



A Healthy Outlook!

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How STRESS Affects Your Health

THE STRESS RESPONSE is automatic, developed in our ancestors to protect them from predators. Faced with danger, stress hormones flood the body, boosting energy and readying it to fight the problem. At one time, the threat we faced was that of being attacked by predators. That is less likely now, but people still face multiple challenges every day, associated with work, family, and finances. Regardless of the source of the stress, the body reacts in much the same way.

Short-lived stress can have an impact, be it minor, such as a stomach-ache; or major, with acute stress, such as a natural disaster. Sudden emotional distresses, especially anger, can trigger heart attacks, irregular heartbeats, even sudden death. Such reactions happen mostly in people with known heart disease, but some people do not know they have a problem

until acute stress causes them to have a heart attack, or worse.

When stress interferes with daily life for an extended period of time, it gradually takes a greater and greater toll on the body and mind, leading to fatigue, inability to concentrate, and irritable mood. Chronic stress can cause disease, either because of changes in the body or because of the overeating, smoking, and other high-risk behaviors people employ to cope with stress. Stress on the job is associated with increased risk of coronary artery disease. Depression and low levels of social support increase risk for cardiovascular disease. When illness occurs, stress can make it harder to recover.

What to Do

Reducing stress makes a person feel better immediately, and helps protect long-term health. In one study

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that examined the association between feelings like happiness, joy, contentment, and enthusiasm and the development of coronary artery disease, it was demonstrated that, as positive emotions increase, the risk of coronary artery disease decreases.

Here are some simple methods for reducing stress:

- ♦ **Identify what is causing the stress.** Be aware of your state of mind throughout the day. If you feel stressed, write down the cause and your thoughts and mood. When you know what is bothering

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Ask the EAP:

Q. I'm wondering about the quality of the help I may receive at the EAP. What are the qualifications of the EAP staff?

A. Most reputable EAPs are staffed by licensed mental health professionals. The MCPS EAP staff include licensed clinical social workers. In addition, all staff are certified employee assistance professionals. You can be assured that whomever you meet with at the EAP is well qualified to assist you.

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send your questions via outlook to Jeff Becker.

How Stress Affects Your Life

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you, you can develop a plan for coping. That may mean more realistic expectations of yourself and others and perhaps asking for help with your job or at home. Determine your priorities and eliminate nonessential tasks.

- ♦ **Build strong relationships.** Relationships can be either a source of stress or a stress reliever. Reach out to family members and close friends. They can offer practical advice, emotional support, and perhaps a different perspective on the stressor.
- ♦ **Walk away.** When you are angry, walk away and think before you react.
- ♦ **Exercise.** Physical activity can help you work off stress. It is a natural stress-reliever because it releases

endorphins. Commit to a daily walk or other form of exercise.

- ♦ **Rest your mind.** Stress interferes with sleep. Try to get the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep per night. Cut back on caffeine and stimulating activity. Eliminate the use of computers or television before bed; even better, take them out of the bedroom entirely. Yoga and relaxation exercises will help to reduce stress and boost your immune system.
- ♦ **Get help from a professional.** Contact the EAP to learn how to identify situations or behaviors that act as stressors. Develop an action plan for change.

Further Reading

American Psychological Association: Mind-body health interactive, [http://](http://www.apa.org/flash/helpcenter/anatomy/index.aspx)

www.apa.org/flash/helpcenter/anatomy/index.aspx

American Academy of Family Physicians: How to cope better with life's challenges, <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/prevention-wellness/emotional-wellbeing/mental-health/stress-how-to-cope-better-with-lifes-challenges.html>

Printed with permission. This piece is a segment of an article by Fawne Hansen. The full article, along with references, can be found at <http://adrenalfatiguesolution.com/stress-101/>. Fawne Hansen is a former Adrenal Fatigue sufferer who has made it her mission to spread awareness of this debilitating and often-misunderstood condition. With her website, Fawne plans to offer a comprehensive source of knowledge for Adrenal Fatigue sufferers and medical practitioners. You can link to her site at <http://adrenalfatiguesolution.com/>

How Drinking Alcohol Can Damage Your Mental Health



WHAT HAPPENS TO ME if I drink too much? Drinking too much is often correlated with alcoholism, which is a disease that affects millions of Americans. What does alcoholism do to me? Most people know how alcohol affects one's physical health. But, do you know how drinking alcohol impacts your mental health?

