

Weekly Wellness Tip

Managing Stress – Part I Relaxation Techniques

The best way to deal with stress is to identify what is causing your stress and to confront it at the source. For example, if you're anxious about a task, you might block out some time and get it done, or break it down into pieces and at least get started. Other stresses can't be dealt with so directly. Most of us need to learn to live with a certain amount of conflict, change, and uncertainty. Learning about stress management techniques, and finding one that will work for you, will help you cope with the stress that you can't avoid.

This week's tip focuses on relaxation techniques that can be used to alleviate stress. Next week's tip will focus on additional techniques that can be used to manage stress.

Relaxation techniques

Stress increases your heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Relaxation techniques do the opposite; they lower your heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure. As an added benefit, regular use of relaxation techniques, even if for just a few minutes once or twice a day, can reduce stress all day long. What follows is a brief explanation of some simple but effective relaxation techniques.

- **Deep breathing** – This method is probably the easiest relaxation technique to master and among the most effective. Slow, deep, diaphragmatic breathing actually slows down your heart rate, reduces blood pressure, and relaxes tense muscles. Deep breathing is one relaxation technique you can use throughout the day, even when you have only a minute or two to spare.
- **Meditation** – Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit, where you won't be interrupted or distracted for at least five or ten minutes. Sit quietly, close your eyes, and begin to breathe deeply. Focus your thoughts on a single calming image or word, clearing your mind of all other thoughts. Keep your mind clear and focused on that one word or image for several minutes. As you become able to concentrate more easily, gradually increase the amount of time that you meditate. Meditating for even fifteen minutes can be refreshing.
- **Visualization** – Follow the instructions for meditation, but instead of focusing on a single word or image, use your imagination to create an entire relaxing word. Think of a scene or a place that relaxes you and imagine it in detail.
- **Getting your right and left brain to communicate** – Moving both sides of your body will help to build communication between your left and right brain, decreasing levels of stress. This is why walking or tossing a soft ball from one hand to the other eases stress for some people.

The key to relaxation techniques is to do them two or three times a day and to protect those times in your schedule as high-priority relaxation breaks. Some of these techniques may be difficult at first, but the more often you do them, the more your body learns to respond.

Source: LifeWorks

Employee Assistance Program

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