Best Care EAP
HealthWORKS

A NEWSLETTER TO PROMOTE HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

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Staying Safe in a Stressed-Out World

It's important to take care of ourselves. We eat healthy foods, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and always wear our seatbelts. But how many of us take time to learn to manage stress? According to the experts, not enough of us do. That's why it is important to understand what stress is and how it can negatively affect your life and the lives of others.

The word "stress" describes the way people react physically, mentally, emotionally and socially to the conditions, demands and inevitable ups and downs of everyday life. Stress is unavoidable and it affects different people to varying degrees. Because stress is ongoing and difficult to measure, it is often overlooked as a side effect of difficulty in life. The truth is that stress can result in serious problems and can create an unsafe climate for you and others.

Stress can compromise one's safety because it often results in what's known as the Fight or Flight Response, which is characterized by an increase in metabolism, heart rate, breathing and blood pressure. These physiological changes tell the body that danger is present and signals it to either fight or remove itself from the situation.

In today's modern world, we don't literally run away or start punching things. Instead, we tend to react by exhibiting classic stress-related symptoms, such as:

- scattered thoughts
- nervousness
- headaches
- stomach aches
- tight muscles
- sleep disturbances
- heart palpitations
- sweaty palms

If stress becomes a chronic problem, it can result in depression, insomnia, anxiety, anger, poor decision making, hostility and, in serious cases, heart attack.

To avoid the dangers of stress, it is important to conquer stress and overcome the problems it can create. The following articles examine problems that can result from stress-induced Fight or Flight Response: domestic abuse (fight), road rage (fight) and substance abuse (flight). The good news is that stress can be managed effectively. You have the power to take control of your stress level by incorporating some of the tips that follow.

Best Care EAP can help you build your skills to cope with stress and keep stress from managing your life. For a confidential appointment, please call (402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606.

Fighting Back Against Domestic Abuse

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a key time to examine the link between stress and domestic abuse. According to the Iowa Department of Public Safety, stress is the most common cause of domestic abuse. Stress from work, pressure from school, lack of money and overwhelming family demands can trigger emotional and/or physical abuse that is detrimental to everyone involved.

Rhoda Youngland, Best Care EAP counselor, says domestic abuse often occurs when people react negatively to their life stressors instead of learning to manage stress effectively. "Abuse is about control. If abusers feel out of control of their environment or people in that environment, they will use power and force to try to regain that control.

"An abuser also has unrealistic expectations of others and can be very blaming. Abusers often feel insecure and inadequate, and have very low self-esteem. Rather than taking responsibility for these expectations and feelings, they blame the people around them."

Youngland says it is important to take action if you think you may strike out against a loved one. "The very best method is to recognize when you are becoming angry and leave the area to take a time out," she says. "It is helpful to engage in physical exercise to work off the energy anger brings. I encourage some couples to write out their responses to each other, either by e-mail or in a notebook, especially when a sensitive subject is going to be discussed."

If a situation escalates and you are afraid of becoming a victim of domestic abuse, Youngland suggests building an informal support network, such as connecting with a neighbor who can call law enforcement, if needed. She also warns that without professional interventions, violence usually becomes more severe and more frequent, so don't hesitate to call for professional support and guidance.

If you are living as a silent victim in an abusive relationship, please contact your Best Care EAP. A professional counselor can provide confidential emotional support and guidance. Call (402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606.

Cutting off Road Rage

According to the American Automobile Association (AAA), road rage is defined as any display of aggression by a driver and/or an extreme act of violence between two drivers. Road rage is often tied to stress, anger or a misunderstanding between two drivers. Road rage can also occur when a driver is late, lost or simply agitated. Aggressive tailgating, flashing tail lights, obscene gestures, deliberately obstructing other vehicles and verbal abuse are the most common forms of road rage, but physical abuse can also occur. In all of these cases, when a driver lashes out, an automobile can become a deadly weapon.

In January 2005, the AAA conducted a study of 526 motorists and found that 90 percent of these drivers were victims of road rage in the preceding 12 months; 60 percent admitted to losing their tempers behind the wheel.

With statistics like these, it is inevitable that road rage will affect most drivers at one time or another. If you feel road rage creeping up on you, try these tips:

- Separate the stress you feel in your life from the job you have in front of you — arriving safely at your destination.
- Calm yourself down by breathing deeply and stopping negative thoughts.
- Find a safe place to pull over and regroup.

If you feel threatened by another driver:

- Try not to react to the aggression. Avoid eye contact and do not make any threatening gestures.
- When stopped in traffic, leave enough space between your car and the car in front of you to pull out if needed.
- If a problem escalates, drive to the nearest police station.

Road rage can cause serious injury or even death to you, your family or other innocent victims. Your Best Care EAP can help you manage your emotions while at home, work or on the road. For a confidential appointment, please call (402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606.

