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Taking Care of Yourself at Work

Combat workplace stress throughout the day with regular interventions. Whittle away at stress rather than doing something about it only when you hit the wall at day's end. Think "preventive maintenance." The goal: leaving work feeling less exhausted. Target four areas:

- 1) **The Body** – Create means of stretching, moving, and exercising during the day.
- 2) **The Mind** – Practice mindfulness, meditation, or breathing exercises that produce calm.
- 3) **Diet** – Consume energy-giving foods. See a list at "bit.ly/hi-foods".
- 4) **Shift Focus** – Practice focusing on enjoyable pursuits or distractions unrelated to work. These self-care interventions will increase productivity and your resilience.



Salt and Heart Health

February is Heart Health Awareness month. You already know that you should exercise regularly, but let's discuss your salt intake. Your heart and salt are not buddies. Reducing your use of salt, especially if you have a family history of high blood pressure or heart disease, could help save your life. When you consume salt, you make it more difficult for your kidneys to gather fluid and for you to urinate, which leads to fluid retention. This fluid raises your blood pressure and, in turn, puts strain on your heart. The tiny blood vessels that lead to your kidneys are also strained.



Gratitude's Got Science Behind It

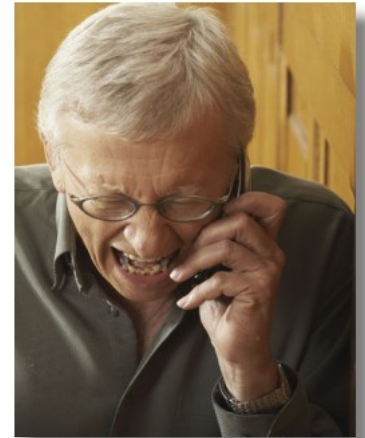
The benefits of practicing gratitude have real science behind it. This principle recognizes that how we think and condition ourselves to think produces expectations and plays a significant role in our self-esteem, perception, decisions, and ability to manage stress. Research supports the benefits of practicing gratitude. In one study, those who wrote about gratitude ten minutes a day were more optimistic and felt better about their lives, exercised more, and had fewer visits to physicians than those who did not. Practicing gratitude is a simple process: You simply reflect regularly on the people and things you are grateful for.



Source: www.health.harvard.edu (Search: "thanks, happier")

Anger in the Workplace

If you blow up at disappointments, rage at inconveniences, or bark at others' mistakes, then you probably recognize your anger management problem. Are you still struggling to get a handle on it? The change you want entails education about anger, self-awareness, and triggers; practicing alternative responses; logging attempts at change; practicing response tactics; apologizing to others when you slip up; and measuring progress. Anger responses become engrained, which is why a programmatic approach is often needed to gain control in the long term. Talk to your EAP or a counselor to discuss the pieces above and how to turn them into a plan that will give you results.



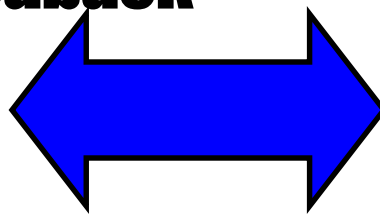
Dealing with Difficult Situations at Work



Difficult situations at work—major errors, sudden change, conflicts, and emotional meltdowns—affect every workplace. A popular question in employment interviews is “Can you give me an example of a difficult situation and how you handled it?” Often full of drama, difficult situations (you know them when you experience them) require maturity, skill, and a cool head. Minimizing disruption to the workplace is the goal, and bosses typically know who they will turn to for help in managing difficult situations. Here are a few tips to help that person be you: 1) Challenges and curveballs happen at home and at work. Don’t be surprised by them. See conflict as normal and change as inevitable. 2) Accept these realities when they happen, and resist the impulse to emotionally respond to them. 3) Avoid being pulled into the drama of a difficult workplace situation. 4) Maintain a cool head by understanding that all crises, large and small, have beginning and end points; a resolution will come. 5) When focusing on resolution, avoid blame and over-attention to symptoms. Think: “What’s the real problem here?” to help identify the best approach. 6) Maintain an attitude of “opportunity found.” This “lens” or point of view will help you spot opportunities to make things better that can help prevent a recurrence of a similar difficult situation.

Soft Skills to Know: Accepting Feedback

Ouch—constructive feedback! You will find plenty of tips on giving feedback so a well-meaning critique is received and understood, but less help on how to be a good receiver of feedback or having your reviewer feel welcomed back to offer more. Accepting feedback is a soft skill that will elevate your reputation. Employers love employees who receive feedback well because it helps drive productivity. This makes “the ability to accept feedback” important in many annual reviews. Keys to becoming a feedback dynamo: 1) Remember, no one enjoys constructive feedback that challenges their predetermined notion of a job well done. It’s a shocker. So, accept that life includes this reality. 2) Nearly all reviewers experience anxiety associated with giving constructive feedback. Empathy for this role will give you a shot at eliminating defensiveness, set your reviewer at ease, and seal your reputation as having an outstanding ability to accept constructive feedback. 3) Prepare yourself for constructive feedback by consciously deciding to appear excited to get it, to discover what you don’t know, to be inquisitive, to thank the reviewer, and to not dwell on disappointing news.



Good for the Heart, Good for the Brain!

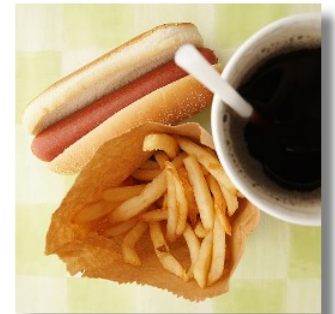
If you do a lot of sitting and get little physical exercise, you are naturally at risk for cardiovascular disease, especially if you are over 55. New research shows that within six months of participating in a commonsense, aerobic exercise program you will experience improved cognitive functions—meaning better brain health. These include increased attention span, the ability to stay focused, better decision-making, improved working memory, better planning, and the ability to think with more agility—switching back and forth between tasks you’re doing. You have even better returns if you follow a diet of vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy foods, less salt, and moderate amounts of whole grains, fish, poultry, and nuts. Do you fear losing your mental capacity as you age? Here’s your mission: Get moving, and remember, what’s good for your heart is good for your brain. (Consult with your medical provider before beginning an exercise program.)



Source: <https://scholars.duke.edu/display/pub1250443>

Foods That Prevent the Afternoon Crash

If that droopy feeling zaps your afternoon performance, examine your diet. The culprit might be lunchtime foods like white bread or white rice—or foods that contain white flour, like pasta. Are you eating enough protein? A protein deficit will affect your energy. Your body wants protein in order to do its jobs, like metabolizing and repairing. A little bit of unsaturated fat is a good thing to keep your metabolism up. Foods like avocados, nuts, and oily fish, like salmon, are good choices. These also supply energy without the crash. Finally, experiment with smaller, more frequent meals during the day, say every three hours, to see if your energy remains up. Keep a diary, and discover what works for you.



Learn more at International Food Education Council www.foodinsight.org