

# HEALTHY

## EXCHANGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF YOUR  
**EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**Vol. 12, No. 1**

### For Your Information

#### **BETTER PROBLEM SOLVING FOR COUPLES**

If you find that you and your partner are going around and around on the same problem without a solution – rather than opposing each other – make a commitment to each other to be on the same team. When you work together to problem solve and be on the same team to determine an acceptable compromise, you have a real chance of finding a solution that is acceptable to both of you.

#### **GOOD HEALTH: HOW IMPORTANT IS ATTITUDE?**

Burn patients who have a positive attitude recover more quickly and completely than patients who do not. The patient's degree of optimism and active involvement in their recovery is a better indicator of how well he/she will recover than is the size or severity of the burn. (From American Medical News)

#### **PARENTING TIP**

Encourage family activities. Spending time together as a family helps foster the parent/child relationship and helps children feel more safe and accepted, which helps them develop into strong, confident and independent individuals. Suggestions: Plan a picnic, movie night, family dinner, game night or vacation.



### WELLNESS

## Why Drinking Alcohol To Induce Sleep Is A Problem

Many people use alcohol to help them fall asleep. But the latest research reports that – while alcohol can help you fall asleep faster – its negative impact on the quality and quantity of your sleep far outweighs its sleep-inducing effects. Plus, regular use of alcohol as a sleep aid may result in a dependency on alcohol.

#### How alcohol reduces the quality of your sleep

According to researchers at the University of Missouri School of Medicine, drinking alcohol to fall asleep interferes with sleep homeostasis, the body's sleep-regulating mechanism. It reduces rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, the stage of sleep when you dream and an important phase of restorative sleep. Alcohol may seem to be helping you sleep – as it helps induce sleep – but the result is lighter, lower-quality sleep, interrupted by frequent awakenings which lead to a poorer night's rest.

#### How alcohol affects sleep apnea

Those suffering from sleep apnea should be extremely careful when mixing alcohol and sleep. Sleep apnea is a condition caused by obstructions in the airway that makes it difficult to breathe effectively while sleeping. Alcohol intensifies this problem by causing the airways to narrow even further and making it even harder for the person to get the quality of sleep they need. Research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison shows that men, especially, have longer episodes of sleep-disordered breathing after drinking alcohol.

#### Use of alcohol and dependency

Using alcohol on a regular basis to change your mood, relax or help you fall asleep is a dangerous choice that can lead to dependence. One of the symptoms of alcohol dependence is the need to drink increasingly more to feel the same result. Health experts recommend that regular use of alcohol as a sleep aid may result in a dependency on alcohol and that alcohol should not be used as a sleep aid.



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## RELATIONSHIPS

# Helping A Friend Who Is In An Abusive Relationship

Watching a family member, friend or colleague going through an abusive relationship is difficult and frustrating. The National Domestic Violence Hotline advises the following for effectively helping a family member or friend who is being abused:



**Don't be afraid to let him or her know that you are concerned for their safety.** Help your friend or family member recognize the abuse. Tell him or her you see what is going on and that you want to help. Help them recognize that what is happening is not “normal” and that they deserve a healthy, non-violent relationship.

**Acknowledge that he or she is in a very difficult and scary situation.** Let your friend or family member know that the abuse is not their fault. Reassure him or her that they are not alone and that there is help and support available.

**Be supportive.** Listen to your friend or family member. Remember that it may be difficult for him or her to talk about the abuse. Let him or her know that you are available to help whenever they may need it. What they need most is someone who will believe and listen to them.

**Be non-judgmental.** Respect your friend or family member's decisions. There are many reasons why victims stay in abusive relationships. He or she may leave and return to the relationship many times. Do not criticize his or her decisions or try to guilt them. He or she will need your support even more during those times.

**Encourage him or her to participate in activities outside of the relationship.** It's important for him or her to see friends and family.

**Help him or her develop a safety plan.** Safety planning includes picking a place to go and packing important items.

**Encourage him or her to talk to people who can provide help and guidance.** Find a local domestic violence agency that provides counseling or support groups. Offer to go with him or her to talk to family and friends. If he or she has to go to the police, court or a lawyer, offer to go along for moral support.

**Remember that you cannot “rescue” him or her.** Although it is difficult to see someone you care about get hurt, ultimately the person getting hurt has to be the one to decide that they want to do something about it. It's important for you to support him or her and help them find a way to safety and peace.

