The Employee Enhancement Newsletter

Helpful Resources from Your Employee Assistance Program

June 19

June Online Seminar
Mindfulness Matters
Explore basic mindfulness principles and learn some techniques that you can put to immediate use.

Available on-demand starting June 18th at www.deeroakseap.com

About Your EAP

Deer Oaks, your EAP, is always available to you and your household members. If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline. Counselors are available 24/7 to provide you with immediate care.

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Did you know that the EAP offers structured telephonic and video counseling in addition to traditional in-person counseling?

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Mindfulness Matters

Can living in the moment improve your health?

At some point in your life, someone probably told you: “Enjoy every moment. Life is short.” Maybe you’ve smiled and rolled your eyes at this well-intentioned relative or coworker—but the fact is, there’s something to it. Trying to enjoy each moment may actually be good for your health.

The idea is called mindfulness. This ancient practice is about being completely aware of what’s happening in the present—of all that’s going on inside and all that’s happening around you. It means not living your life on “autopilot.” Instead, you experience life as it unfolds moment to moment, good and bad, and without judgment or preconceived notions.

“Many of us go through our lives without really being present in the moment,” says Dr. Margaret Chesney of the University of California, San Francisco. She’s studying how mindfulness affects health. “What is valuable about mindfulness is that it is accessible and can be helpful to so many people.”

Studies suggest that mindfulness practices may help people manage stress, cope better with serious illness, and reduce anxiety and depression. Many people who practice mindfulness report an increased ability to relax, a greater enthusiasm for life, and improved self-esteem.

One study found a link between mindfulness meditation and measurable changes in the brain regions involved in memory, learning, and emotion.1 Another researcher reported that mindfulness practices may reduce anxiety and hostility among urban youth and lead to reduced stress, fewer fights, and better relationships.2

A major benefit of mindfulness is that it encourages you to pay attention to your thoughts, your actions, and your body. For example, studies have shown that mindfulness can help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight. “It is so common for people to watch TV and eat snack food out of the box without really attending to how much they are eating,” says Chesney. “With mindful eating, you eat when you’re hungry, focus on each bite, enjoy your food more, and stop when you’re full.”

Finding time for mindfulness in today’s culture, however, can be a challenge. People tend to place great value on how much they can do at once and how fast. Still, being more mindful is within anyone’s reach.

You can practice mindfulness throughout the day, even while answering emails, sitting in traffic or waiting in line. All you have to do is become more aware—of your breath, of your feet on the ground, of your fingers typing, of the people and voices around you.
Chesney notes that as people start to learn how to be more mindful, it’s common and normal to realize how much your mind races and focuses on the past and future. You can just notice those thoughts and then return to the present moment. It is these little, regular steps that add up and start to create a more mindful, healthy life.

**Being Mindful**

The concept of mindfulness is simple, but becoming a more mindful person requires commitment and practice. Take a moment and consider mindfulness. Here are some tips to help you get started:

1. **Take some deep breaths.** Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4, hold for 1 second, and then exhale through the mouth to a count of 5. Repeat often.
2. **Enjoy a stroll.** As you walk, notice your breath and the sights and sounds around you. As thoughts and worries enter your mind, note them but then return to the present.
3. **Practice mindful eating.** Be aware of taste, textures, and flavors in each bite, and listen to your body when you are hungry and full.
4. **Find mindfulness resources in your local community,** including yoga and meditation classes, and mindfulness-based stress-reduction programs and books.

**References**


Tips for Parents: Be Active and Have Fun

Be active with your family each day. Here are some tips to fit physical activity into a busy week and make it fun!

Find the best times to be active.
• Keep track of how your family members spend their time for one week.
• Find two 30-minute time slots when your family could fit in physical activity. Choose times when your family is usually together to try an activity and when you usually have the most energy.

Start small.
• Take a walk or play tag with your children.
• Walk to work, school, or a friend’s house.
• Use chores to move more. You can burn calories while you vacuum, rake leaves, or scrub floors.
• Ask your family to start a new routine or activity.

