



EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

March 2023



DEER OAKS PRESENTS

March On-Demand Seminar

Set Boundaries and Boost Your Wellbeing

Look at the benefits of having healthy boundaries, and how we can practice setting boundaries in everyday lives.

*Available OnDemand Starting March 21st.
Access via deeroakseap.com*

Table of Contents

Self-Care Strategies for
Today's Busy Employees
• P. 2

Jump Start Your Exercise
Goals • P. 4

Coping with Financial
Stress • P. 6

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR TODAY'S BUSY EMPLOYEES

Self-care is most often perceived as all about indulging yourself, playing selfish, and giving full attention to your needs only. This perception could not be farther from the truth. Time and time again, this misinterpretation often brings to light some bothersome observations by friends, family, and even coworkers.

One of the main reasons for this misperception is that many people still do not grasp the value of self-care and how everyone should make sure that they take the time to look after themselves, making themselves a priority. The reality is that everyone has a fundamental right to practice self-care for many different reasons, one of them being to prevent yourself from going down the route of neglecting your basic needs.

To start off, first consider what self-care is. Self-care can translate into a great number of distinct capacities; yet, if you look at it objectively, self-care is nothing more than taking the time to care for yourself. Not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally.

Self-care is when you intentionally take time to check in with yourself. It is that moment in which you deliberately choose to become involved in activities that you know will allow you to be in a better place. Self-care is you purposely choosing to prioritize yourself, showing up for yourself, and making sure you are in a good enough place to take on your day-to-day life and the numerous different aspects of it.

Practicing self-care is known to enhance self-esteem, increase positive feelings, and create more joy and satisfaction, which can all translate to a big expansion in energy levels and allow a major uplift in motivation.

When you intentionally take the time to engage in such practices, you distinctly notice that your vitality becomes greater. With self-care comes a substantial improvement in your emotional health and a boost in your immune system that ends up with you feeling more well equipped to handle everyday pressures.

Regular self-care allows you to navigate through ordeals in a calmer state while dealing with any challenges that arise. The benefits of being intentional in these kinds of practices are broad and linked to positive health outcomes.

When your productivity is most often maximized, there is a better stress response, increased resilience, and a feeling of growing compassion towards yourself and others. This is typically perceived to be a win-win situation.



Taking part in self-care activities presents you with the possibility to handpick the best course of action. You become responsible to take the most appropriate move that is best for you. When light is shed on how you are truly feeling, you are given an opportunity to stop and ask yourself, "What do I need right now?" That level of awareness brings a choice; that is when you are able to take back control and make use of the options available. Do you want to click the reset button or keep living in autopilot mode? Making a conscious choice can make the difference between having a well-balanced day or a stressful, negatively charged day.

Everyone knows that society has been operating on the belief that one must always be productive, work long hours, and avoid taking breaks and time off. This notion ultimately has led to burnout and prolonged emotional, physical, and mental stress, as it does not allow any space for self-care.

Long working hours and juggling different aspects of your life throughout the day can be draining and push you to the limit. In order to prevent such a state, everyone should strive to take control of their overall health and wellness.

As the old adage goes, "You can't pour from an empty cup," and this is an absolute truth. You simply will not be able to give your best self to the important things in life if you don't take care of yourself first.

The truth is that everyone needs to work on being one step ahead in terms of self-care. Without that awareness, you simply cannot operate fully for long. In order to comprehend and fully accept the concept of self-care, it is important not to view self-care as simply a reward; rather, it is a necessity.

What is meant by this? When you think to yourself, "Oh, I had such a long day, I deserve to..." you should make an effort to change your self-talk. Try to regard self-care not as a reward but rather as a must and a need—not merely labeling it as something you do because you endured a tough day.

Self-care can look different for everyone, and it doesn't need to translate into relaxing practices such as a trip to a fancy spa or going on a retreat. There's no right or wrong. The important thing is that whatever you decide to do as a self-care practice is something you think of as an act of self-love.

Here are some self-care examples:

- Setting emotional, mental, and physical boundaries
- Being sure you have a good work-life balance
- Saying "no" to things that you know offhand causes unnecessary stress
- Giving yourself permission to take a break, meditate, and spend time in nature or at home
- Setting time to hit the gym, go for a run, or go for a walk
- Taking time for yourself to do what you enjoy, like taking a bubble bath or dancing to your favorite tune
- Limiting your spending to save up for something you truly want to purchase
- Scheduling time to meet up with friends and do a weekly check-in

These are merely suggestions of possible self-care strategies that you can implement; however, you should always reflect on what makes sense to you. The most important thing is that you are giving space to yourself, awarding yourself with options so that you can uncover what makes you feel good. Keep in mind that this is not about what others do or say you should do. It is about what you believe will help you prioritize your wellbeing. Be mindful of the fact that self-care is something you can control and act on and that there's literally no limit to what you can consider to be self-care.