**Get advice.** If you want to talk to someone to get advice about a particular situation, contact a local domestic violence program or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224. NDVH is a nonprofit organization that provides crisis intervention, information and referral to victims of domestic violence, perpetrators, friends and families.

**Inducing sleep...**  
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## Why a chronic lack of sleep is bad for you

According to the latest research, the consequences of too little sleep are more than just daytime fatigue, a bad mood or a lack of focus. Regular poor sleep puts you at risk of serious medical conditions, including depression, obesity, heart disease and diabetes – and it can shorten your life expectancy. British researchers who studied how sleep patterns affected the mortality of more than 10,000 British civil servants over two decades found that those who cut their sleep from seven to five hours or fewer a night nearly doubled their risk of death from all causes. In particular, lack of sleep doubled the risk of death from cardiovascular disease.



## Better Sleep Habits

If you are having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, the following are tips to help you improve the quality of your sleep:

1. **Exercise regularly** – Exercise dissipates stress and exercised muscles relax more easily, which will help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer. Initially, however, exercise does stimulate the body, so try finishing exercising at least three hours before bedtime or workout earlier in the day.
2. **Avoid stimulants** – Caffeine can keep you going long after you drink it. It is best to cut it out of your day by 2 p.m. Avoid alcohol or nicotine within three hours of bedtime. Additionally, avoid eating large or spicy meals for two or three hours before bedtime. Your body isn't meant to be digesting food while you sleep.
3. **Set regular hours** – Keep a consistent sleep/wake schedule, even on weekends. Going to bed and waking up at the same time each day sets the body's “internal clock” to expect sleep at a certain time night after night. Staying up and sleeping in later than normal on weekends can shift your body's natural clock in the same way that cross-country travel does and make it extra difficult to fall asleep on Sunday nights.

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# Five Reasons To Disconnect From Digital Technology



While it may be the norm for many, being connected 24/7 to your computer, laptop, smartphone or iPad comes with a price. Here are five good reasons to take breaks from digital technology.

**1. Recharge from job stress** – According to a survey conducted by VTech, being constantly accessible for work was the number-one source of technology-related stress. Studies show, however, that in spite of modern work trends, our brains need downtime for recovery and we need our evenings and weekends to disconnect and recuperate from the stresses of work. Although it can be tempting to continue to check email, return text messages and answer work calls after normal work hours, it is important to allocate time for yourself and switch off work stress. Tell your colleagues that you will be unavailable after a certain time, turn off your phone and computer and set aside some work-free time each evening to relax. Your employer will benefit too, as you'll be coming back to work more relaxed and recharged each day.

**2. Maximize your productivity** – Studies have found that multitasking reduces your productivity by 40 percent. This is because our brains are designed to focus on one thing at a time and bombarding them with unrelated, extraneous information only slows them down. Researchers at Stanford University found that people who are regularly besieged with several streams of electronic information cannot

pay attention, recall information, or switch from one job to another as well as those who completed one task at a time. To improve your productivity at work – or for other cognitive tasks – do one thing at a time and give it your full attention. Disconnect from your phone, texting, email, social media, etc. and schedule specific times during the day to attend to these.

**3. Enhance your relationships** – Texting or scrolling through your smartphone during dinner is not just an issue of table manners. Sharing a meal or other time spent with family and friends is an opportunity to engage in first-person conversation, but when people are more interested in checking the latest text or Facebook update on their phone, the chance for meaningful connection suffers. When you're spending time with family and friends, turn off your phone or tablet and give them your undivided attention. This break will give you the focus to more fully connect with others, which will improve your relationships.

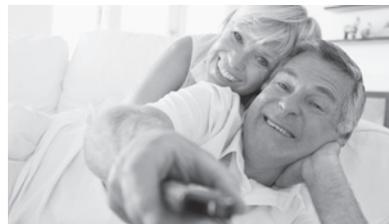
**4. Improve your mood** – Mental health researchers report that being overly tuned in to smartphones and laptops causes over-stimulation, anxiety and stress. A recent study showed that people now check their mobile phones more than 150 times per day. "People are often in the quick-to-respond mode which undermines their ability to calm down and relax, taking a toll on their emotional state," says Psychotherapist Lisa Brateman, LCSW. Just like your physical body, your brain needs downtime too. Brateman and others recommend scheduling breaks during the day from all digital technology, "unplugging" during dinner and at least two hours before bedtime.

