

Balanced Living

December 2022



Developing Good Sleep Habits

Many people struggle with both the quantity and the quality of sleep they get each night. Your sleep habits can impact all areas of your life, so it is important to find a routine that works for you. Most of us realize that sleep is important, but do we realize just how important it is? In his 2019 TED Talk, sleep scientist Matt Walker, PhD put it succinctly: "The shorter your sleep, the shorter your life."

In 1900, the average American adult slept nine hours per night. Today, it's less than seven (National Institutes of Health). When one does not get enough quality sleep, there are many physical, emotional, and neurological effects, including a compromised immune system, increased irritability, difficulty learning new information, and many more. Here are some techniques to help you improve your sleep routine to ensure you feel well rested each morning.

Be Mindful of How Substances Affect Sleep

If you have difficulty getting a good night's sleep or never wake up feeling well rested, then consider how various substances could be affecting your sleep. Many people believe caffeine helps them power through the day and that a glass of wine is beneficial for winding down at night. However, both caffeine and alcohol can decrease the amount of restorative deep sleep you get. Another substance to consider is sugar, particularly processed sugar, which can cause hyperactivity. It can ultimately create a vicious cycle: you consume sugary foods, you don't sleep well, and then you wake up hungry for more sugar. Author Shawn Stevenson said, "A tired brain is a hungry brain." Try cutting out or down on sugar throughout the day and don't eat for two hours before bedtime.

Get into a Sleep Routine

An important aspect of developing good sleep habits is figuring out a routine that works for you, or establishing regularity, as Walker refers to it. Try to wake up and go to sleep at the same time every day, even on the weekends. Another aspect to incorporate into your sleep routine is keeping your environment on the cooler side. Most of us can relate to tossing and turning in bed on a hot summer's night or when the AC isn't working. A cooler room is much more conducive to a good night's sleep because our core body temperature needs to decrease by a few degrees in order to fall and stay soundly asleep.

Try Stretching

Light stretching before bed can also help settle down your body and mind. Try doing some easy stretches for 10 or 15 minutes. It helps put you in a relaxed state so you can fall asleep faster and can also improve your quality of sleep.

Write Down Reminders

Some people have a hard time turning off their brains when they are trying to fall asleep. If you notice you are thinking about all the things you need to do tomorrow or keep thinking about what happened today, try writing in a notepad before going to bed. Write down any reminders for yourself so that you can let your mind forget about it until tomorrow.

Minimize Screen Time Before Bed

Do you have a tendency to look at your phone or watch a show before going to bed? Harvard researchers looked at the effect of blue light exposure near bedtime and found that it interferes with melatonin production and affects our circadian rhythm. Try putting screens away a few hours before going to bed, or at least turn the brightness down. If having a device curfew doesn't work for you, try wearing blue light blocking glasses at night or configuring automatic nighttime settings on your devices.

Meditate to Calm Your Mind

Another technique to help calm your mind is meditation. Try sitting in a comfortable position and closing your eyes. Focus on your breath. At first, try sitting still for a few breaths and each night, add a few more breaths until you have worked up to at least a few minutes.

Try Sleep Apps or Music

There are numerous mobile applications geared toward improving sleep, as well as different types of music that can help you relax. Sound machines can be helpful too because they drown out background noises or can even help quiet down your own thoughts.

Make Sure You're Comfortable

Your pillow and mattress can make a big difference in the quality of sleep you get. Experiment with different pillows until you find the right one for you. If your mattress isn't comfortable, consider budgeting to purchase a new one in the near future. You could also consider a mattress topper, which is an economical way of upgrading your mattress without having to buy a new one.

Consult with Your Doctor

If you are having trouble improving your sleep patterns on your own, consult with your doctor for medical advice to properly treat sleep conditions.

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Employee Burnout: How It Happens and What You Can Do to Help

Employee burnout happens in every workplace. Workers may start the job as enthusiastic employees, and then turn into problem people who show up late or don't show up at all. If you know of workers who have lost motivation for their jobs and show signs of apathy, they may be experiencing employee burnout.