Start with what you know.
• Do things you know how to do, such as riding a bike or dancing.
• Pick activities that don’t need any costly sports gear, like jogging, doing push-ups, or tossing a ball.
• Get active at home, in your neighborhood, or in the park. Remember, you don’t need to go to a gym. You can try active video games where you and your kids can dance or run in place.

Be active together.
• Play with your kids, or let them join you for an exercise video or fitness game.
• Set up a birthday party or other social event that gets people moving, like dancing or having a jump-rope contest.
• Exercise with friends.

Try new things.
• Ask a friend to teach you a sport or active game.
• Take a dance or sports class, and sign your kids up for a class too.

Get support.
• Find free or low-cost programs to help you and your family move more, such as parks and recreation or YMCA programs, after-school programs, and exercise classes at work.
• Tell friends and family that you are trying to move more. Ask them to support your efforts.
• If your family does not want to be active, try these ideas:
  o Tell them physical activity will help make their bodies strong and healthy.
  o Lead by example. When they see you having fun, they will want to join in.
  o Tell them being active will give them more energy. Ask them to try it for two or three weeks and see how they feel.
  o Have children choose fun ways to get moving.

Eight Ways to Measure (and Improve) Your Financial Health

The basic tenets of financial wellness are simple — spend less than you earn, save what you can, invest the rest, and protect your assets. However, applying these principles to our everyday lives is an entirely different story.

The reality is that many of us are struggling to make ends meet — 40 percent of Americans can’t cover a $400 emergency, we’re drowning in student loan and credit card debt. Plus, the wealth gap in our country is ever-increasing.

While there are systemic issues that come into play with one’s finances, the onus falls on us to do what we can to manage our money. So how exactly can financial health be measured? For starters, the Center for Financial Services Innovation (CFSI) has come up with eight indicators. Here’s what they are, and how you can begin making improvements in each area:

1. **SPEND LESS THAN YOUR INCOME**

   Why is it that there usually seems to be more month than money? To stay within your means, you’ll need a budget. Sure, budgeting is something many people avoid, points out Wilson Muscadin, CFEI, and financial coach and founder of The Money Speakeasy. “It can be time-consuming and it’s hard to stay consistent, but it can be different if we change our perspective.”

   Instead of thinking of budgeting as a chore, Muscadin recommends thinking of it as a to-do list for our money. “We use to-do lists so we can allocate our most important tasks over a finite period of time, whether it’s a day, week, month,” says Muscadin. “When we don’t budget, we can easily overspend and not fund our priorities.”

2. **PAY BILLS ON TIME AND IN FULL**

   You’ve probably heard this one many times, but automate your bills if you can. Sync up your bill payments to your paychecks. For instance, if you get paid twice a month, one paycheck can go toward rent and your utilities, and the second paycheck can go toward insurance, groceries, and personal items.

   It’s important to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of setting up automatic payments, says Muscadin. “We know those bills will be paid and as long as there are sufficient funds in the account, and we don’t have to worry about missing payments,” he says. “The disadvantage is that once we automate, we tend to disengage with our bills, so if there is an error or if the bill was higher than expected, we’re less likely to question it or catch it.”

   If automating all bills isn’t something you’re comfortable with — or you aren’t able to pull it off just yet — Muscadin recommends automating fixed expenses, or recurring expenses that are the same each month — and set several calendar reminders to pay variable expenses.

3. **HAVE SUFFICIENT LIVING EXPENSES IN LIQUID SAVINGS**

   The general rule of thumb is to save anywhere from three to six months of your living expenses. You might be nodding your head, while asking, “Umm..how”? Start with a $500 cushion, then build from there.

   One tactic to try is to divvy your paycheck to multiple accounts, suggests Muscadin. You can do this by either percentage or dollar amount. “Having multiple checking and savings accounts may seem like more of a hassle, but it can actually streamline our spending and saving,” says Muscadin.
For example, Muscadin’s family figured they could save $200 per paycheck. But instead of transferring the money from a checking account, they had it taken out of their paycheck and put directly into their savings account.

You can also split your paycheck so part of it goes toward an account just for paying bills, and another account solely for personal spending. “This requires budgeting in advance and knowing your numbers, but if our goal is to reduce overspending, having a separate checking account that is strictly for personal spending can help,” says Muscadin.

