



Member Pulse



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MHN Member Pulse Updates and More

Happy New Year! We've got some great news to help you start the new year right:

Our new wellness resources are now live!

You can learn more about these new resources by visiting your Wellness Center. You can find the Wellness Center under the Wellness tab on the EAP member website home page. Included with your EAP, these new resources include:

- Wellness coaching services to help you reach your healthy lifestyle goals.
- Enhanced wellness tools on your EAP member website, such as:
 - MHN's health assessment tool.
 - Interactive trackers for healthy eating, exercise and more.
 - Meal planners, recipes and fitness recommendations.



Fitness: Tips for Staying Motivated

Have you ever started a fitness program and then quit? If you answered yes, you're not alone. Many people start fitness programs but stop when they get bored or results come too slowly. Here are seven tips to help you stay motivated.

1. Set goals. Start with simple goals and then progress to longer range goals. Remember to make your goals realistic and achievable. It's easy to get frustrated and give up if your goals are too ambitious.

For example, if you haven't exercised in a while, a short-term goal might be to walk 10 minutes a day three days a week. An intermediate goal might be to walk 30 minutes five days a week. A long-term goal might be to complete a 5K walk.

2. Make it fun. Find sports or activities that you enjoy, then vary the routine to keep you on your toes. If you're not enjoying your workouts, try something different. Join a volleyball or softball league. Take a ballroom dancing class. Check out a health club or martial arts center. Discover your hidden athletic talent. Remember, exercise doesn't have to be drudgery — and you're more likely to stick with a fitness program if you're having fun.

3. Make physical activity part of your daily routine. If it's hard to find time for exercise, don't fall back on excuses. Schedule workouts as you would any other important activity. You can also slip in physical activity throughout the day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk up and down sidelines while watching the kids play sports. Pedal a stationary bike or do strength training exercises while you watch TV at night.

4. Put it on paper. Are you hoping to lose weight? Boost your energy? Sleep better? Manage a chronic condition? Write it down. Seeing the benefits of regular exercise on paper may help you stay motivated.

You may also find it helps to keep an exercise diary. Record what you did during each exercise session, how long you exercised and how you felt afterward. Recording your efforts can help you work toward your goals — and remind you that you're making progress.

5. Join forces with friends, neighbors or others. You're not in this alone. Invite friends or co-workers to join you when you exercise. Work out with your partner or other loved ones. Play soccer with your kids. Organize a group of neighbors to take fitness classes at a local health club.

6. Reward yourself. After each exercise session, take a few minutes to savor the good feelings that exercise gives you. This type of internal reward can help you make a long-term commitment to regular exercise. External rewards can help, too. When you reach a longer range goal, treat yourself to a new pair of walking shoes or new tunes to enjoy while you exercise.

7. Be flexible. If you're too busy to work out or simply don't feel up to it, take a day or two off. Be gentle with yourself if you need a break. The important thing is to get back on track as soon as you can.

Now that you've regained your enthusiasm, get moving! Set your goals, make it fun and pat yourself on the back from time to time. Remember, physical activity is for life. Review these tips whenever you feel your motivation slipping.



How to Be Happy: Tips for Cultivating Contentment

Do you know how to be happy? Or are you waiting for happiness to find you?

Despite what the fairy tales depict, happiness doesn't appear by magic. It's not even something that happens to you. It's something you can cultivate.

So, what are you waiting for? Start discovering how to be happy.

How to be happy: What science tells us

Only 10 percent or so of the variation in people's reports of happiness can be explained by differences in their circumstances. It appears that the bulk of what determines happiness is due to personality and — more importantly — thoughts and behaviors that can be changed.

So, yes, you can learn how to be happy — or at least happier.

Although you may have thought, as many people do, that happiness comes from being born rich or beautiful or living a stress-free life, the reality is that people who have wealth, beauty or less stress are not happier on average than those of who don't enjoy those blessings.

People who are happy seem to intuitively know that their happiness is the sum of their life choices, and their lives are built on the following pillars:

- Devoting time to family and friends
- Appreciating what they have
- Maintaining an optimistic outlook
- Feeling a sense of purpose
- Living in the moment

How to be happy: practice, practice, practice

If you have been looking for happiness, the good news is that your choices, thoughts and actions can influence your level of happiness. It's not as easy as flipping a switch, but you can turn up your happiness level. Here's how to get started on the path to creating a happier you.