A worker can experience burnout due to a great amount of stress; this stress can be job-related, but it can also be a result of great levels of stress at home. The important thing to remember is that employee burnout can be reversed and there are things managers and employers can do to help an employee get back on track.

How Does Burnout Happen?

Burnout occurs when a person is placed under stress for a long time. Oftentimes, the person is physically and/or emotionally exhausted, and no longer functions like he or she used to. If an employee has been placed in a demanding situation at work or at home, the person may suffer symptoms of burnout as a result, especially if the stress is persistent and ongoing.

An employee may experience burnout if he or she was passed over for a promotion or overworked without recognition, or if there is continual change in a department. An internal inability to set appropriate boundaries may also contribute to burnout. For instance, employees might bring too much work home with them.

Recognizing Employee Burnout

Burnout symptoms are:

- A change in work habit or attitude
- Loss of enthusiasm or motivation
- Absenteeism or tardiness
- Negative reactions or comments
- Emotional outbursts
- Health problems
- Drug or alcohol use

Additionally, as an employer or supervisor, there are steps that can be taken to help avoid employee burnout affecting the workplace:

- If your company is downsizing, readjust workloads in creative ways. Ask employees for input, and see which tasks they would prefer to do and which tasks they would like to avoid.
- Give ample notice about changes in positions or tasks. If downsizing has occurred, firm up schedules to give a sense of routine and continuity.
- Redistribute workloads if employees seem overwhelmed.
- Listen to employees and try to counsel them the best you can.
- Pay attention to what motivates each individual employee and utilize that when assigning projects.
- Understand your personality style and be aware of how that can play a role with individual employee communication.
- Schedule after-work events to boost employees' spirits.
- Refer employees to resources provided by your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Written by Life Advantages - Author Dr. Delvina Miremadi ©2022

Thriving in the Face of Uncertainty

Though there will always be uncertainties when it comes to the future, it is still possible to relish the good in life and accomplish goals you set for yourself. Trust in yourself and your resiliency to get through difficult times and be stronger because of it. Challenges can serve as learning experiences, opportunities to better yourself, and reminders about what really matters in life. Here are some tips to help you not just survive but also thrive during uncertain times.

- You don't have to pretend everything is perfect all the time—that has a way of backfiring. Instead, acknowledge your fears and doubts. It can be very therapeutic to reach out to a friend and talk about current challenges you are facing or spend some time writing down how you feel in a journal.
- Practice what Dr. Marsha Linehan, psychologist and author, refers to as radical acceptance. This is the act of letting go of how you wanted things to be in any given moment and accepting what is.
- Avoid what Dr. Sarah McKay, Oxford neuroscientist, refers to as a “mental rehearsal” of worry thoughts—this is when we get so good at worrying, that our brains automatically go to worst-case scenario thinking. This goes hand in hand with mindfulness and staying grounded in the present moment. Whenever you have a worry thought, try to redirect yourself and reframe the thought. Focus on the facts and what you do have control over.
- Try distancing yourself from sources of negativity—whether it be the news, media you consume, or even people in your life. Surrounding yourself with these can heighten your anxieties and fears. As entrepreneur Jim Rohn said, “We are the average of the five people we spend the most time with.” Surround yourself with supportive, positive people and consume more inspirational, hopeful media.
- A little gratitude can go a long way. Each day, take even just a few moments to remind yourself of the positive in your life and what you are grateful for, no matter how seemingly small. Author Tony Robbins wrote, “You can't be angry and grateful simultaneously.” Verbalizing your blessings with family or friends can be a great weekly habit.
- If you are starting to feel overrun with anxiety or worry, make a to-do list. Add even small tasks to it. You could also break a big project into smaller steps, or as McKay says, “move the goalposts closer.” By crossing items off once completed, this will help build positive momentum. Don't feel like you have to do it all at once: Focus on essential items first to avoid overwhelming yourself.
- Stick to a routine as much as you can. McKay refers to daily routines as a “secret weapon” when it comes to anxiety. She explains, “Setting a daily schedule automatically provides structure amidst chaos and anchors your mind to the present moment.” Try your best to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Don't forget to take care of yourself—body and mind—which is the foundation for thriving, no matter the situation. As much as you can, get an adequate amount of sleep, eat healthy foods, keep yourself hydrated, and move your body, even with simple exercises such as walking or stretching. Physical activity can often help put worry thoughts into perspective and allow you to think more clearly.
- Just because there are uncertainties in the world doesn't mean you have to remain stagnant in your own life. Actively seek new opportunities and ways to grow. Don't be afraid to think outside the box.