What is important is that you start by picking out a daily or weekly practice and slowly lacing it into your daily routine. To help you become conscious of how much that practice is helping, take note of any positive changes that surface with the change in your behavior, as that can provide you the fuel you need to keep adding in more time to practice self-care.

Self-care is how you take your power back. Self-care is critical to a happier and fulfilling life. Be sure that you are prioritizing yourself.

Source: Nunes, S. (2022, July). Self-care strategies for today's busy employees (B. Schuette, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

JUMP START YOUR EXERCISE GOALS

Perhaps you tell yourself that a couple of walks from the TV to the kitchen for another handful of chips is enough exercise for one evening. Then you watch with envy at the wiry neighbor who rises early every day to run five miles before work. Face it: Deep down, everyone knows that more exercise is important for better health.

Regular exercise, or even an increased level of daily physical activity, will lead to:

- An improved physique
- An improved sense of well-being
- A reduction in stress and fatigue
- Greater capacity for staving off life-threatening or debilitating diseases
- A body less prone to aging and injury

However, despite good intentions, many people find it difficult to follow a serious exercise regimen. While it is easy to consider beginning an exercise program, it is not always easy to make it past the first few workouts. Often, people may give up when it feels as though the exercise routine is too much. If that's happened to you, it may well be because you weren't armed with the right information. You may have chosen the wrong program, or set up unrealistic and unfair goals for yourself. You might even have suffered an injury. But with the right information and expectations, you can make a difference.

Start by setting realistic goals.

What do you want to do? Lose 10 pounds? Be able to fit into the jeans you wore in college? Perhaps you'd just plain like to feel healthier. Decide what your goal is first, and then write it down. But don't set yourself up to fail. If you want to lose 20 pounds in 20 days, forget it. You'd have to starve yourself, and you'd gain it back as soon as you started eating again. What you're shooting for, remember, are realistic goals.

Determine how much time and energy you can give to exercising and how much time you're prepared to dedicate. If you want to set aside a certain number of hours per week for programmed exercising, go for it! But if you know that's not your style, then think about what you will do. Could you commit to a walk for half of your lunch time every day? Or would you rather consider increasing your daily activity in a lot of small ways? Decide what goals will work for you, and then start to think about how to reach them. Every time you



make a decision about the kind of exercise you want to do, the time you can give it, or what you're aiming for, write it down.

Make a commitment to your goals.

Exercise can be fun or grueling—that's your choice. But it won't be easy. You have to decide that you're ready to make a commitment to the goals you've chosen, and then stick with them.

One thing you can do to help yourself is to start small. You won't want to plunge into the whole program on day one. Your body probably won't be ready for it, anyway, so once again, you might be setting yourself up for failure. If you want to run five miles at a time, start with just a third of a mile, or less, depending on the shape you're in. Or if you work on the seventh floor of your building, start by walking up one or two flights slowly. Then gradually increase the speed and the number of flights you mount each day. Build slowly to that exercise peak you have in mind.

Anticipate your objections.

Comedian George Burns once said, "If I knew that I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself." More and more people are living to what used to be unattainable ages. Wouldn't you rather be healthy and mobile in your 90s? Then why not take better care of yourself? Oh, sure, there are obstacles. We all have obstacles—some might call them excuses—for not exercising. Some of them may even be legitimate. But each obstacle can be overcome.

You may think you're:

- Too pressed for time
- Too tired
- Too old
- Too injury-prone

But what you can tell yourself instead is:

- If I'm pressed for time, I'll do mini-exercises while I'm on the phone or talking with a colleague or sitting at my computer.
- If I'm too tired it's probably because I'm stressed out and not exercising enough. Exercising is a proven rejuvenator of energy and spirits.
- It's not possible to be too old to exercise—I'll plan my exercising to fit my needs. I may not run the Boston Marathon but I can walk briskly around my street several times a week.
- If I start exercising I'll be in better shape—so I'll be less injury-prone.

Focus on the positive side and stop wasting energy constructing obstacles. Doesn't it make more sense to put that energy into exercise?

Key Tip 1

Exercise is the most effective stress reducer known to science. When you exercise, your body releases natural chemicals that restore your body to its normal equilibrium. Get up from your desk for just five minutes of stretching exercises and you'll feel the difference. Remember to keep breathing as you stretch.

Key Tip 2

Exercise slows the aging process. It helps boost your circulation, fights osteoporosis, and increases your resistance to many serious illnesses. It even helps fight "middle-age spread."

Key Tip 3

Exercise is an extremely effective antidepressant. Even a walk or some stretching exercises will improve your mood. If you're dealing with serious depression, a more regular exercise program can supplement the treatment you may already be receiving.

Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2018). Jump start your exercise goals. Raleigh, NC: Author.



COPING WITH FINANCIAL STRESS

Money worries are one of the most common causes of stress. Unexpected expenses, price increases, income loss, and high levels of debt can cause pressure that may feel all-consuming. When money runs short, it doesn't simply create financial hardship. It can lead to feelings of shame, anger, fear, and depression. Those negative emotions can get in the way of the clear thinking you need to deal with your financial challenges. Here are some suggestions for coping with financial stress and navigating a path toward better financial and emotional wellbeing.