Invest in relationships

Surround yourself with happy people. Being around people who are content buoys your own mood. And by being happy yourself, you give something back to those around you.

Friends and family help you celebrate life's successes and support you in difficult times. Although it's easy to take friends and family for granted, these relationships need nurturing.

Build up your emotional account with kind words and actions. Be careful and gracious with critique. Let people know that you appreciate what they do for you or even just that you're glad they're part of your life.

Express gratitude

Gratitude is more than saying thank you. It's a sense of wonder, appreciation and, yes, thankfulness for life. It's easy to go through life without recognizing your good fortune. Often, it takes a serious illness or other tragic event to jolt people into appreciating the good things in their lives. Don't wait for something like that to happen to you.

Make a commitment to practice gratitude. Each day identify at least one thing that enriches your life. When you find yourself thinking an ungrateful thought, try substituting a grateful one. For example, replace "my sister forgot my birthday" with "my sister has always been there for me in tough times."

Let gratitude be the last thought before you go to sleep. Let gratitude also be your first thought when you wake up in the morning.

Cultivate optimism

Develop the habit of seeing the positive side of things. You needn't become a Pollyanna — after all, bad things do happen. It would be silly to pretend otherwise. But you don't have to let the negatives color your whole outlook on life. Remember that what is right about you almost always trumps what is wrong.

If you're not an optimistic person by nature, it may take time for you to change your pessimistic thinking. Start by recognizing negative thoughts as you have them. Then take a step back and ask yourself these key questions:

- Is the situation really as bad as I think?
- Is there another way to look at the situation?
- What can I learn from this experience that I can use in the future?

Find your purpose

People who strive to meet a goal or fulfill a mission — whether it's growing a garden, caring for children or finding one's spirituality — are happier than those who don't have such aspirations.

Having a goal provides a sense of purpose, bolsters self-esteem and brings people together. What your goal is doesn't matter as much as whether the process of working toward it is meaningful to you.

Try to align your daily activities with the long-term meaning and purpose of your life. Research studies suggest that relationships provide the strongest meaning and purpose to your life. So cultivate meaningful relationships.

Are you engaged in something you love? If not, ask yourself these questions to discover how you can find your purpose:

- What excites and energizes me?
- What are my proudest achievements?
- How do I want others to remember me?

Live in the moment

Don't postpone joy waiting for a day when your life is less busy or less stressful. That day may never come. Instead, look for opportunities to savor the small pleasures of everyday life. Focus on the positives in the present moment, instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.



Stress Relievers: Tips to Tame Stress

Is stress making you frustrated and irritable? Stress relievers can help restore calm and serenity to your chaotic life. You don't have to invest a lot of time or thought into stress relievers. If your stress is getting out of control and you need quick relief, try one of these tips.

Get active

Virtually any form of physical activity can act as a stress reliever. Even if you're not an athlete or you're out of shape, exercise is still a good stress reliever.

Physical activity pumps up your feel-good endorphins and other natural neural chemicals that enhance your sense of well-being. Exercise also refocuses your mind on your body's movements, improving your mood and helping the day's irritations fade away. Consider walking, jogging, gardening, housecleaning, biking, swimming, weightlifting or anything else that gets you active.

Laugh more

A good sense of humor can't cure all ailments, but it can help you feel better, even if you have to force a fake laugh through your grumpiness. When you laugh, it not only lightens your mental load but also causes positive physical changes in your body. Laughter fires up and then cools down your stress response. So read some jokes, tell some jokes, watch a comedy or hang out with your funny friends.

Connect with others

When you're stressed and irritable, your instinct may be to wrap yourself in a cocoon. Instead, reach out to family and friends and make social connections.

Social contact is a good stress reliever because it offers distraction, provides support, and helps you tolerate life's up and downs. So take a coffee break with a friend, email a relative, or visit your place of worship. Got more time? Considering volunteering for a charitable group and help yourself while helping others.

Assert yourself

You might want to do it all, but you can't, at least not without paying a price. Learning to say no or being willing to delegate can help you manage your to-do list and your stress.

Saying yes may seem like an easy way to keep the peace, prevent conflicts and get the job done right. But it may actually cause you internal conflict because your needs and those of your family come second, which can lead to stress, anger, resentment and even the desire to exact revenge. And that's not a very calm and peaceful reaction.

Try yoga

With its series of postures and controlled-breathing exercises, yoga is a popular stress reliever. Yoga brings together physical and mental disciplines to achieve peacefulness of body and mind, helping you relax and manage stress and anxiety. Try yoga on your own or find a class — you can find classes in most communities. Hatha yoga, in particular, is a good stress reliever because of its slower pace and easier movements.

