

Balanced Living

February 2025



Understanding and Supporting Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways that people's brains work and process information. No two people are exactly the same in how they view their environment and respond to it. Additionally, people have different strengths and challenges based on how their brain functions.

Understanding the Terms

Neurodivergent is another related term. This is used to describe people whose brains developed differently from most people, affecting how they function. People who aren't neurodivergent are referred to as neurotypical. Neurodivergent is often used in the context of people with autism spectrum disorders, other neurological conditions, or learning disabilities. However, other people may identify as neurodivergent, including those who have not received a formal diagnosis.

The term neurodiversity was first coined by a sociologist named Judy Singer in the late 1990s. She wanted to encourage a more positive view of neurodivergence rather than labeling people as normal or abnormal.

Signs of Being Neurodivergent

People who identify as neurodivergent have different preferences from most people when it comes to social interactions, learning environment, and communication. For example, an individual who is neurodivergent might struggle to filter out external stimuli and cannot function in an environment with loud noises or bright lights.

An individual might also struggle with:

- Focus and concentration
- Organizing thoughts
- Disruptions to their routine

It's also important to note that someone who is neurodivergent has many unique strengths as well, which may include innovative thinking, attention to detail, and taking the initiative in certain situations.



Promoting Acceptance and Inclusivity

Let's take a look at some ways that you can promote acceptance and inclusivity of neurodiversity in various settings, including the workplace.

- **Consider how you communicate.** Everyone has different preferences in how they communicate with others. Someone who identifies as neurodivergent might struggle to communicate with others for various reasons. For example, they might prefer written communication, such as email, versus a phone call so they have more time to think about what they want to say. They might prefer to see work assignments or updates in writing. Often direct and concise communication is ideal. You can ask them directly about their preferences.
- **Take the time to listen.** Make sure to give individuals time to speak or respond. It might take someone who identifies as neurodivergent more time to formulate what they want to say or to find the right words.
- **Avoid making assumptions.** Get to know someone as an individual rather than making assumptions. No two people are the same.
- **Offer a flexible work environment when possible.** Individuals who consider themselves neurodivergent might excel with certain accommodations, such as being able to wear headphones at times to block out background noise.

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Helping Your Employees Through Personal Problems

When large life events occur in an employee's personal life, they find that it will affect their work as well. Suppose you notice that one of your employees who used to be consistently on time, productive, and jovial, is now consistently late, sad, and apathetic. When you see a drastic change in an employee's attitude or performance, there may be a non-job-related problem that's affecting him or her. As an employer, you can help your employee work through their problems so that he or she can get back to being an effective team member.

Investigate the choices your employees have:

- Can they take time off with pay to handle an at-home problem?
- Are there policies or resources at your company that help with drug or alcohol addiction?
- Are counseling services or referrals (for fee-based and non-fee-based agencies) available from your company?
- Does your personnel officer or human resources department suggest any further options?



Stay Aware

As you are helping an employee through his or her problem:

- keep in touch
- monitor progress and give them support
- ask how he or she is doing, and help with further counseling if needed
- determine what your expectations are, and when you expect the employee to return to full productivity
- decide what you'll do if the job performance is still unsatisfactory after a certain period of time

Be Helpful but Firm

Be helpful towards employees, but after a reasonable time period, if the employee still has a decreased productivity, you may have to excuse the employee.

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Setting Goals for Academic Success

Successful people set and write goals for themselves, both for the short term and long term. You're only going to be an undergraduate student once. Setting tough, attainable goals will help you get the most out of your college experience. As you think about what your goals are and how you will set about achieving them, here are some things to consider.

Fundamentals of goal setting.

Aim to make goals for yourself that are specific, time-oriented, and challenging but achievable. If you don't end up achieving a goal exactly as you had planned, don't beat yourself up. Focus on the strides you have made, consider what alterations you can make to increase your success, and keep going.

Short-term goals.

As college students, a good time frame for short-term goals is the duration of a semester. For example, your goal might be to get a B+ or better in all your courses.

Long-term goals.

A long-term goal could be something you hope to accomplish in five years or shortly after graduation. Both short- and long-term goals can be broken down into smaller goals. This way you can easily track your progress and make the goal more attainable.



Make a plan.

Determine what you need to do on a daily and weekly basis to work toward your goals. It might be helpful to track your productive hours to help you see your efforts and build momentum. Maximize your focus by limiting distractions, such as putting your phone away during class or study sessions. Also, consider what you might have to sacrifice at times, such as skipping social events when you have an exam coming up.

