relax without “doing” something, just concentrate on taking slow, deep breaths or on relaxing each of your muscle groups.
3. Getting enough sleep is critical to your well-being and should be a priority; without it, your mood and ability to manage stress will most certainly suffer. A set of good sleep practices called “sleep hygiene” can dramatically improve both the quality and quantity of your sleep. These practices include:
 - Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day (including weekends) in order to help “set” your body’s clock to sleep when you want it to.
 - Make sure your body is in good sleep condition when you go to bed. Minimize or eliminate caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol use for several hours before your bedtime.
 - Don’t eat a big meal late at night, but also make sure you are not hungry when you go to bed, as this can disrupt your sleep.

Chat Reminder

Self-Care

Connect with Deer Oaks and a counselor for a live confidential chat.

When:

February 19, 2014

Where:

www.deeroaks.com

Session Time (CST):

12:15 PM to 12:45 PM



DEER OAKS EAP SERVICES



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continued...

- Getting regular exercise will improve your sleep as well as your ability to manage stress. Try to exercise in the morning so that your body is no longer “revved up” when it’s time to go to bed.
 - Make your bedroom as noise-free and as dark as possible. You may even want to invest in light-blocking shades, since the darker the room is, the more your brain will produce and release Melatonin. Melatonin improves sleep quality, stabilizes your sleep, and also acts as an anti-oxidant.
 - If you can’t sleep after about 20 minutes, get up and do something boring and non-stimulating (e.g., read the dictionary), and go back to bed when you start to get sleepy. Make sure not to turn on any bright lights, as this will wake your body up.
4. Each morning, instead of bolting out of bed, take a little time to enter the day. Allow your mind to slowly and peacefully wake up and get oriented, and prepare your body by doing some gentle stretching exercises. You may want to set your alarm a few minutes earlier so that you have enough time to practice this type of self-care without rushing. You could also just hit the “snooze” button one less time - spending 7 minutes preparing yourself for your day will help your mood and energy level much more than just 7 minutes of sleep would!
 5. Make sure you’re getting the right amount of vitamins and minerals (e.g., a daily multivitamin, fish oil, Calcium, Vitamin D, Vitamin B complex, etc.). Not giving your body the nutrients it needs can make you sluggish and less able to deal with the demands of your day. Consult your physician regarding the specific vitamins you should be taking; in addition, he or she may want you to get some lab work done to see if you have any existing deficiencies.
 6. Go for a brisk walk for at least a half an hour every day. Regular exercise is good for cardiovascular and bone health, and it releases chemicals in your body that can improve your mood and decrease the amount of stress you feel. In addition, the fresh air and change of scenery can be very beneficial.
 7. In addition to the usual lifestyle recommendations of “get enough sleep, nutrition, and exercise,” think of more creative ways to take care of yourself. For example, you can engage in “pampering” activities such as regular pedicures, manicures, facials, or massages. These services are typically not expensive if you only do them once per month, and the benefits to your well-being are priceless. You can also make activities that you really enjoy a regular part of your routine, such as going to the movies, eating out at your favorite restaurant, etc.
 8. Call a meeting with everyone in your household to review chores and other necessary household tasks. Discuss how often these various chores need to be done as well as how much time each chore takes. Work together to divide up the household responsibilities evenly so that everyone has the same amount of chore time, not necessarily the same amount of chores. In this way, you can make sure that everyone also has an equal amount of free time as much as possible. In order to avoid arguments about who is supposed to do what, you can keep a chart of this information on the refrigerator door.
 9. Having adequate social support is absolutely necessary for mental health and stress management. Nurture and promote good friendships or other relationships, and find at least one person you trust enough to talk to about anything. If you tend to act as the caretaker in most of your relationships, make sure you have at least one friend you can count on to take care of you.
 10. Buy something new (not necessarily expensive) for your home or office, such as a picture, a plant, or music that you enjoy. Sprucing up your environment is often neglected, but feeling good about the place in which you spend most of your time can go a long way toward improving your overall mood and stress level.

Article Source: <http://EzineArticles.com/5499316>

Commit To Be Fit



How are those resolutions going about now? You can make a renewed commitment to yourself and your health anytime. Here's advice from Life Time Fitness to move forward:

- *Create a vision statement.* Make your resolution a commitment and create a vision statement that projects clear personal investment and connects directly to your happiness and health. Once you've created your personal vision, you can identify what goals will get you there.
- *Don't assume you know how to exercise.* Many people who exercise think they know what to do when they walk into a gym, but the reality is poor form, training at an inappropriate intensity, or choosing the wrong exercises for your needs. A well-planned program using proper exercise technique will prove much more successful. Sit down with a well-qualified and certified personal trainer to talk about your exercise program to start on the right track.
- *Test your readiness.* Ask yourself how ready you are to make an actual change. If your vision is health-based and you've made the goal of working out every morning of the week, ask yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being absolutely positive how likely you'll be able to commit and achieve that task and identify barriers that might get in the way. If your readiness is 7 or above, you're ready to embark on your vision, but if it's below 7, change or revise your goal until you're confident enough to know you'll succeed. Small steps to success are better than big steps to fail.
- *Junk the junk.* Don't think you can stick to your diet while keeping junk food in the house. Make a commitment to get rid of all the foods that don't promote health and instead fill your kitchen with good choices.
- *Put it on the fridge.* Laminate it, frame it or post it on your mirror. The goal is to have your resolution statement somewhere where you will see it often as a reminder of what you are working toward. If you're a social person, share it.