4. HAVE SUFFICIENT LONG-TERM SAVINGS OR ASSETS

Once you have enough savings to cover living expenses for a few months, you’ll want to focus on the holy grail, marathon-equivalent of savings: investing for retirement, or acquiring valuable assets like a business or home.

So how do you even get to the point where you have $1 million in your nest egg? Start by getting into the habit of saving, suggests Jackie Cummings Koski, a CEPF®, personal finance educator, and author of Money Letters 2 My Daughter. “No matter how small, just start,” she says. “As your salary begins to increase, so will your savings. The $20 a week you used to save will turn into $50 a week, then $80 a week and so on.”

For long-term goals such as retirement, let the magic of compound growth do the rest of the work by investing in a low-cost index fund, says Cummings Koski. If you’re an investing newbie, get started by using an investing app or discount stock brokerage.

5. HAVE A SUSTAINABLE DEBT LOAD

No matter how much debt you owe, you’ll want to make sure you can afford the payments. If you’re having trouble staying on top of your payments, you’ll want to come up with a debt repayment plan that’s feasible with your budget. When paying off debt, there are several different popular debt repayment strategies, such as the debt avalanche, debt snowball, and the debt blizzard.

Other options include consolidation, or a debt management plan. You shouldn’t live the life of an ascetic and eat only ramen to pay off your debt. The key is to balance happiness in the present with paying for your past (aka debt) and planning for the future.

6. HAVE A PRIME CREDIT SCORE

Credit scores for consumers range from 300 to 850. A prime credit score is considered a score ranging from 740 to 799. When trying to boost your credit score, the first step is understanding how your credit score is calculated, explains Cummings Koski. The lion’s share, or 65 percent, of your score is made up of two parts: your payment history (whether or not you’ve been making your payments on time), and how much credit you’re using (your debt) versus your available credit (this is called your debt ratio).

The other factors that impact your score are new accounts, credit mix, and length of credit history. “To really make an impact on your score, make sure you’re in good shape with your repayment history and your amounts owed,” says Cummings Koski.

You can order a credit report for free — one from each of the three major credit bureaus — by going to annualcreditreport.com. As for scores, a handful of free credit monitoring services and credit card companies now offer your score for free. “Dispute any errors, because those mistakes could be causing you points on your credit score,” says Cummings Koski. “And keep track of your credit score so that you can quickly address any issues that pop up.”
7. HAVE APPROPRIATE INSURANCE
In a nutshell, insurance is designed to protect your assets and family in case something terrible happens. And the type of insurance and coverage depends on your unique needs and situation. If you’re single and don’t own a home, you probably don’t need life insurance. But if you are a homeowner with a family and pets, you might want to look into life insurance, setting up a pet trust, and homeowners insurance.

8. PLAN AHEAD FOR EXPENSES
Planning ahead for expenses ties in to having a budget. Besides your ongoing monthly living expenses, such as your rent, groceries, and gas for your car, you’ll want to plan for times during the year that are more expensive — summertime, back to school, and the holidays.

And of course, plan on only using money you already have. One of the biggest mistakes people make is spending money they thought they were going to get, explains Cummings Koski. For instance, the supposed tax refund that ended up being a tax bill, or the bonus check that wasn’t quite as much as expected. “This could derail even the best planning, so the first tip is don’t spend money unless you have actually received it,” says Cummings Koski.

It is important to plan for the expected and unexpected, she adds. Besides automating your savings through direct deposit or banking transfer, Cummings Koski suggests naming your bank accounts for specific savings objectives, like “The Hawaiian Vacation Fund 2020” or “Baby Fund”.

While it’s a lot to mull over, taking small steps toward financial wellness will help you from enduring stress and anxiety with your money.

Source: Jackie Lam is an L.A.-based personal finance writer who is passionate about helping creatives with their finances. Her work has appeared in Forbes, Mental Floss, Business Insider, and GOOD. She blogs at heyfreelancer.com. Article retrieved from https://www.moneymanagement.org/blog/2019/05/eight-ways-to-improve-your-financial-health.