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Emotional Health

To maintain your physical health, you may exercise regularly, eat healthy and sleep well. Tending to your emotional health is just as important for your overall wellbeing. In this month's newsletter, learn tips for taking care of yourself emotionally - from avoiding self-blame to exercising.



Think Your Way to a Positive Attitude

You're late for your morning meeting but just about to reach your exit. Suddenly, a car shoots across three lanes of traffic to cut you off. You lean on the horn and want to scream, but it's too late anyway; you've missed your exit and are stuck in stop-and-go traffic.

You reach over and grab a chocolate donut from the box you were taking to the meeting. Chocolate usually lightens your mood. But after finishing the snack, you panic. "I shouldn't have eaten the whole thing! Now I'm off my diet. I can't do anything right!"

Do these thoughts sound familiar? Your thoughts are very powerful and are connected to your success in losing weight, achieving other goals and improving your quality of life. A positive attitude can actually improve your situation while a negative attitude may worsen it.

It may seem as if your feelings control your thoughts, but actually the opposite is true: your thoughts control your feelings. And since you can control your thoughts, you can teach yourself optimism.

5 GREAT WAYS TO THINK YOUR WAY TO A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

- **Use motivating self-talk:** Motivating self-talk can enhance progress. With a little practice, you can change de-motivating thoughts into motivating ones. Instead of thinking, "I don't feel like exercising," think, "I'm going to feel great after this workout!" Focus on how you will feel after you exercise instead of how you feel before.
- **Remember past success:** If sticking to a diet seems impossible, think about what you have already accomplished. Making a list of your successes will remind you that you can do it!
- **View setbacks as learning experiences, not failure:** Instead of feeling depressed when you slip up, focus on what you will do differently next time.
- **Set small goals:** Work toward small goals so that you can see success right away and build confidence. For example, walking instead of snacking when stressed is a small, yet valuable, goal.
- **Plan ahead:** If you plan ahead, all you have to do is stick to your plan. Deciding in the moment makes it too easy to change your mind.

At first, consciously trying to think positively may not feel natural. But after three weeks or so, you will be more comfortable doing so and will start to see the results. Try it today; you can do it! As Henry Ford once said, "Whether you think that you can, or that you can't, you are usually right."

Also in this Issue:



Get Physical

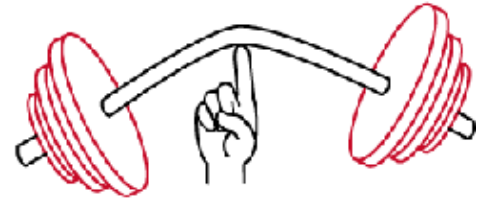
Physical exercise has a positive effect on mood; it helps to increase energy levels and feelings of well being. Exercise is a great way to relieve emotional and physical tension. It does not have to be strenuous; start by going for a short walk.

It is common for people with depression to think that nothing will help or work, but it is important to give exercise a try. Depression can sap your energy, but don't wait until you feel energetic to begin exercising. Exercise now and the energy will come.

If you have an existing medical condition, check with your medical physician before you start exercising. They will advise you on a suitable exercise program.

EXERCISE

In order to feel calm and relaxed, and to keep your tension low, you need to feel physically healthy. Physical exercise is an important component for maintaining your health and reducing tension. There are many exercises you can do, even in a chair.



TRY THIS EASY EXERCISE

- While sitting on your chair place your hands on your lap.
- Slowly rotate your head clockwise in a large arch so that you gently stretch your neck as you rotate your head.
- Repeat this 4 times.
- Then do the same counter-clockwise.
- As you rotate your head, breathe slowly and deeply. If your time permits repeat this exercise.
- As you rotate your head, do not stretch too hard.
- Just stretch enough to feel that the muscles are tight.
- After you finish stretching, relax, breathing slowly and deeply, for another minute or so before returning to your work.



Coping With Postpartum Depression

The experience of childbirth can be one of the most significant and wonderful events in a woman's life. At the same time, the birth of a child brings many life changes that can be bewildering and frustrating. Often, the stress can combine with natural hormonal reactions, producing a broad and overwhelming range of emotions.

It is not unusual for new mothers to experience sadness, anxiety, confusion and fear. Some even feel jealous of their babies for stealing the attention they enjoyed during the pregnancy. Others feel a lingering sense of despair. This emotional stage is sometimes referred to as the "baby blues."

For many mothers, the "baby blues" fade and disappear within a few days or weeks after the child is born. But, according to experts, for as many as 20 percent of new mothers, these feelings can become more severe and affect the woman's ability to function. This condition, called **postpartum depression** (PPD), requires attention and treatment. If ignored, the symptoms can get worse and last a year or longer. The good news is that PPD can be effectively treated with medication and counseling.

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

If you or someone close to you has recently given birth, and you suspect that you or she might be suffering from PPD, here are some warning signs to look for:

- Lingering or recurring sadness, frequent crying
- Lack of energy
- Feelings of irritability or restlessness
- Physical symptoms of stress, such as headaches, chest pains or palpitations, or rapid breathing
- Insomnia or extreme fatigue
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things, or making decisions
- Eating problems (either an excessive appetite or an inability to eat), accompanied by weight gain or loss
- Being extremely anxious about the baby, or feeling no concern for the baby at all
- Feelings of guilt or uselessness
- Thoughts, or fears, of harming yourself or the baby
- Inability to enjoy pleasurable activities, including sex

WHAT TO DO

If you are experiencing the above symptoms consistently for more than two weeks after giving birth, you should contact your health care provider to discuss medical treatment. PPD can be successfully treated with a variety of therapies, including antidepressants and psychotherapy. (If you are breastfeeding, make sure your doctor is aware of this before prescribing any medications.)

There are many ways to take care of yourself if you are suffering from depression. Try to get enough rest, and nap when the baby does. Don't take on more than you can do - chores don't always need to be done immediately. Try not to anchor yourself to the house, and make an effort to spend time with others. Often, it helps to be in contact with other mothers who are experiencing the same challenges. PPD support groups are available in many communities.

Remember, you deserve to feel better - and your baby deserves a happy, healthy mom. If you are not satisfied with your health provider's response to your concerns, go to another doctor or ask for a referral to a mental health specialist.



Don't Go Blaming Yourself

People with depression quite often blame themselves when things go wrong, but rarely give themselves credit when things go right. For example, when something goes badly, you may think it is your fault and when things go right, you think that it was 'just luck'.

TRY THIS EXERCISE:

- Think of an event or situation that you enjoyed or coped well in.
- Draw a table with two columns. Label one of the columns 'Due to Me' and one 'Due to Others'.
- Fill in the table; perhaps ask a friend to help.
- At the end, write down on a scale of 1 to 10. How much you were responsible for this event or situation.
- Do the same for other events and situations, including ones that went badly.

If you find that you are blaming yourself for bad things that happen and giving other people the credit for when good things happen, you need to look again at your table. Can you think of other reasons why things might have happened? It might help to think of something helpful or supportive you would say to someone else if something did not go well.

The idea is to learn to attribute the good things that happen to you to general and stable things about yourself e.g. your skills or personality. Bad things that happen are often due to things outside of our control but which are only temporary.

Getting Started is Easy!

Call your EAP for more information.