Health-e headlines™

How much is a handful?

When dietary guidelines recommend a daily 1-ounce portion of nutrient-rich foods such as almonds, how much is that? The California Almond board says a handful is about 23 almonds. That's the number that can fit nicely on a 3-inch-square sticky note or in a 1/4-cup measuring cup.

Health-e headlines™

Eating Right Tip

Cut back on your fat intake. A high-fat diet can be a real brain and energy drainer. Just say "no" to deep-fried foods and look for foods that contain no more than 3 grams of fat per serving.

Eat moderate portion sizes and avoid large meals. Have you ever wondered why you feel tired after eating a large meal? During periods of digestion, your blood supply is directed to the digestive tract and away from the brain, which makes you feel tired.

Health-e headlines™

An EAP Reminder

Life Can Be Hectic. The EAP Can Help You Find Your Balance.

Deer Oaks, your EAP, is always available to you and your household members.

If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.

Counselors are available 24/7 to provide you with immediate care.





Clinician's Corner..

Monthly Advice from the Deer Oaks Clinical Team

Reminder:
Take
Care of
Myself

Self-Care

"Self-care is not about self-indulgence. It's about self-preservation." ~Audrey Lorde

Self-care is by no means a new and hot topic. In fact, the notion of self-care has now been around so long that its definition has changed. Unfortunately, the change has muddled the concept at its core, as people often confuse self-care with being selfish and doing what they want, when they want. This couldn't be more untrue.

The idea of self-care is similar to the idea of routine maintenance on your car. Sure, you could skip oil changes and tire rotations in attempts to avoid lengthy errands and possibly high mechanic fees. But, what happens months or years down the road? Your car is more likely to completely breakdown leading to even higher fees and more time-consuming repairs.

So many of us find ourselves in a firm routine, filled with "musts," "have to's," and "need to's." Although we may think nothing of this daily grind, over time it can begin to take its toll, and the effects are exacerbated if you don't take consistent attempts to care for yourself – to rejuvenate and revive. Eventually, neglect of our own needs, whether they be physical, emotional, and/or spiritual, will lead to a costly breakdown.

What can you do then? Of course, for many of us it isn't possible to change our routines drastically. Work, family and other commitments will continue to require our energy but that doesn't mean you can't find even an extra ten minutes a day to do something that recharges your batteries. The thing about self-care is its uniqueness: what's relaxing and refreshing to one person may seem stressful or frustrating to another. Find something that makes you feel relaxed, and helps you to focus on your own well-being. It could be deep breathing, meditation, journaling, gardening, working on a car, reading, or even playing with a pet.

If you find yourself still saying, "I don't even have ten minutes" it may be time to re-prioritize. Are all of those things on your to-do list "musts?" Can someone else help? Many people struggle with asking for help because they can feel selfish, worthless, or inadequate. Remember the analogy of the car: it may seem like you're saving time in the short run, but in the long run, you'll have much better results and feel much more balanced by investing a few moments each day.

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How To: Get the Good Credit Score and Report that You Deserve

Developing good credit is an ongoing process that starts with understanding how credit reporting works. While paying your bills is an essential step in the right direction, there are other smaller, lesser-known steps that are key to establishing and keeping a clean credit report and a good credit score. Applying these steps will go a long way in giving you the credit history you deserve.

Check your credit report for accuracy

First, check your credit report regularly to ensure that the data included is accurate. While you want to look out for obvious errors, such as accounts that may have been opened as the result of identity theft, there are other smaller errors that may exist that can harm your credit. In addition, look at your name on the report to ensure that it's accurate. Something as obvious as changing your last name from your maiden name to your married name could make a large difference in your ability to obtain credit, as your married name and maiden name may not be linked within your credit history.



Establish credit history

Next, make sure that you actually have a credit history. Without any sort of credit history to go on, lenders have a difficult time evaluating whether or not you are a risk. Keep in mind that each individual has their own credit file and report, so spouses will each need credit cards and/or loans in their own name. If you don't like the idea of having credit cards or loans, consider a secured credit card or a credit card with a low limit that you pay off every month, establishing that you are a reliable and trustworthy consumer.

Stay loyal to creditors

Being loyal to your creditors is the next step. Creditors like to see a strong history so keeping cards open for a long period of time is beneficial to your credit score. While the first credit card you opened may not have terms as appealing as some newer cards, consider contacting your existing lender for better options rather than canceling.

Find a balance

Next, make sure that you don't have too much open credit. Lenders often look at your credit lines as potential liabilities, and this can hurt you. On the other hand, using a high percentage of your available credit can also be detrimental to your credit score. It's essential that you develop a good balance.

Pay bills on time

Finally, pay your bills on time. When payments are delinquent, creditors report this information to the credit agencies, and it can harm your credit score. Timely payments of the minimum required payment or more shows creditors that you have a history of paying your bills on time.

About Money Management International

Money Management International (MMI) is a nonprofit, full-service credit-counseling agency, providing confidential financial guidance, financial education, counseling and debt management assistance to consumers since 1958. MMI helps consumers trim their expenses, develop a spending plan and repay debts. Counseling is available by appointment in branch offices and 24/7 by telephone and Internet. Services are available in English or Spanish. To learn more, call 800.432.7310 or visit www.MoneyManagement.org.