**5. Promote better sleep** – According to neuroscientists, the blue light from laptops, tablets and cellphone screens can disrupt your sleep, especially if you use these devices before bed. Studies show that the artificial light suppresses the secretion of melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep. This suppression makes it harder to fall asleep. Health experts recommend that you avoid these electronic devices for at least two hours before bedtime.

## Inducing sleep...

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- 4. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine** – Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode. About an hour before bed, calm your body and mind with a relaxing pre-sleep routine. Unplug from all electronic devices and avoid any stressful or stimulating activities. Take a bath (the rise, then fall in body temperature promotes drowsiness), read a book, watch TV, or practice relaxation exercises.
- 5. Manage stress** – When you have too much to do – and too much to think about – your sleep is likely to



suffer. If you find your mind racing in bed, instead work through your thoughts about the day – or the next day – before getting into bed. Take some time in the evening to process your thoughts about the day. Clear your head of tomorrow's tasks by writing your plan or "to do" list for the next day and leaving it for the morning.

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## Inducing sleep...

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6. **Create a relaxing sleep environment** – Reserve your bedroom for sleeping and sex only. Your bedroom should be cool, free from noise that can disturb sleep and free from any light. The Better Sleep Foundation suggests to consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, “white noise” machines, humidifiers or other devices to reduce distractions that may interfere with sleep.

### If you need help

If you try the suggestions above and find that you still are having trouble falling asleep and staying asleep, talk to your doctor or a sleep medicine physician to determine what factors are keeping you from sleeping. You can also contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counseling, referrals or information.

## Excellence = MC<sup>2</sup>

Your Employee Assistance Program

**1-800-899-3926**

## Did you know?

Your EAP Website offers:

- Employee/Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Administrator Satisfaction Surveys
- Articles & Newsletters
- Quizzes & Self Assessment Instruments
- Tips on Stress Reduction
- Management and Human Resource Tips

Forgot your password? Ask your Human Resource specialist for the password or call the EAP at 1-800-899-3926.

[www.theemployeeassistanceprogram.com](http://www.theemployeeassistanceprogram.com)

## EMOTIONAL HEALTH

# Grief – Helping the Recovery Process



Studies show that those who openly grieve heal much faster than those who repress or avoid their feelings. Running away from grief postpones sorrow; clinging to grief prolongs pain. Neither leads to healing. The grieving process is nature’s way of helping us heal.

### If you’ve had a recent loss, keep the following in mind:

- **Talk about your sorrow.** Seek comfort from those who will listen and accept your feelings.
- **Forgive yourself.** Work through any guilt or “should haves” by acknowledging them and expressing your feelings.
- **Take care of yourself.** Exercise, maintain a balanced diet, get plenty of rest and make time for relaxing activities that clear your mind.
- **Start something new in your life.** When you’re ready, find interesting things to do, like taking a class, volunteering, joining a book club, traveling or adopting a pet.
- **Get help.** If you are in great distress or feel very depressed, talk to your family doctor, who may want to refer you to a counselor.

### If you know someone who is grieving, these suggestions may help:

- **Reach out and listen.** Ask about the deceased and allow the person to talk freely.
- **Offer to help.** Offer to do simple tasks at home or work.
- **Include the grieving person in your social life.** Grieving people don’t necessarily want to be alone, but they may need encouragement to rejoin social situations.
- **Pay attention to these signs.** Signs of weight loss or gain, substance abuse, depression, prolonged sleep disorders, physical problems and talk about suicide require immediate attention. Suggest the grieving person talk to his or her doctor or a counselor.

## Employee Assistance Program

**1-800-899-3926**

- **Personal / Work Stress**
- **Marital / Family Concerns**
- **Alcohol / Drug Concerns**
- **Frustration / Anger / Sadness**

**CALL FOR FREE  
CONFIDENTIAL  
HELP**

All of us experience personal, family or work related problems now and then. Sometimes, even ordinary problems can become overwhelming. It is at these times, your **EAP** can provide free confidential assistance. Employees or family members can call to receive telephone consultation and/or to schedule an appointment with an **EAP** specialist.

Read Healthy Exchange online: [theemployeeassistanceprogram.com](http://theemployeeassistanceprogram.com)  
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