



employee  
assistance  
center

# HEALTHY

EXCHANGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF YOUR  
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

FALL 2009

## For Your Information

### COUPLE CARE

Communication is the key to a strong, healthy relationship. Without effective communication, any relationship is in trouble. Communicate your thoughts, plans, ideas and opinions with your partner on a consistent basis. Equally important: Communicate your feelings – the joys, sorrows or frustrations we all experience.

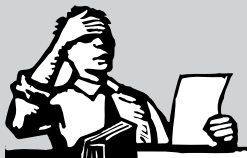


### ANGER MANAGEMENT TIP

Walk away when you're angry. Before you react, take time to mentally regroup by counting to 10. Then look at the situation again. Walking or other physical activities will also help you work off steam.

### OVERWHELMING STRESS

If you're feeling overwhelmed by stress, how do you know when it's time to get professional help? According to the American Psychological Association, here are a few indicators:



- You feel trapped, like there's nowhere to turn
- You worry excessively and can't concentrate
- The way you feel affects your sleep, your eating habits, your job, your relationships, your everyday life.

If you or a family member needs help, contact your EAP for confidential counseling, referrals or information

## IMPROVING YOUR LIFE

### How To Be Happier...Everyday

What would it take to make you happier? More money? A bigger house? A new relationship? Maybe a flatter stomach? According to the latest research on happiness, none of the above will make you happier in the long run. Human beings adapt, researchers report, so acquiring new material possessions or changing life circumstances don't result in sustained happiness. That new car, promotion or house feels great at first. Then we get used to it.



So, what does it take to be happier? Through analyzing studies on identical twins and other research, happiness researchers have determined that each of us has a "happiness set-point," a baseline level of happiness that we return to, regardless of the ups and downs of life. Just like your weight set-point, which keeps the scale hovering around the same weight, your happiness set-point will remain the same – unless you make a concerted effort to change it.

According to the researchers, approximately 50% of your set-point is genetic, about 10% is related to life circumstances and the remaining 40% is within your control. It's the 40% under your control that gives you the power to raise your happiness set-point and increase your happiness. In the same way you'd crank up the thermostat to get comfortable on a chilly day, psychologists say you can reprogram your happiness set-point to a higher level of peace and well-being. Just as you can improve your health through diet and exercise, you can increase your happiness by changing your thoughts, behaviors, actions and habits.

#### Tips to increase happiness

Happiness researchers say that you have the ability and power to be happier by changing your habits. Below are strategies and "happiness activities" shown in numerous studies to increase the happiness of study participants. To improve your happiness, choose the strategies or activities that suit you best. Build these activities into your everyday life to ensure long-term success. Seek out additional resources, if needed, to expand your knowledge, skills and success in the areas you choose.

**Live with purpose.** People who strive for something personally significant – whether it's learning a new skill, raising a good family, or changing careers – are happier than those who don't have strong dreams or aspirations. Pick one or more significant goals and devote time and effort pursuing them. The process of working towards your goal is as important to your well being as its attainment.

**Cultivate optimism.** "Many people say things happen for the best. I don't agree with that," says Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D., a Harvard University psychology professor and author of *Happier*. "But some people are able to make the best of things that happen – and that's a key to happiness." One way to do this is to reframe your thoughts. If you see everything that goes wrong as being permanent (things are going to be this bad forever); pervasive (this is going to wreck everything); and personal (it's all my fault); you're more likely to feel sad, fearful or anxious. Instead try to view your problems as temporary (this will pass); limited (this problem affects only one, specific part of my life); and learn to look at the situation objectively to determine your part of the problem and what you can do. You can train yourself to look on the bright side. Using a practice

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## HOW TO BE HAPPIER...EVERYDAY

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called "cognitive restructuring," you can help yourself become more optimistic by consciously challenging negative, self-limiting thinking and replacing it with more optimistic thought patterns. Numerous studies report that positive, optimistic people are happier and live longer.

