

Employee Enhancement Newsletter

Page 1 February 2009

Helpful Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program

February's Chat Topic

February 18, 2009

Learn to Appreciate and Care for Your Body

Every month you'll have an opportunity to chat online with a trained counselor. These live chats are held from 6:00 PM to 6:30 PM CST.

February 2009 At A Glance

AMD/Low Vision Awareness Month

<http://www.preventblindness.org/>

American Heart Month

<http://www.americanheart.org/>

National Cancer Prevention Month

<http://www.aicr.org/>

National Children's Dental Health Month

<http://www.ada.org/>

Wise Health Consumer Month

<http://www.healthylife.com/>

Random Acts of Kindness Week (9th-15th)

<http://www.actsofkindness.org/>

National Eating Disorders Awareness Week (22nd-28th)
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

Source: 2009 National Health Observances, National Health Information Center, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC.



Featured Article

How Are Your Goals Affecting Your Character?

So you want to lose 20 pounds, get out of debt, volunteer your time, or make another change? Those are worthwhile pursuits that will deliver great rewards—improved health, less financial stress, a sense of purpose. One thing that makes such goals difficult is that you will probably not see immediate results... unless you are looking!

Making changes can be time-consuming, boring, frightening, challenging, or otherwise unpleasant. By paying attention to the positive qualities that you are developing as a result of sticking to your goal, you give yourself greater incentive to hang in there.

Think about what character strengths you have been developing as you pursue your goals. Self-restraint, self-confidence, trust in your own word? Resilience—the ability to pick yourself up and begin again, no matter how many times? Perseverance? Humor? Compassion? Humility? Patience? Forgiveness? Courage? All of the above?

Regardless of the outcome of the goals themselves, developing such qualities are the real benefits of pursuing change. This is because the newly improved qualities are transferable. The strengthened characteristics will help you experience a more meaningful and satisfying life.

That is why change is such a powerful act. You develop aspects of yourself you may never have otherwise cultivated. Character strengths are usually formed in times of challenge, when you have to rise above your previous limitations

Try taking a few moments today to write down the goals you have been pursuing, as well as other changes you have already made. How has each effected the qualities within yourself? Acknowledge your efforts and the rewards you have gained. This should inspire you to keep going.

Adapted from <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/look-at-the-character-strengths-youre-cultivating.html>

Random Acts of Kindness

Scientific studies show that Acts of Kindness result in significant health benefits for those who perform them. One compelling study was documented in Allan Luks' 1991 book, *The Healing Power of Doing Good: The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Helping Others*. Luks surveyed 3,296 volunteers and concluded, "Helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and it can diminish the effect of diseases and disorders—serious and minor, psychological and physical." The volunteers in Luks' study described a natural "helper's high" that reduces stress and apparently causes the release of the body's natural painkillers, endorphins. The initial rush is followed by a long-lasting state of improved emotional well-being. Many of the volunteers had stress-related health problems that improved after they performed kind acts.

Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available to you and your dependents. If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact your EAP, Deer Oaks at: 1-866-327-2400 eap@deeroaks.com www.deeroaks.com

How to Be a Wise Health Care Consumer

Every doctor visit or medical treatment presents you with choices and responsibilities. Here are some common problems you may encounter as a health care consumer, with tips for wise responses.

The treatment your doctor prescribed isn't working

Maybe it's the wrong treatment for you, or maybe it is being applied in the wrong way. Ask your doctor for clarification. She may learn of a mistake or suggest a treatment alternative.

The side effects seem worse than the cure

Are you cutting back on your prescription (or otherwise changing a treatment) because of side effects? Let your doctor know. Perhaps adjustments can be made.

The hospital bill looks wrong

Are there problems with the dates of service or other aspects of your charges? Call the hospital or your insurance for help.

You're considering a "miracle" treatment

The Internet is full of products that sound too good to be true—and are. Television ads can also be misleading. Be skeptical of "secret formulas," "scientific breakthroughs," "amazing results," and money-back guarantees. Consult your doctor before buying.

You're not satisfied with your doctor

If you don't believe your doctor is right for you, consider looking for another. You deserve a physician who explains things in a language you understand, listens, encourages questions, and supports you in self-managing your condition.