A new study published in the *Journal of Alcohol and Drugs* shows that, rather than helping with sadness and depression, alcohol intake actually leads to depressive symptoms among heavy drinkers. Though some experts know that alcohol abuse can lead to temporary

depression, which is called "substance-induced depression," this study shows that there can be severe long-term effects as well. "I don't know that the actual person realizes that heavy drinking can induce mood problems," said the lead researcher, Marc A. Schuckit, M.D., of the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine. He added that substance-induced depression must be approached and treated much differently than depression that is not accompanied by alcohol abuse.

Drinking Can Damage Your Brain

A new study conducted by The Scripps Research Institute suggests that even intermittent binge-drinking can severely impair the brain's ability to control alcohol intake. The study, which focused on rats given varying amounts of alcohol, showed that even after only a few months of intermittent binge drinking the rats had difficulty controlling the amount they drank. Olivier George, the lead author of the study, said, "We suspect that this very early adaptation of the brain to

intermittent alcohol use helps drive the transition from ordinary social drinking to binge drinking and dependence."

How Can I Beat Out-Of-Control Drinking?

Alcoholism impacts peoples' lives in terrible ways. But the good news is that you do not have to let it control you. How does one beat alcoholism? By entering treatment. To find out more about treatment options, contact the EAP at 240-314-1040.

Article used with permission, provided by the Retreat at Lancaster County, located in Ephrata, Pennsylvania 17522.

The Retreat at Lancaster County (PA)

is a private rehabilitation center in Pennsylvania, offering an exclusive drug- and alcohol-addiction treatment center and detoxification program. The center is within driving distance of patients from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Ohio, Maryland, Washington, DC, as well as Florida. They can be reached at 1.855.859.8808.

Healthy SLEEP Tips

HEALTHY SLEEP HABITS can make a big difference in your quality of life. Having healthy sleep habits is often referred to as having good “sleep hygiene.” Incorporate the following practices into your sleep routine for a good night’s sleep:

Stick to the same bedtime and wake-up time, even on the weekends.

This helps to regulate your body’s clock and could help you fall asleep and stay asleep for the night.

Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual.

A relaxing, routine activity right before bedtime, conducted away from bright lights, helps separate your sleep time from activities that can cause excitement, stress, or anxiety, which can make it more difficult to fall asleep, get sound and deep sleep, or remain asleep.

Avoid naps, especially in the afternoon.

Power napping may help you get through the day, but if you find that you cannot fall asleep at bedtime, eliminating even short catnaps may help.

Exercise daily.

Vigorous exercise is best, but even light exercise is better than no activity. Exercise at any time of day, but not at the expense of your sleep.

Evaluate your room.

Design your sleep environment to establish the conditions you need for sleep. Your bedroom should be cool—between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit. Your bedroom also should be free from any noise that can disturb your sleep. Finally, your bedroom should not have any light. Check your room for noises or other distractions. This includes a bed partner’s sleep disruptions such as snoring. Consider using blackout curtains, eye shades, ear plugs, “white noise” machines, humidifiers, fans, and other devices.

Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows.

Make sure your mattress is comfortable and supportive. The one you have

been using for years may have exceeded its life expectancy—about 9 or 10 years for most good-quality mattresses. Have comfortable pillows and make the room attractive and inviting for sleep but also free of allergens that might affect you and objects that might cause you to slip or fall if you have to get up during the night.

Use bright light to help manage your circadian rhythms.

Avoid bright light in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning. This will keep your circadian rhythms in check.

Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and heavy meals in the evening.

Alcohol, cigarettes, and caffeine can disrupt sleep. Eating big or spicy meals can cause discomfort from indigestion that can make it hard to sleep. It is good to finish eating at least two to three hours before bedtime.

Wind down. Your body needs time to shift into sleep mode, so spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity, such as reading.

For some people, using an electronic device such as a laptop can make it hard to fall asleep, because the particular type of light emanating from the screens of these devices is activating to the brain. If you have trouble sleeping, avoid electronics before bed or in the middle of the night.

