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Your Employee Assistance Program
1-800-899-3926

HEALTHY

EXCHANGE

ANOTHER BENEFIT OF YOUR
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

VOL. 4, NO. 4

For Your Information

COUPLE CARE

Communication is the key to a strong, healthy relationship. Without effective communication, any relationship is in trouble. Communicate your thoughts, plans, ideas and opinions with your partner on a consistent basis. Equally important: Communicate your feelings – the joys, sorrows or frustrations we all experience.

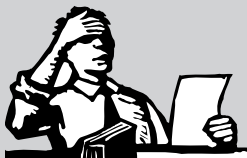


ANGER MANAGEMENT TIP

Walk away when you're angry. Before you react, take time to mentally regroup by counting to 10. Then look at the situation again. Walking or other physical activities will also help you work off steam.

OVERWHELMING STRESS

If you're feeling overwhelmed by stress, how do you know when it's time to get professional help? According to the American Psychological Association, here are a few indicators:



- You feel trapped, like there's nowhere to turn
- You worry excessively and can't concentrate
- The way you feel affects your sleep, your eating habits, your job, your relationships, your everyday life.

If you or a family member needs help, contact your EAP for confidential counseling, referrals or information

IMPROVING YOUR LIFE

How To Be Happier... Everyday

What would it take to make you happier? More money? A bigger house? A new relationship? Maybe a flatter stomach? According to the latest research on happiness, none of the above will make you happier in the long run. Human beings adapt, researchers report, so acquiring new material possessions or changing life circumstances don't result in sustained happiness. That new car, promotion or house feels great at first. Then we get used to it. An often-cited study found that within one year, lottery winners returned to approximately the same level of happiness they experienced before their windfall.



So, what does it take to be happier? Through analyzing studies on identical twins and other research, happiness researchers have determined that each of us has a "happiness set-point," a baseline level of happiness that we return to, regardless of the ups and downs of life. Just like your weight set-point, which keeps the scale hovering around the same weight, your happiness set-point will remain the same – unless you make a concerted effort to change it.

According to the researchers, approximately 50% of your set-point is genetic, about 10% is related to life circumstances and the remaining 40% is within your control. It's the 40% under your control that gives you the power to raise your happiness set-point and increase your happiness. In the same way you'd crank up the thermostat to get comfortable on a chilly day, psychologists say you can reprogram your happiness set-point to a higher level of peace and well-being. Just as you can improve your health through diet and exercise, you can increase your happiness by changing your thoughts, behaviors, actions and habits. Finally, scientists have concluded what the great thinkers and philosophers have been telling us for all time – that increasing your happiness is an "inside" job.

Tips to increase happiness

Happiness researchers say that you have the ability and power to be happier by changing your habits. Below are strategies and "happiness activities" shown in numerous studies to increase the happiness of study participants. To improve your happiness, choose the strategies or activities that suit you best. Build these activities into your everyday life to ensure long-term success. Seek out additional resources, if needed, to expand your knowledge, skills and success in the areas you choose.

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Recognizing Childhood Depression

Childhood depression is a serious illness with serious consequences. Left untreated, depression can lead to school failure, substance abuse and even suicide. Are you aware of the warning signs of child or teen depression?



Each day, at least one child in every elementary classroom across America may suffer from depression. And several teenagers sitting in every junior high and high school classroom may also have depression. Yet most parents and teachers never realize these children are silently suffering.

Warning signs for depression in children and teens

Because the child may not always seem sad, parents and teachers may not realize that troublesome behavior is a sign of depression. Child psychiatrists advise parents to be aware of the signs of depression in children and teens. If one or more of the warning signs below persists for more than two weeks, parents should seek professional help:

- Persistent sadness and hopelessness
- Withdrawal from friends and activities once enjoyed
- Increased irritability or agitation
- Missed school or declining school performance
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Indecision, lack of concentration or forgetfulness
- Poor self-esteem or guilt
- Frequent physical complaints such as headaches and stomachaches
- Lack of enthusiasm or motivation or low energy
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse-- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

** Source: National Mental Health Association*

Additional warning signs for teens

Additionally, teens may experiment with drugs or alcohol or become sexually promiscuous to avoid feelings of depression. Teens also may express their depression through hostile, aggressive, or risk-taking behavior.