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Reflecting on your Relationships

Healthy relationships are critical to our emotional well-being and have been linked to healthier and longer lives.

According to an article by Harvard, positive relationships contribute to increased life expectancy, decreased stress responses, and even more significant resistance to the common cold. This makes it essential to take time to reflect on whether your connections are promoting love and positivity in your life.

Some relationships to reflect on:

- Friendships
- Coworkers
- Family
- Romantic Partners
- Yourself

Some questions you can ask yourself about your relationship with others:

- Does this person leave me feeling uplifted?
- Do they push me to be the best version of myself?
- Are they trustworthy and respectful?
- Do they accept my boundaries?
- Does this person encourage growth?

Including yourself in the list of relationships you are reflecting on is important. After all, it is the only relationship you will have for the entirety of your life.

Some questions you can ask yourself about your relationship with yourself are:

- What are the messages I repeat to myself?
- Would I speak to a loved one the way I speak to myself?
- Where can I give myself more grace and kindness?

By taking the time this month to reflect on the relationships in your life, you can enter the new year with a newfound understanding and sense of connection to yourself and those you love.

Source: Harvard University - The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences



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Coping with Loss During the Holiday Season

For many, the holidays represent an excellent time to unite, celebrate, and create memories over endless sweet treats with friends and family. However, others spend the holiday season quite differently - grieving the loss of loved ones.

When going through the grieving process, we may feel like we are just barely getting by with the everyday tasks; therefore, celebrating the holidays without all our loved ones may trigger overwhelming sadness, fear, and even anger. Those coping with loss, regardless of how recent or long ago the loss occurred, may wish to fast-forward through the Holiday celebrations.

If you find yourself struggling to prepare for the upcoming holiday season while coping with loss, please note a few ideas below designed to help you preserve and honor your capacity this holiday season.

Opt Out.

If you do not feel up to attending the annual holiday dinner or gift exchange, do not attend. Practice self-care and tend to your needs – it does not make you selfish.

One Day at a Time.

This year's celebrations may look different; however, it does not mean next year's holiday season will look the same. Take it one day at a time and allow yourself time to grieve. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, nor is there a time limit on the grieving process.

Start New Traditions.

Should you celebrate the holidays, find ways to honor lost loved ones. Encourage guests to wear their favorite color, perfect their favorite recipe, or light a candle honoring them.

Know You Are Not Alone.

Even if you stay home this holiday season, you may wish to connect with others navigating similar situations. Participating in grief blog discussions and virtual support groups are a few ways to respect boundaries and avoid isolation.

source: Harvard Health



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International Aids Awareness Month

Each December is dedicated to HIV and Aids Awareness.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), with the introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) and other treatments during the last two decades, people with HIV/AIDS in the United States are living longer. HAART has also dramatically reduced the incidence of opportunistic infections, such as tuberculosis, that take advantage of weakened immune systems. However, as studies have shown, HIV-positive women who do not develop AIDS are still at high risk for chronic health problems, such as low bone mineral density to diabetes.

More tools than ever are available to prevent HIV. You can use strategies such as abstinence, never sharing needles, and using condoms correctly every time you have sex. You may also be able to take advantage of HIV prevention medicines such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). If you have HIV, there are actions you can take to prevent transmitting HIV to others.

Tips to reduce the risk of getting HIV from the NIH:

- Get tested for HIV
- Choose less risky sexual behaviors
- Use condoms every time you have sex
- Limit your number of sexual partners
- Get tested and treated for STDs
- Talk to your healthcare provider about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
- Do not inject drugs

Source: The Basics of HIV Prevention | NIH

It is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach.
Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, well-being & legal issues.