If you cannot sleep, go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired.

It is best to take work materials, computers, and televisions out of the sleeping environment. Use your bed only for sleep and sex, to strengthen the association between bed and sleep. If you associate a particular activity or item with anxiety about sleeping, omit it from your bedtime routine.

If you are still having trouble sleeping, do not hesitate to speak with your doctor or find a sleep professional. You also may benefit from recording



your sleep in a sleep diary to help you better evaluate common patterns or issues you may see with your sleep or sleeping habits.

Article from the National Sleep Foundation. For more information on sleep, go to their website at <http://sleepfoundation.org/>

FOR SUPERVISORS: Ideas on Employee RECOGNITION

Knowing that recognition, enhanced morale, and productivity are all factors in retaining employees, Cindy Ventrice, author of *Make Their Day! Employee Recognition that Works*, came to this conclusion: Employers that make recognitions an integral part of their management style will find great success. Formal reward programs can make a difference, but they are really just icing on the cake, according to Ventrice’s book. She shares the following tips for creating effective recognition:

♦ Move beyond programs.

Supervisors can recognize an employee’s hard work by acknowledging a previous project and relating it to a new project.

♦ Recognition can come in surprising packages.

New responsibilities can be a form of recognition when an employee feels it is a growth opportunity. When a supervisor asks an employee to attend an important meeting or conference in his or her place, the employee may view this opportunity as a form of recognition.

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Are You a CAREGIVER? EAP Is Starting a Support Group

AT SOME POINT in our lives, many of us may become caregivers for someone else. Adult children caring for elderly parents, mothers and fathers caring for ill or disabled children, spouses caring for their partners through chronic illness and end of life, and healthcare professionals providing many forms of care each and every day of their professional lives comprise some of the many faces of caregiving. Each experience

is unique and comes with its own rewards and challenges. That said, caregivers do share something in common.

According to Sally Abrahms (AARP Bulletin, November 2012), most caregivers confront three difficult experiences: grief, guilt, and exhaustion. As caregivers, we grieve the loss of the person we once knew or the experiences we will never share with our partner or child. We feel guilty that we can never spend enough time or find exactly the right medical care. Sometimes our guilt stems from occasional feelings of resentment that our lives are not our own. As we become experts at juggling our schedules to provide the best care we can while carrying out day-to-day responsibilities

of our own, we become physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted.

MCPS recognizes that, currently, many among us are caregivers who are likely experiencing some of the reactions described above. To support our caregivers, the EAP is inaugurating a caregiver support group, designed to provide helpful resources and establish connections among the caregivers within our MCPS community. Three consecutive one-hour sessions will be held on July 9, 16, and 23 at 4 p.m., CESC, Room 225. If there is a showing of sufficient need and interest, the EAP will extend the group on a more permanent basis. Watch for the flyers and sign up by calling 240-314-1040.

Ideas on Employee Recognition

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- ♦ **Make recognition a weekly event.** Ventrice found that employees who were given recognition at least once a week felt their supervisors were doing a good job in providing recognition.
- ♦ **Knowing employees is key.** Supervisors can provide more meaningful recognition when they know what type of recognition their employees desire.
- ♦ **You can initiate recognition** on a small scale simply by providing feedback as tasks or projects

occur, rather than just waiting for the formal evaluation.

- ♦ **Managerial relationships matter.** If employees have a healthy relationship with their supervisors, they are more likely to accept new tasks as recognition than those whose relationships are damaged. The ability to do this is intricately tied to skills in the realm of social emotional intelligence.

Taking actions to improve recognition in your school or office requires thought and preparation, but it does not have to cost a lot. Providing feedback for a job well done is a simple way to start.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

Upcoming Events:

July 9, 16, and 23

To support our caregivers, the MCPS EAP is inaugurating a Caregiver Support Group, designed to provide helpful resources and establish connections among the caregivers within our MCPS community. Three consecutive one-hour sessions will be held on July 9, 16, and 23 at 4 p.m., CESC, Room 225. With sufficient need and interest, MCPS EAP will extend the group meetings on a more permanent basis. Watch for the flyers and sign up by calling 240-314-1040.



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



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Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.

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