Getting help

If you suspect that your child or teen may need help for depression, it is extremely important that your child receives prompt, professional treatment. Depression is not simply a passing blue mood. Your child cannot simply get better by being "more positive." Depression is the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain. If you need help, contacting your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for professional assistance is a great place to start. Your EAP can provide you and your dependents with CONFIDENTIAL counseling, referrals and information and EAP counselors are specially trained to help people get the right help for depression.

HOW TO BE HAPPIER...EVERYDAY

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Live with purpose. People who strive for something personally significant – whether it's learning a new skill, raising a good family, or changing careers – are happier than those who don't have strong dreams or aspirations. Pick one or more significant goals and devote time and effort pursuing them. The process of working towards your goal is as important to your well being as its attainment.

Cultivate optimism. "Many people say things happen for the best. I don't agree with that," says Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D., a Harvard University psychology professor and author of *Happier*. "But some people are able to make the best of things that happen – and that's a key to happiness." One way to do this is to reframe your thoughts. If you see everything that goes wrong as being permanent (things are going to be this bad forever); pervasive (this is going to wreck everything); and personal (it's all my fault); you're more likely to feel sad, fearful or anxious. Instead try to view your problems as temporary (this will pass); limited (this problem affects only one, specific part of my life); and impersonal (it wasn't my fault). You can train yourself to look on the bright side. Using a practice called "cognitive restructuring," you can help yourself become more optimistic by consciously challenging negative, self-limiting thinking and replacing it with more optimistic thought patterns. Numerous studies report that positive, optimistic people are happier and live longer.

Nurture your relationships. The happiest people surround themselves with family and friends. A Japanese study published last year found that contented people's happy experiences most often involved connecting with someone. Happy people have a strong bond with at least two out of three of these essential relationships: a partner, a friend, or a parent. Experts say the best way to improve a relationship is to invest time and energy in it.



Do more activities that truly engage you. Losing yourself in an activity, whether it's running, singing in a choir, gardening, reading a book or cooking a meal, promotes a contented state called "flow." During a state of flow, you get so involved in an activity or task that nothing else seems to matter and you lose track of time. What puts you in a state of flow is usually an activity that uses your strengths and talents. Increase the experiences at home or work in which you lose yourself in total absorption.

Count your blessings. One way to feel happier is to recognize good things when they happen. Express gratitude for what you have privately and also by conveying

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appreciation to others. If you have trouble counting your blessings, try keeping a gratitude journal. Write down three to five things you're grateful for once a week. Several studies show that people who record what they appreciate experience greater happiness and less anxiety.

Practice kindness. Do good things for others. Acting kind or helping others makes you feel capable, compassionate and full of purpose. In one recent study, researchers could literally see the benefits of kindness. Subjects were hooked up to a brain-imaging mechanism and asked to click yes or no to charity-giving opportunities. When they donated, the machine registered a boost in blood flow to a part of the brain associated with happiness.

Learn to forgive. When we hold on to pain, old grudges, bitterness or hatred, many areas of our lives can suffer. When we're unforgiving, we are the ones who pay the price over and over. According to research conducted by Dr. Fred Luskin at Stanford University, people who learn to forgive become less stressed, less angry, more optimistic and reported healthier relationships and improved physical health. Forgiveness is not excusing someone else's wrong behavior, nor does it necessarily include reconciliation with the person who wronged us. Forgiveness means no longer dwelling on the wounds that keep us tied to the past. By learning to forgive, you take responsibility for how you feel and take back the power from others to keep hurting you. An effective forgiveness technique to consider: Write a letter in which you let go of anger and resentment toward those who have hurt you. Actually sending the letter is optional.

Practice spirituality. Studies show that people who have a spiritual dimension in their life – defined not as an affiliation with an organized religion, but as an internal sense of the spiritual meaning of life – are happier than those who don't. It doesn't matter what you call it – God, Spirit, Higher Power or Nature – connecting to your spirituality is the experience of feeling connected to a force bigger than yourself. The more deeply you experience this



How can you help a family member who is abusing alcohol or drugs?

Someone in your family has a problem with alcohol or drugs. What can you do to help?

You might think that an alcohol or drug problem belongs to the person who is drinking or taking drugs. But if a family member has a problem, then you have a problem too.

