

Healthy@Hopkins

Health Coach's Corner – Stress

Stress is a natural physical response that alerts us when we are approached with danger. Our heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing increases, and there is increased blood flow to the muscles, lungs and brain. This is called “the fight or flight” reaction and can be useful as a way of protecting us from harm.

Exposure to stress over long periods is known as chronic stress. Chronic stress is the result of consistent imbalance with the demands of work and home over long periods of time. It can raise blood pressure, increase the risk for heart disease, stroke, anxiety and depression, and stress can also suppress the immune system leaving you susceptible to many illnesses in addition to impacting your happiness, relationships, and decreased productivity at work and home.

If this describes YOU, then please take a moment to practice these simple stress busters at work (or home).

Stress-Busting Exercises at Work

- Keep a stress ball at your desk (or in your lab coat/uniform) and squeeze away the tension.
- Practice deep breathing during work breaks or whenever you can. Sit down with eyes closed, shoulders back, and head up. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose as you count to five, and then slowly exhale through your mouth as you count to five. Repeat until you feel relaxed.
- Exercise. Spend part of your lunchtime taking a long walk or participate in a fitness or yoga class. Do something you enjoy. Exercise is one of the best stress relievers!



RELAX! Stress Relief Programs Make Work, Life Easier

Did you know that so many adults suffer adverse health effects from stress that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) declared stress a hazard of the workplace?

Unfortunately for today's workforce, stress has become an inevitable part of life. With so many sources of stress (poor economy, long commutes to work, caring for children and ailing parents), it is no surprise that we may be affected by them at work. Over time, stress can affect the immune system, heart, muscles, stomach, reproductive organs, and lungs as well as emotional and mental health. While the ways in which stress affects an individual may depend on his or her personality and coping skills, too much stress is detrimental to anyone's health. Here at Hopkins, nearly 15 percent of employees report being physically and emotionally affected by stress according to the 2008 Health Risk Assessment results (See graph below):

- 6.8% of employees reported feeling anxious or tense most of the time
- 3.7% reported feeling frustrated, impatient, or angry much of the time
- 7.0% reported being unable to stop thinking about their problems
- 3.2% reported that nothing seemed to give them pleasure
- 1.8% found it difficult to get along with people they used to enjoy
- 12.1% reported minor problems throwing them for a loop

In addition, 15.5 percent of Hopkins employees who completed the 2008 HRA reported feeling unable to cope and 24.3 percent reported that they got the recommended hours of sleep (7-8 hours per night) only half of the time. The ability to cope and sleep are important to fighting stress, so these individuals may be at added risk.

Stress affects more than your mood and health. It also increases absenteeism and employee turnover, reduces productivity, and raises healthcare costs. One estimate claims that stress has cost businesses almost \$600 billion. Fortunately, many companies have programs that help employees reduce stress and save money.

At Aetna Life & Casualty, increased payouts for stress medications and treatments prompted the company to incorporate stress screening into all 35 of its employee health programs. “We can't separate the medical

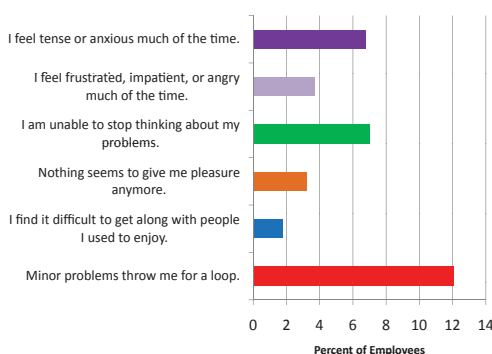
from the mental,” says Jean Chambers, Aetna's Mid-Atlantic Regional Wellness Coordinator. For example, their smoking cessation program helps people reduce stresses that drive them to smoke.

Wellness coaches and nurses help employees identify and manage stress triggers. Lunchtime programs discuss stress management techniques. Employees receive discounts on massages and spa treatments. Aetna's health risk assessment directs employees to online tools with self-tests and online coaching.

As a result, medical claims costs have dropped consistently and nearly half the employees reported significant improvements in mental health. These results have encouraged Aetna to offer stress management incentives to its clients. “It's about making sure these programs come to life and that customers get involved,” Chambers says.

Because stress can have serious affects on employee health and productivity, Healthy @ Hopkins has programs to help employees deal with and reduce stress. Through stress management workshops and individualized health coaching, employees can learn coping mechanisms and ways to address the sources of stress to improve their health and well being. Do your mind and body a favor and contact your HR department to find out more about stress management programs at Hopkins.

Percent of Respondents Reporting Stress Signals



Walk the Monday Mile! Walking at least a mile a week is easy if you get it done on Monday. Incremental behavioral changes can have long lasting and dramatic effects, so step up to the benefits of walking. Visit www.benefits.jhu.edu starting November 2nd to learn more about JHU's Monday Mile.