Regularly remind yourself of your reasons for wanting to achieve your goals and visualize yourself on the journey. Take it one day at a time, and soon you will see the progress you're making. Remember that proper rest is vital for success in all areas of life, so don't skimp on the hours of sleep you get each night.

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Webinar Now Available:

Understanding Neurodiversity

"Neurodiversity" is a word used to explain the unique ways people's brains work. Being neurodivergent means having a brain that works differently from the average or "neurotypical" person. In this session we will learn what neurodiversity is and what it means to be a neurodivergent person. We will explore various neurotypes and gain an appreciation for the varied strengths and differences.

[Log-in](#) any time this month to watch the webinar!



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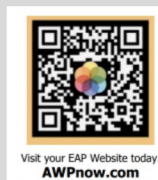
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The Wellness News

Tips and resources for living well

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National Cancer Prevention Month

February is National Cancer Prevention Month, a time to reflect on how our everyday choices can significantly impact our long-term health. While not all cancers are preventable, adopting certain habits can lower your risk and support overall wellbeing.

A healthy diet is a cornerstone of cancer prevention. Fueling your body with a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins provides essential nutrients that can reduce the risk of certain cancers. Limiting processed foods, sugary drinks, and red or processed meats can further support your efforts.

Physical activity is another key factor. Regular exercise not only helps maintain a healthy weight but also reduces inflammation, improves hormone balance, and strengthens your immune system. Aim to incorporate movement into your daily routine, whether it's a brisk walk, a yoga class, or even dancing in your living room.

Avoiding tobacco is an effective way to lower cancer risk. Smoking is a leading cause of cancer, contributing to approximately 30% of all cancer deaths. If you're a smoker, seeking support to quit can make a significant difference in your health.

Protecting your skin from UV damage is also crucial. Skin cancer is one of the most common types of cancer, but it is highly preventable. Use sunscreen with at least SPF 30, wear protective clothing, and avoid peak sun hours.

Finally, regular cancer screenings can save lives. Early detection allows for timely and effective treatment. Talk to your healthcare provider about the screenings recommended for your age, gender, and family history.

Making these changes may seem small but they create a powerful defense against cancer. Take the opportunity to assess your habits and make choices that prioritize your health. Small steps today can lead to a healthier tomorrow.

Source: <https://www.cancer.org/>



The Wellness News

Tips and resources for living well

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The Heart of Social Wellness: Building Healthy Connections for a Happier, Healthier You

As Valentine's Day approaches, we take time to celebrate romance and love. Although establishing loving and healthy romantic relationships is paramount, these connections are not the only ones that affect us. Other relationships in our lives include friends, family, coworkers, pets, and others. Ensuring that all relationships and connections in our lives are positive and healthy is crucial to our health and wellbeing. Unhealthy connections can be emotionally and physically damaging. People can deeply care for one another, but something may be weighing them down. It could be ineffective communication, lack of support, jealousy, or possessiveness, to name a few.

These types of relationships detrimentally impact our health and wellbeing causing:

- Decreased energy levels
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Damage to one's social wellness that can lead to more unhealthy relationships

What is social wellness?

It's the ability to form and hold onto healthy relationships, and to feel a sense of connection and belonging. As humans, we desire to feel loved and accepted. We want to grow without the fear of isolation. Healthy relationships meet these needs and allow us to enhance our social wellness. They help us develop close friendships, teach us to feel comfortable in diverse groups, encourage us to create relationship boundaries, and allow us to have fun. Though they may not always be perfect, healthy relationships improve our social wellness and boost our overall health and wellbeing.

How do we create healthy connections?

- Set time aside for relationships by making plans with
- friends and family.
- Practice self-care so you can support others without depleting your own health.
- Get involved! Volunteer or attend local events to meet people in your community.

We encourage you to assess your current relationships, evaluate how they're currently impacting you, and try to build and foster new connections to enhance your social wellness.

Source: <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/social-wellness-toolkit>



The Wellness News

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Top 5 Strategies for Staying Healthy During Cold and Flu Season

Cold and flu season is a challenging time of year, but with the right precautions, you can protect your health and the well-being of those around you. Taking proactive steps can reduce the risk of illness and help you recover more quickly if you do fall sick. Let's explore five key strategies to maintain your health this winter:

1. Practice Proper Hand Hygiene

Hands are a primary way germs spread, making handwashing one of the most effective defenses against illness. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, particularly after being in public spaces, before eating, or before touching your face. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to eliminate harmful bacteria and viruses.