Kicking the Habit of Substance Abuse

In times of stress, some people turn to alcohol and drugs to dull the pain. According to Scott Bryant, Best Care EAP counselor, these substances offer quick relief to medicate the anxiety, anger, depression and other "uncomfortable" feelings and moods associated with stress. Actually, substance abuse tends to fuel stress levels and offers only temporary relief from stressful situations.

"Drugs and alcohol can be a way to escape and avoid problems rather than deal proactively or directly with them," Bryant says. "People also use gambling, work, food and sex. When substances are involved, they impact judgment and lower inhibitions. People do things they would not normally do." This can lead to loss of employment, relationships, health and friends, and decreased feelings of self-worth.

Many abusers deny that they have a problem. Acknowledging a problem is one of the biggest hurdles to getting the help they need. People can also become emotionally and physiologically dependent on the drug, which perpetuates continued use.

Bryant says the first step a substance abuser must take in order to regain control over his or her life is to admit there is a problem and ask for help. "Getting a chemical dependency assessment can help pinpoint the extent of the problem and determine what level of treatment is needed," Bryant says. "The addicted person must want recovery. He or she has to overcome addiction by completing a treatment program and becoming involved with a 12-step program to maintain sobriety. Staying involved in a 12-step program and obtaining a sponsor can help ensure sobriety over the long haul."

Please get help before drugs or alcohol destroy your family or your life. For a confidential appointment please call Best Care EAP at (402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606.

Learn More about Your Best Care EAP.

To view an informational video online, check out our Web site *www.BestCareEAP.org*. Select member login, enter User Name: member and Password: bestcare, then click on the Employee Orientation Video link.

Stress Quiz (answers on back cover)

Sources: *Kicking Your Stress Habit, Donald Tubesing*
Health & Longevity, February, 2005

How much do you know about stress management? Try taking the following true-or-false quiz. You may be surprised at how much you know.

1. Stress is pressure from the outside such as a burned meal, death or divorce.
❑ True ❑ False

2. Stress can be good or bad for you.
❑ True ❑ False

3. Stress management means getting rid of all stress.
❑ True ❑ False

4. You can make yourself sick from stress overload or "underload."
❑ True ❑ False

5. A positive attitude can help you cope with everyday stress.
❑ True ❑ False

6. Change, especially if sudden or disagreeable, is the most frequently mentioned cause of stress.
❑ True ❑ False

7. Worry has a useful place in our lives.
❑ True ❑ False

You Can Help!

When you visit Best Care EAP, you will be asked to complete a customer service questionnaire. Please help us by completing it and offering feedback. We depend on your feedback and ideas to make adjustments in our services, add improvements and help our staff maximize their potential for serving you.

Best Care EAP is a unique benefit provided to you by your employer. It is a free assessment, short-term counseling and referral service to help you and your dependent family members work through personal problems that may adversely affect home and work relationships. If a referral to an outside agency or specialist is made, only then do expenses become your responsibility. To arrange a confidential appointment, call

(402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606.

For more information about Best Care EAP, check us out at: www.BestCareEAP.org

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Here's Your NEW Issue of Best Care EAP HealthWorks
Inside: **Staying Safe in a Stressed-Out World**
• Fighting Back Against Domestic Abuse • Cutting off Road Rage
• Kicking the Habit of Substance Abuse • Stress Management Quiz

Quiz Answers

1. Stress is pressure from the outside such as a burned meal, death or divorce.
Answer: FALSE. These are stressors. Your response to those situations constitutes stress. The distinction is important. Stressors are the multitude of daily occurrences that call upon you to adapt. Stress is your response as you attempt to make the adjustment.

2. Stress can be good or bad for you.
Answer: TRUE. Stress is like spice - in the right proportion it enhances the flavor of a dish. Too little produces a bland, dull meal while too much may choke you.

3. Stress management means getting rid of all stress.
Answer: FALSE. Stress management means making thoughtful choices about which stress to keep and which to let go. If you are suffering from overload, let go. If you are suffering from stress underload, find additional stimulation and challenge.

4. You can make yourself sick from stress overload or "underload."
Answer: TRUE. You can make yourself sick by the choices you make. Choices about the work you do, where you live, whom you love, how you play and what you consider important all affect your stress level.

5. A positive attitude can help you cope with everyday stress.
Answer: TRUE. A positive attitude strengthens your character and makes you confident, so little things won't shatter you. It helps you handle everyday problems.

6. Change, especially if sudden or disagreeable, is the most frequently mentioned cause of stress.
Answer: TRUE. Change is less stressful if it is desirable, anticipated and under your control.

7. Worry has a useful place in our lives.
Answer: FALSE. If you're faced with a problem, worrying won't do anything to solve it. Worrying stirs up harmful stress hormones in your body. Replace worry with action. Don't agonize over it - do something!

Best Care EAP can help you evaluate your stress level and provide you with the tools to help manage your stress. Call (402) 354-8000 or (800) 666-8606.