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Almond Flour Cake

Ingredients

- 4 large eggs, separated
- 1 tablespoon orange zest, plus more for garnish
- 1 tablespoon almond extract
- ½ cup granulated sugar, divide
- 1 ½ cups raw sliced almonds
- Sifted confectioners' sugar for garnish

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Coat a 9-inch cake pan or removable bottom springform pan with cooking spray. Line the bottom with parchment paper.
2. Whisk egg yolks, orange zest, almond extract and ¼ cup sugar in a large bowl until combined, about 1 minute.
3. Using a spoon or spatula, gently stir in almond flour, baking powder and salt.
4. Beat egg whites in a medium bowl with an electric mixer on high speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Slowly add the remaining ¼ cup sugar, beating until stiff peaks form, about 2 minutes.
5. Add one-third of the beaten egg white mixture to the egg yolk mixture, gently folding until smooth and lightened.
6. Fold in the remaining beaten egg white mixture carefully until just combined. Spread the batter into the prepared pan; top evenly with sliced almonds.
7. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes.
8. Remove from the pan and carefully place, almond-side up, on the rack. Let stand until cooled completely, about 30 minutes.
9. Garnish with confectioners' sugar and/or orange zest, if desired.

Nutrition

Serving Size: **1 slice** | Servings: **8** | *Dairy Free, Gluten Free, Soy-Free, Vegetarian*

Per Serving: Calories: **258** | Protein: **9g** | Carbohydrates: **19g** | Dietary Fiber: **3g** | Fat: **17g** | Saturated Fat: **2g** | Sugar: **14g** | Sodium: **241mg**

source: *EatingWell*

Make Work-Life Balance Second Nature

Do you crave work-life balance only when overwhelmed by stress? Put work-life balance on “autopilot.” 1) Do tiring or intense work tasks during the time of day you feel the most energetic and “up.” 2) Passionately engage in a goal, hobby, pastime, or sport *outside of work*—something magnificent that “calls your attention.” Make it something you can’t wait to get to, either before work or after. 3) Write down realistic goals for your work each day. (Without a daily plan, you won’t easily find an end to your day.) 4) Examine what underlies imbalance. For example, do you believe overwork is noticed and will eventually be rewarded? Do you work harder hoping others won’t notice the skills and abilities you fear you don’t possess? With these few changes, you can avoid “work strain,” burnout, and disillusionment with your job.

Your Bucket Full of Vitamins

Many people take multiple vitamins, herbal supplements, and nutraceuticals marketed on television or suggested by others who swear by their benefits. Pills, powders, and super food concoctions are heavily promoted, and may not be regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Discuss supplements with your physician, and visit [drugs.com](https://www.drugs.com) to discover whether anything you are taking now interferes with something else you might be using. Fact: Did you know that vitamin C has known interactions with 27 drugs and medications? Learn more: [drugs.com](https://www.drugs.com) [tab “interaction checker”]

Conquer and Check Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are naturally acquired, mostly unconscious beliefs or views about others who are different from us. Research shows that all people have biases, but with education, awareness, and conscious use of self you can prevent their expression. Biases can sour interactions on the job, damage morale, and affect the bottom line. When bias is checked, employees remain focused and engaged and possess a stronger sense of belonging. And ultimately, those who are different from the majority come to believe their value is unconditionally accepted and their differences don’t matter. Learn more: “The Leader’s Guide to Unconscious Bias: How to Reframe Bias, Cultivate Connection, and Create High-Performing Teams”—coming April 25, 2023, by Pamela Fuller

Digital Timers for Boosting Productivity

Digital timers are desktop or smartphone applications that keep you focused so you produce more work and waste less time with fewer distractions. Beyond this basic goal, they collect start, stop, and pause data to measure, analyze, and offer insight into your behavior. This can improve awareness, create new work habits, save time, and help your employer with the bottom line. Timers for Windows applications can be found online, but even if you don’t use one, here’s a metric most have identified: You work efficiently and at peak for about 25 minutes. Taking a break for 3-5 minutes every 25 minutes will maximize productivity.