2. Stay Up to Date with Vaccinations

The flu vaccine is a proven way to reduce the severity and duration of illness, as well as the risk of complications. Even late in the season, it's not too late to get vaccinated. Speak with your healthcare provider about scheduling your flu shot and staying current with other recommended immunizations.

3. Support and Strengthen Your Immune System

A healthy immune system is your body's best defense against seasonal illnesses. Prioritize eating a balanced diet rich in vitamins and nutrients, such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains. Staying hydrated and ensuring you get 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night are also critical components of a strong immune response.

4. Effectively Manage Stress Levels

Stress takes a toll on both your mental and physical health, weakening your body's ability to fend off illness. Incorporate daily habits to help manage stress, such as practicing mindfulness or meditation, engaging in physical activity, or spending time on hobbies and activities that bring you joy. Even small moments of relaxation can make a big difference.

5. Minimize Exposure to Germs

Germs thrive in crowded spaces, so limiting time in high-traffic areas can reduce your chances of getting sick. If you feel unwell, stay home and rest to allow your body to recover and to prevent spreading illness to others. Simple actions, like covering your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, can also help protect the community.

By incorporating these five strategies into your daily routine, you can build resilience and stay healthier this cold and flu season. And remember, after counting these tips on your fingers, give them a thorough wash to ensure they're germ-free!

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent>



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Lemon-Parsley Baked Cod

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning
- 4 cod fillets (6 ounces each)
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400°. In a shallow bowl, mix lemon juice and butter. In a separate shallow bowl, mix flour and seasonings. Dip fillets in lemon juice mixture, then in flour mixture to coat both sides; shake off excess.
2. Place in a 13x9-in. Baking dish coated with cooking spray. Drizzle with remaining lemon juice mixture. Bake 12-15 minutes or until fish just begins to flake easily with a fork. Mix parsley and lemon zest; sprinkle over fish.

Nutrition

Per Serving: 1 Fillet

Calories: 232 | Protein: 28g | Carbohydrates: 7g | Dietary Fiber: 0g | Saturated Fat: 6g | Total Sugars: 0g | Sodium: 477mg | Cholesterol: 87mg

Source: <https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/lemonparsley-baked-cod/#RecipeCard>

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How to avoid cultural isolation

Cultural miscommunication occurs when different norms, values or communication styles cause misunderstandings or make effective interaction at work difficult. It is a growing problem, but not new. Cultural miscommunication can be reduced with a couple of practices that have enormous benefits for workplace harmony and the bottom line. 1) Educate yourself about various cultural norms (see resource below). 2) Practice “active listening” to catch any misunderstandings as they occur – ask for clarification quickly. 3) Use simple language to avoid confusion or misinterpretation. 4) Adapt your communication style to the cultural preferences of others. For example, in some cultures it is customary to address a new male coworker as “Mr. (last name)” instead of using your first name. Accommodating those preferences can show respect and create good relationships. 5) Periodically solicit feedback on how communication is working and ask if adjustments need to be made to improve understanding or collaboration. Resource: “Cultural Intelligence: A Blueprint for 21st-Century Leadership (2025)”

How EAP Can Help: Overcoming the Emotional Aftermath of Conflict

You've had a heated argument with a co-worker, and you've been thinking about it all day, angry and distracted. This persistent stress and negativity is known as emotional reverberation – the emotional aftermath of conflict. If a work conflict is weighing you down, consider reaching out to your employee assistance program (EAP). Most likely, you have a reverberation, you are replaying the conflict in your mind with intrusive thoughts. This can decrease your motivation and productivity and possibly lead to work-related stress disorder. The EAP can help you process these feelings and discuss conflict resolution, and with its support you will regain focus and productivity.

Stop Interrupting!