Families operate as a system in which each family member's behavior affects every other member's behavior. The abuser's behavior affects all family members, producing painful and difficult feelings in response. At the same time, the other members of the family – unintentionally – develop patterns of behavior that make it easier for the problem drinker or drug user to continue their substance abuse. This behavior is referred to as enabling. Here are some examples of enabling:

- ◆ Denying that there is a problem, or dismissing the problem as a small one.
- ◆ Rescuing the abuser from the consequences of his or her use, such as by "calling in sick," covering up for a broken promise, or lending money.
- ◆ Taking over the abuser's responsibilities, making allowances or excuses, forgiving unforgivable behavior or to continue trying to be loving and caring in the face of abuse.
- ◆ Reinforcing drug use by participating in occasions where it is used.

All of these behaviors allow the abuser to keep using alcohol or drugs in destructive ways and allow the alcohol or drug abuse to progress to a more serious stage.

What to do

Contacting your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a great place to start if you suspect that a family member might have a problem with alcohol or drugs. A professional EAP counselor can help you assess your situation and help you determine the best way for you to help yourself, your drug using family member, or other family members. Highly recommended: You may also find it helpful to attend an Al-Anon meeting where family, friends and loved ones of alcoholics and drug addicts share their experience, strength and hope as they struggle to cope and come to terms with the effects of addiction.



connection, the more content and happy your life will feel. To nurture your spiritual side: learn meditation, pray, read spiritual books, or get more involved in your church, temple or mosque.

Develop healthy coping strategies.

It's hard to be happy if you're chronically over-stressed and emotionally drained. Stress and anxiety are huge barriers to health and happiness. Research from Harvard Medical School has found that women 100 years and older share a common trait – they're not plagued by negative feelings such as guilt, anger, fear and sadness. Find and practice healthy

ways to manage stress, hardship or trauma.

Move your body. Research overwhelmingly shows that people who exercise are happier. Make some form of exercise – such as brisk walking, running, swimming or yoga – a regular habit. When you exercise, your body produces valuable brain chemicals and hormones – like endorphins, serotonin, dopamine and adrenaline – that impact your energy, mood and health. Additionally, taking up a sport or working out regularly will help you feel more in control of your body and health, thereby

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increasing your confidence and self-image. Also important to feeling happier: Eat a nutritious diet and get adequate sleep.

If you need help...contact your EAP

Aiming for greater happiness requires effort and commitment. There are no short cuts. Taking some of the suggestions above may seem daunting at first, but they are within your power. If you or one of your dependents are concerned about issues that may be negatively affecting your happiness, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for professional counseling, referrals or information. All EAP services are FREE and strictly CONFIDENTIAL. If you need help, why not call an EAP counselor today? We're here to help you.

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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

Preventing Holiday Burnout



If you are prone to experiencing holiday burnout, consider the suggestions below to lessen holiday stress:

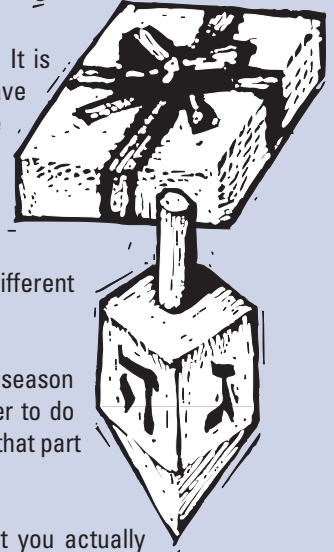
1. Develop realistic expectations about the holidays. It is easy to expect too much of the holidays. When we have expectations which are not met (regardless if they are realistic or not), we may feel disappointed, upset or worse. This contributes to holiday stress. Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable by not trying to make the holidays "perfect." Think about what was stressful last year and how that could be different this year.

2. Do more of what you enjoy. Which parts of the holiday season do you want in your life? Which parts would you prefer to do without? Figure out what you want and plan for more of that part in your life.

3. Set boundaries and limits. Be realistic about what you actually have time for. Make a list and prioritize the most important activities. Always think before committing to any responsibility or social event. Learn to say "no" politely but firmly to keep your holiday time manageable.

4. Develop a holiday budget that is based on what you can afford. Remind yourself that it is possible for your family to have memorable holiday experiences without spending a great deal of money. Be sure to include all holiday spending in your budget, including big family dinners, wrapping paper, decorations, parties, etc. Stick to your budget.

5. Plan ahead for potential problems. Make a list of the problems that continually happen every year. Then, plan ahead how you are going to handle them. If your brother and brother-in-law have never gotten along and frequently argue at holiday gatherings, plan ahead how you will respond to this situation.



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- 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
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