Avoiding the Winter Doldrums

November 3 12:00 – 1:00 pm East Baltimore

Check *Today's Announcements* for date 12:00 – 1:00 pm Homewood

Join Meg Stoltzfus to learn about how seasons can impact our moods. Not only will you be able to identify signs that may indicate a case of the winter blues, but you will also discuss strategies for coping with low moods. Share your ideas with other participants to make the coming winter a wonderful one.



Employee Profile – Audrey Trapp



Audrey Trapp, Talent Management Consultant in the Talent Management and Organization Development department since 2006, identified a need to get more exercise and get her blood pressure under control.

“In 2007, I decided to stop procrastinating and find a way to exercise on a regular basis, as I had in the past. I was 60 years old and in good health, yet I knew the importance of proper diet and exercise for continued health in the future. I was busy at Hopkins, and also busy with volunteer work, family and friends. In addition, I was taking additional graduate courses, thanks to the tuition benefits available to JHU employees. My group at work was facing reorganization and, for the first time in my life, my blood pressure went from “low normal” to “borderline high.” I realized that my stress level had increased.”

When the flyer announcing yoga classes came, Audrey decided to give it a try. “I had never had a single yoga class before in my life but the class was in my building at 5:30 pm and across the hall from my office – how could I say no?”

Audrey has loved yoga from the very first day. She thinks the instructors have an amazing way of teaching groups of people who have varied experience with yoga and who vary in age and physical condition. “They emphasize listening to your body and not doing anything that is painful or uncomfortable. For me, yoga has been a marvelous combination of stretching, relaxation, improved balance, and increased confidence in my ability to learn the yoga positions. And my blood pressure has returned to normal levels. Yoga has improved my life and is something that I plan to do for many years to come.”

To those who are considering making a healthy lifestyle change Audrey says, “Start somewhere! Healthy diet and exercise is critical for everyone regardless of your age and physical condition.”

To submit your success story, please contact Darlene Kurek at dkurek3@jhu.edu

Coping with Grief and Bereavement During the Holidays

November 19 12:00 – 1:00 pm East Baltimore

November 20 12:00 – 1:00 pm Homewood

Join Ellen Walderman, LCSW-C, in this confidential, professionally facilitated workshop where participants can share their thoughts and feelings about coping with the loss of loved ones. The holidays can be especially challenging for anyone who is experiencing loss. The need to grieve and the pressure to celebrate the season can be a stressful combination. Holidays or not, it is important for the bereaved to honor and attend to their emotional needs. Learn how to make this personal journey more peaceful, even during the holidays.

Don't Let Stress Ruin the Holidays

November 10 12:00 – 1:00 pm East Baltimore

November 16 12:00 – 1:00 pm Homewood

Join Meg Stoltzfus, LifeSpan Services Specialist, for this interactive workshop on reducing holiday stress. The season of joy, cheer, parties and family gatherings can present an overwhelming array of demands as we seek to create the perfect holiday experience. Shopping, cleaning, baking, and caring for elderly parents, or children on vacation from school, can be formidable tasks. Rather than letting anxiety and stress ruin the holidays, find new ways to enjoy more of the seasonal fun.

Special Needs of Caregivers

November 4 12:00 – 1:00 pm East Baltimore

November 9 12:00 – 1:00 pm Homewood

LifeSpan Services Specialist Meg Stoltzfus will present techniques for avoiding or reversing caregiver exhaustion. Providing care for a family member or a friend in need is a timeless act of kindness, loyalty and love. But it can also be challenging and emotionally exhausting. A 24-hour period may present a roller coaster ride of emotions such as fear, rage, hope, sadness, humor, grief, and affection. Feeling brave and dedicated one minute and guilty or overwhelmed the next is not uncommon, but can be hard for one person to process all alone. Remember, when you take care of yourself, you take care of the people who depend on you too.

Calendar

Yoga 12:00 – 1:00 pm

Monday/Wednesday/Friday
November 13 – December 18
Class starts on a Friday (no class 11/27)
Homewood Campus: Mattin Center Dance Studio

Yoga 12:00 – 1:00 pm

Mondays
November 16 – December 14
The Candler Building: Third Floor International Conference Room

Yoga 12:00 – 1:00 pm

Tuesdays
November 10 – December 8
Peabody Dance Studio, Room B-22

Yoga 5:30 – 6:30 pm

Wednesdays
November 11 – December 9
JHU@Eastern, First Floor

Mindfulness Meditation 12:00 – 12:45 pm

Tuesday/Thursday
November 12 - December 17
No class 11/26
Homewood Campus: Mattin Center Dance Studio