**Nurture your relationships.** The happiest people surround themselves with family and friends. A Japanese study published last year found that contented people's happy experiences most often involved connecting with someone. Happy people have a strong bond with at least two out of three of these essential relationships: a partner, a friend, or a parent. Experts say the best way to improve a relationship is to invest time and energy in it.

**Do more activities that truly engage you.** Losing yourself in an activity, whether it's running, singing in a choir, gardening, reading a book or cooking a meal, promotes a contented state called "flow." During a state of flow, you get so involved in an activity or task that nothing else seems to matter and you lose track of time. What puts you in a state of flow is usually an activity that uses your strengths and talents. Increase the experiences at home or work in which you lose yourself in total absorption.

**Count your blessings.** One way to feel happier is to recognize good things when they happen. Express gratitude for what you have privately and also by conveying appreciation to others. If you have trouble counting your blessings, try keeping a gratitude journal. Write down three to five things you're grateful for once a week. Several studies show that people who record what they appreciate experience greater happiness and less anxiety.

**Develop healthy coping strategies.** It's hard to be happy if you're chronically over-stressed and emotionally drained. Stress and anxiety are huge barriers to health and happiness. Research from Harvard Medical School has found that women 100 years and older share a common trait – they're not plagued by negative feelings such as guilt, anger, fear and sadness. Find and practice healthy ways to manage stress, hardship or trauma.

**Move your body.** Research overwhelmingly shows that people who exercise are happier. Make some form of exercise – such as brisk walking, running, swimming or yoga – a regular habit. When you exercise, your body produces valuable brain chemicals and hormones that impact your energy, mood and health. Additionally, working out regularly will help you feel more in control of your body and health, thereby increasing your confidence and self-image. Also important to feeling happier: Eat a nutritious diet and get adequate sleep.

# How can you help a family member who is abusing alcohol or drugs?

## Someone in your family has a problem with alcohol or drugs. What can you do to help?

You might think that an alcohol or drug problem belongs to the person who is drinking or taking drugs. But if a family member has a problem, then you have a problem too.

Families operate as a system in which each family member's behavior affects every other member's behavior. The abuser's behavior affects all family members, producing painful and difficult feelings in response. At the same time, the other members of the family – unintentionally – develop patterns of behavior that make it easier for the problem drinker or drug user to continue their substance abuse. This behavior is referred to as enabling. Here are some examples of enabling:

- ◆ Denying that there is a problem, or dismissing the problem as a small one.
- ◆ Rescuing the abuser from the consequences of his or her use, such as by "calling in sick," covering up for a broken promise, or lending money.
- ◆ Taking over the abuser's responsibilities, making allowances or excuses, forgiving unforgivable behavior or to continue trying to be loving and caring in the face of abuse.
- ◆ Reinforcing drug use by participating in occasions where it is used.

All of these behaviors allow the abuser to keep using alcohol or drugs in destructive ways and allow the alcohol or drug abuse to progress to a more serious stage.

### What to do

Contacting your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a great place to start if you suspect that a family member might have a problem with alcohol or drugs. A professional EAP counselor can help you assess your situation and help you determine the best way for you to help yourself, your drug using family member, or other family members. Highly recommended: You may also find it helpful to attend an Al-Anon meeting where family, friends and loved ones of alcoholics and drug addicts share their experience, strength and hope as they struggle to cope and come to terms with the effects of addiction.



## Employee Assistance Program Services

Counselors at the Employee Assistance Center (EAC) are available to assist you with all your personal problems — marital relationship, parent/child, substance abuse, job and more.

Services provided by the Employee Assistance Center are free to you and your family. You will not receive a bill for our services. In the event a referral is needed for counseling services outside of EAC, there could be costs not covered by your insurance. You and your counselor will explore these issues during your assessment.

A phone call to the Employee Assistance Center starts the **confidential** process. Federal law forbids release of information without your written authorization.

**For more information or an appointment, call:**

**1-800-227-0905**

Visit us online at [www.eaccare.com](http://www.eaccare.com)