Focus on what you can control.

Don't panic about things that are beyond your control. You can't change the economy to bring prices down or create more and better-paying jobs. You can control how you spend your money and how you manage your debt and savings. There may be ways you can earn more money. By acting on things you can control, you'll begin to feel more in control of your life, and feeling more in control can help you stay calm and make good decisions.

Understand your financial situation.

When you're worried about money, it can be tempting to avoid thinking about it. However, avoiding financial challenges won't resolve them. Turn toward your money worries instead of away from them. Take the time to understand your finances as they really are.

Add up how much money you earn every month, and compare that to what you spend. Make a chart breaking your expenses down into categories. A budgeting worksheet or an app can help as you build this picture of how your money comes in and flows out. By gathering this information in one place, you can see how your income and expenses match up (or don't). Seeing the totals by category can help you understand where you might need to make adjustments. While it can be scary to start this process, having the information is empowering and sometimes even comforting.

Talk as a couple and as a family.

If you're facing money challenges, your partner and other members of your household are also affected. Once you understand your financial situation, talk about it in calm, respectful, and mutually supportive ways. Recognize that others may be scared about what might happen in the future. They may have different ideas about what to change to bring household finances into balance. By talking, you can agree on a plan, then follow that plan together.



Prioritize changes, and make them one step at a time.

Financial stress can feel overwhelming. You can make it feel more manageable by choosing a few changes and making them one step at a time. As you experience small successes, you'll gain the confidence and courage to make bigger and more difficult changes. (If you're facing a financial crisis, you may need to make significant changes quickly. Consider talking with a professional advisor right away.)

To correct a budget that is out of balance, you can either increase your income or cut your spending—or both:

- **Consider options to increase your income.** These might include working extra shifts at your job, applying for a promotion, asking for a raise, taking a second job, earning money from an outside activity, renting a room in your home, or exploring options for government support.

- **Think about ways you might cut expenses.** These might include conserving energy to reduce heating and A/C bills, carpooling or working from home more often, switching to less-expensive phone and internet plans, shopping from a carefully planned grocery list and using coupons, exploring less-expensive housing options, paying down high-interest debt, ending subscriptions you rarely use, eating out less often, or cutting back on concerts and other entertainment.
- **Leave room for fun and pleasure in your life.** Many activities that bring joy don't cost money. Spending time in nature, playing games, and many forms of exercise are free. Even extras that cost money are worth keeping if they help you stay calm and clear-headed. If your yoga class helps you relax or an occasional latte gives you a lift, don't punish yourself by eliminating those expenses.

Practice stress management.

Making progress in resolving your money challenges will help you feel more in control of your life, but the changes can take time. To keep your stress under control while you work on your finances, take care of yourself, and use stress-management techniques that work for you:

- **Talk to trusted friends.** It can be hard to talk about money and embarrassing, at first, to admit to having money problems. But opening up to supportive friends can help you put your worries in perspective and feel calmer. You don't need them to fix your problems, just to be a friend and help you feel better about yourself.
- **Focus on the positive.** Think about the progress you're making, rather than how far you have yet to go. Think of what you're grateful for in life, rather than what makes you unhappy. Look for the positive opportunities in the changes you're making.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity is important to good health. It's also calming when you're feeling tense. You don't need to pay for a gym to exercise. Go for walks, ride your bike, or find exercise stations in public parks.
- **Eat healthy foods, and get the sleep you need.** Nutritious meals and regular sleep will help you feel better, maintain your energy, and think clearly.
- **Practice a relaxation technique.** Try deep breathing, mindfulness, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, listening to calming music, or spending time in nature. Find an activity or a technique that works to relax your mind and body when you're feeling anxious.

Ask for professional help.

Credit counseling and financial planning services offer expert guidance on money matters. Mental health counselors can help you deal with stress and change behaviors that may be contributing to your money worries. Your employee wellbeing program can provide stress management counseling and referrals to financial and mental health professionals.

For More Information

American Psychological Association. (Updated 22 March 2022). *Managing your stress in tough economic times*. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from <https://www.apa.org/topics/money/economic-stress>

Caron, C. (25 July 2022). "I'm always worrying": *The emotional toll of financial stress*. The New York Times [online version]. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/25/well/mind/stress-money-relationships.html>

Robinson, L., & Smith, M. (Updated 30 August 2022). *Coping with financial stress*. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from HelpGuide: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/coping-with-financial-stress.htm>

Scott, E. (Updated 29 July 2022). *Financial stress: How to cope*. *Verywell Mind*. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from <https://www.verywellmind.com/understanding-and-preventing-financial-stress-3144546>

Source: Morgan, H. (2022, September 22). *Coping with financial stress* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: *Workplace Options (WPO)*.