Facing Loss During the Holidays

Grief often intensifies during the holiday season. And the dread that comes with anticipating the struggle can create strain. Those who have faced grief offer some tips. Acknowledge that this time of year is different and hard. Ironically, this self-awareness makes practicing other tips easier. Avoid “thought blocking,” stuffing feelings, and isolation. Make a few choices about traditions. Keep ones that are meaningful, modify others, eliminate some, and start new ones. Again, it’s okay. What works for you is what works for you. Where will you physically be during the holidays? Trust your gut. If it feels easier to manage grief in a new environment, consider this choice. Don’t apologize for how you grieve or for acting on what feels right to you. Engaging with others, especially loved ones, along with the positive distraction socializing generates, is a healthy coping strategy. So, reach out for support, consciously nurture yourself, don’t resist participating in an activity that brings you joy, and let others know what your needs are at this time. If you are not experiencing grief, do you know someone who is? Reaching out to offer companionship and support is the most priceless form of caring. Explore more: <https://parade.com/1308668/lisamulcahy/coping-with-grief-holidays/>

Reducing Holiday Financial Stress

Holiday cheer is often followed by post-holiday “jeer” when credit card bills come due. If you are inclined to overindulge in purchases, especially for loved ones, here are a few tips to reduce post-holiday bill shock. Decide who will get a gift, and who can receive your sentiments in another way. Recruit your family—use a team approach to buy into cutting back. Don’t be tempted by shopping deals that excite you to spend more, credit offers, or bulk deals you don’t need. When shopping online, enter the keyword of a gift item you are considering and click the “images” tab at the top of your browser. You will discover numerous images of the same item displayed by competitors—both online and at stores nearby. Now, shop by price. This trick to online shopping can lead to significant savings. Track holiday spending—it’s a restraining tactic to curtail buying on impulse. With these clever changes in spending, you will enjoy the holidays more and keep mindful spending habits year-round.

Reduce Stress, Right Now: Focus on the Tension, Not Just Stress

When we perceive stress, it is the result of tension affecting us. The tension of being overworked creates the exhaustion (stress symptom) felt when you arrive home. So stress and tension (the source) are different. The desire to reduce stress may cause people to reach for relief—healthy choices like taking a walk, or perhaps unhealthy choices like substance abuse, which can bring temporary relief but then make circumstances worse. When stressed, consider what influence or control you have over the tension. Make it your first intervention. Ask: What element of the tension do I have the ability to shape, eliminate, reduce, or manage better? Stumped? Seek help from your EAP or another professional resource. Then develop the life skill of acting upstream to help prevent tension arriving downstream in the form of stress

Fentanyl Education for Parents and Teens

Deaths of young people from fentanyl poisoning keep rising, at 41,587 deaths in 2021, a 20% increase over 2020. Most deaths are in young people 18-45 who unwittingly take lethal amounts—about the size of two grains of salt. A government report issued last month contains the results of a massive survey of young people that sought to gauge their knowledge of fentanyl. The survey shows a dramatic lack of knowledge of this killer drug. Only 36% of teens know fentanyl is sold as fake pills or mixed with other substances of abuse. Download the 75-question survey and use it as a conversation starter to help young people be more informed and less likely to be victims of poisoning. Download: [Justthinktwice.gov](https://justthinktwice.gov) [search “friends fentanyl”] “How Much Do Your Friends Know About Fentanyl”.

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, & legal issues.

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'Tis the Season ... for your EAP

With the shortened winter days, there is less daylight to get you moving and time for holiday work and family obligations. You may start feeling sluggish or experience a lack of motivation. It is common for stress levels to rise and the EAP is here. By speaking with an Intake Counselor, you can get help with:

Community Resources
Counseling Services
Eldercare Resources
Family Support
Financial Issues
Health & Wellness

Legal Concerns
Loneliness
Occupational Strategies
Stress | Anxiety
Teen Support
... and more

**Accessing the EAP is easy, confidential and there is no cost.
Give us a call to speak with an Intake Counselor today!**

*The Holiday Season has a variety of emotions, challenges, expectations and possibilities.
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so you can enjoy the full potential of the New Year.*

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