A recommended treatment makes you uneasy

Don't rush into important health decisions. There is usually time to carefully weigh your choices. Ask: Do I need this treatment? Are there any alternatives? What are the risks and benefits? Get a second opinion if necessary.

You feel out of control in your care

Feeling out of control often has to do with a lack of knowledge. To learn more about your condition and how to self-manage it, contact a respected nonprofit group, such as the American Heart Association, to request information. Go to reputable online sites. Ask your doctor for brochures or book recommendations.

You know you should quit smoking, eat better, exercise, but it's just not happening

Do you need more support in making lifestyle changes? Ask your doctor or EAP for help. Family and friends can also support you, as well as people going through similar challenges. Look into online chats or real-life support groups.

Keep in mind, the ability to ask for help in sticking with your doctor's advice is one of your most important traits as a wise health care consumer.

Matters of the Heart



How the Financial Crisis Could Break Your Heart, Literally

If you think the current economic crisis is hurting only your pocketbook, think again. Researchers say the decline of Wall Street, the mortgage crisis, and the looming threat of layoffs may take a heavy toll on your heart, especially if you are already at risk for cardiac problems.

“Financial stress can cause your whole cardiovascular system to be off,” says Louise Hawkley, PhD, associate director of the Social Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Chicago. “Elevated stress hormones constrict the blood vessels and create a vicious cycle where blood scrapes the cells and aggravates atherosclerotic plaque, which increases your risk for a cardiovascular event like a heart attack.” She adds that new research suggests the social isolation of being laid off from a job can compound the problem. One study found that older workers who lost their jobs had a two-fold increase in the risk for subsequent heart attack and stroke.

Financial stress also contributes to behavior proven to increase heart disease risk. Smokers, for example, are 13% less likely to quit during economic hard times, and ex-smokers are more likely to relapse. Drinkers tend to drink more, which drives up blood pressure, and alcoholics who have quit drinking are more prone to relapse when exposed to chronic stress. “People also eat less heart-healthy foods during times of stress—more sweets and carbohydrates,” adds Redford Williams, MD, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University.

So what can you do if the bad economy has you worried about your ticker? First, don’t catastrophize. Take stock of your own situation and make sure you are not panicked about something that hasn’t happened yet. But if your situation is dire, it’s crucial not to isolate yourself. “Sharing concerns with friends and getting some social support can make your stress hormones go down and improve your health,” says Dr. Williams, who also recommends exercise, yoga, and meditation. However, he adds, the situation is serious, and stress researchers don’t have all the answers. “You can run all you want and meditate all you want, but if you don’t have the money to pay the bills, you are really stuck.”

Source: <http://living.health.com/2008/09/25/how-the-financial-crisis-could-break-your-heart-literally/>

10 Tips for a Healthy Heart

Eating well and being physically active are important for a healthy heart. Try these tips from the American Dietetic Association.

- 1. Lighten up.** Losing even a few extra pounds helps unburden your heart.
- 2. Be fat-savvy.** Trim saturated fat and cholesterol by choosing lean meats, skinless poultry and low-fat milk products.
- 3. Slash sodium.** Look for reduced-salt and no-added-salt versions of canned soups, vegetables and prepared foods.
- 4. Load up on produce.** Enjoy colorful fruits and vegetables — their fiber, vitamins and minerals are great for your health.
- 5. Go for whole grains.** Eat at least 3 ounces daily of whole-grain foods such as cereals, bread, pasta, and brown rice.
- 6. Get hooked on fish.** Eat omega-3-rich fish such as salmon, trout and herring at least twice a week.
- 7. Go a little nuts.** Choose modest portions of foods with unsaturated fats such as vegetable oils, nuts and seeds.
- 8. Focus on Fiber.** The fiber in oatmeal, barley, fruits, vegetables — and yes, beans — is good for your heart.
- 9. Be label conscious.** The Nutrition Facts label can help you manage the calories, fiber, fat, cholesterol, sodium.
- 10. Move to the beat.** Get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day. Time strapped? Do 10-minutes at a time. Try brisk walking, jogging, dancing, biking, gardening—even vacuuming with vigor!

Source: http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/nutrition_19748_ENU_HTML.htm