What aspect of workplace communication do you find most annoying? If you are interrupted, you are not the only one. Nearly 30% of employees agree that being interrupted is the most common and frustrating problem in conversations. If interrupting conversations is a habit for you, try applying the principles of “active listening.” (The key to active listening is understanding that it is more about behaviors than “listening.” It is also essential to avoid preparing a counterargument or rejection while listening.) Steps: Pay full attention, eliminate distractions, and maintain eye contact with the person speaking. Next, demonstrate your participation by periodically nodding your head or verbally demonstrating (e.g., “mmm...”) that you are “attentive” to what is being said. This test of reflection and thought makes the speaker feel validated. Then give feedback by asking questions, paraphrasing, or making other comments during a pause (for example, “Did you say the other driver ran the red light?”). Lastly, respond. Learn more at: preply.com/en/blog/bad-communication-habits/

Waking up with a feeling of freshness

Consult a doctor who specializes in sleep disorders if you suffer from sleep problems. However, if you sleep well, or think you do, but don't wake up feeling “fresh,” try these tricks to improve sleep: 1) Go to bed at the same time every night so that your circadian rhythm produces better sleep. 2) Make sure your room is cool, dark, quiet and free of pets. (Subtle movements may not wake you up, but they can disturb deep sleep.) 3) Establish a bedtime routine (without technology) that signals your body to prepare for sleep. 4) Don't look at the clock in the middle of the night; It can trigger stressful worries that delay the return to sleep. 5) Avoid having a drink before going to bed. Alcohol sedates and can produce a rebound effect that interferes with deeper sleep. Learn more at: www.cdc.gov [search for “sleep”]

Simple tips for taking care of your heart

Keeping your heart healthy is not just about intentionally exercising and following a healthy diet. Consider the following tips and practices clinically proven and researched to have positive effects on heart health; They are all simple and some may surprise you: 1) Consider using stairs and taking short walks. Chances are, every day will present you with opportunities to enjoy a healthy heart. Catch them. Even a ten-minute walk will contribute to heart health. 2) Wash your hands. The flu, colds, pneumonia and other illnesses are bad for your heart, but washing your hands several times a day reduces your risk of getting a viral infection by 20%, according to the CDC, and by 50% if you work in a health center. 3) Add an extra serving of fruit to your daily diet. 4) Stay hydrated to help maintain proper cardiovascular function. 5) Limit screen time. Chances are, not all of your screen time is work-related. Cut an hour and you'll improve your heart health by sitting less. (Hint: See point 1 above.) 6) Listen to more calming music and relax with it. 7) Practice deep breathing exercises several times a day to help lower blood pressure. 8) Reflect on the positive aspects of your life: Yes, this is related to improving heart health. Learn more at: www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/10-small-steps-for-better-heart-health

Give yourself the best Valentine's Day gift

Self-love is about valuing, appreciating and taking care of yourself. It is essential for personal growth and happiness, and crucial for having satisfying relationships with others. But it is often misunderstood. Do you have a great sense of respect and acceptance for who you are? There are five elements of self-love: Self-compassion: You are kind to yourself when things don't go well and avoid cruel self-criticism; Boundaries: Set boundaries to protect your time, energy, and emotional well-being; Positive Self-Talk: Replaces negative thinking with positive thinking, recognizing the damage that negative self-talk can cause to your mental health; Acceptance: you accept your imperfections and do not label them or see them as detractors that make you less worthy of love and respect; and Priorities: you do not feel guilty for taking care of your needs, even if others do not agree. Learn more with over 60,000 related book titles on this topic.

Surviving with "situational awareness"

Situational awareness is the practice of being deliberately aware of your surroundings and recognizing something that could be a threat, so that you are not caught off guard. It is not a matter of living in fear; It is about actively observing the environment in order to be able to act proactively instead of reactively in the face of a threat or a disturbing event. Situational awareness is taught in many professions – health workers, police officers, airline pilots, school teachers – but anyone can learn this practical safety skill. Although the chances of encountering a terrible threat such as a terrorist attack are very low, staying alert in crowded or unfamiliar environments can increase your safety and give you a protective advantage. A practice as simple as taking note of emergency exits is a small step, but it will allow you to be proactive and a little better prepared. Learn more at: ufpro.com/us/blog/situational-awareness-and-personal-safety-for-civilians

Don't Erode Your Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand and manage our emotions and those of others in our interactions. EI is essential to building strong relationships and driving sustained productivity. However, EI is not a fixed skill and, without practice, can gradually decline over time. This loss of EI can occur if too much time is spent online to the detriment of real-life interactions, the research says. Do you spend many hours a day on social media or is it your primary means of interacting with others? If you are using social media instead of healthier ways of relating to others, recognize that your EI is underutilized and may show up at work or at home with poor communication, inability to empathize, more conflict, and trouble working in collaboration with others. Source: [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11321225/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11321225/)

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