Get enough sleep

Stress often gives sleep the heave-ho. When you have too much to do — and too much to think about — your sleep suffers. But sleep is the time when your brain and body recharge.

And the quality and amount of sleep you get affects your mood, energy level, concentration and overall functioning. If you have sleep troubles, make sure that you have a quiet, relaxing bedtime routine, listen to soothing music, put clocks away, and stick to a consistent schedule.

Keep a journal

Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be a good release for otherwise pent-up emotions. Don't think about what to write. Just let it happen. Write whatever comes to mind. No one else needs to read it, so don't strive for perfection in grammar or spelling. Just let your thoughts flow on paper or computer screen. Once you're done, you can toss out what you wrote or save it to reflect on later.

Get musical and be creative

Listening to or playing music is a good stress reliever because it provides a mental distraction, reduces muscle tension and decreases stress hormones. Crank up the volume and let your mind be absorbed by the music.

If music isn't your thing, turn your attention to another hobby you enjoy, such as gardening, sewing, sketching — anything that requires you to focus on what you're doing rather than what you think you should be doing.

Seek counseling

If new stressors are challenging your ability to cope or if self-care measures just aren't relieving your stress, you may need to look for reinforcements in the form of therapy or counseling. Therapy also may be a good idea if you feel overwhelmed or trapped, if you worry excessively, or if you have trouble carrying out daily routines or meeting responsibilities at work, home or school. Professional counselors or therapists can help you identify sources of your stress and learn new coping tools.



Are You Ready for Change?

Nobody's perfect, so there's probably something about your life, habits or routine that you'd like to change. Maybe you want to eat healthier or exercise more. To improve your chances of making a long-lasting change, try these tips.

1. List the benefits of healthy change. To increase your chance of success, remember to pick just one or two areas of your life that you want to change. Then write down exactly what you could gain by making a change. You might note that you'd have more energy if you exercised, for example, or lower your blood pressure if you ate healthier meals.

2. Evaluate your readiness for change. Behavior change happens over time, not overnight. Knowing where you are in the change process can help you develop a plan for moving forward – and ultimately achieving lifelong change. Which stage of change describes you?

- **Considering making a change** – You're thinking about change, and see some of the benefits. You see a lot of roadblocks, too, though. You're just not sure if change is possible or will be worth the effort.
- **Planning or taking some action** – Change now looks like a real possibility, and you believe that the benefits will be worth the work. You have a plan for overcoming roadblocks and you're starting to lay the foundation for change.
- **Making the change** – You are making the change, and working hard to make it part of your routine. You are committed to your goal.

3. Move towards change by creating a S-M-A-R-T goal. A S-M-A-R-T goal is:

- **Specific** – You know exactly what you need to do.
- **Measurable** – You can track your progress easily and objectively.
- **Attainable** – You have a clear vision of the steps you'll take.
- **Realistic** – You are honest with yourself about the challenges, and have a good plan for confronting them.
- **Timely** – You have a clear, reasonable timeline.

Example of a SMART goal: For the next three months (timely and measurable), I will go for a brisk walk (specific, realistic and attainable).

When creating your S-M-A-R-T goal, try to frame your goal in terms of what you can control.

4. Stay on track. It takes time for a healthy change to become a solid habit. In the meantime, you're more likely to stay committed to your goal if you:

- **Expect the unexpected** – Be flexible, and develop a back-up plan to keep you moving forward when changes in your life, mood or motivation threaten to stop you in your tracks. Have an exercise video for rainy days, go-to healthy recipes for busy evenings and a good pep talk for moments of temptation. If you do slip up, learn from the experience and get back on track.
- **Have fun** – Make sure that something about the change is enjoyable for you. For example, find a form of exercise you enjoy, and switch it up if you begin to get bored. Many people are more committed to exercise if they have a work-out buddy. Others appreciate the chance to get lost in their favorite music or a good audiobook. If you're changing your diet, experiment with new recipes and ingredients and share your favorites with friends.
- **Celebrate success** – Make a list of rewards that you can afford, and that won't take you away from your goal. Celebrate large and small victories with something from your list – a good book (and an undisturbed hour to read it), fresh flowers, an evening out. Making new changes can be challenging, so take time to congratulate yourself for staying on track!

Getting Started is Easy!
Call your EAP for more information