Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Take a Deep Breath and Relax

One of the most effective ways to rejuvenate our body and mind is through rest and relaxation. Of course there are times when it's difficult to feel relaxed. This is when deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation techniques can be extremely effective.

Take a deep breath. When we feel stressed our breathing becomes shallow, less oxygen is pumped into the body, and we experience a reduction in mental clarity and physical energy. A simple method of deep breathing can help: Close your eyes and focus on the rhythm of your breathing. Breathe in to the count of three (1 - 2 - 3). Hold the breath to the count of three (1 - 2 - 3) and then slowly exhale to the count of three (1 - 2 - 3). Pause and count to three (1 - 2 - 3) before inhaling. Then repeat. Your abdomen should expand when you inhale and empty when you exhale. Deep breathing, even for as little as five minutes, can counteract the effects of stress, clear your mind, and rejuvenate your body.

Leave your tension behind. Muscle tension is one of our bodies' most common responses to stress. Try a basic relaxation technique to help: Begin by choosing a comfortable position, preferably lying down. Breathe slowly and evenly. Close your eyes and begin gently tensing the muscles of the face. Hold for three to five seconds. Then slowly and gently relax these muscles, letting go of the tension. Continue this exercise with other muscle groups, slowly working your way down to the feet.

Achieve peace of mind. Meditation is a popular technique to achieve physical and mental relaxation. Begin by choosing a quiet spot. Sit in a comfortable position and choose a focus word or short phrase that represents something that you believe in. Close your eyes. Relax your muscles from head to feet. Become aware of tension as you breathe in and let it go as you breathe out. Breathe slowly and evenly, repeating your focus word or phrase silently as you exhale. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes.

Though it can be difficult to let go of all the stress piled on our shoulders, a feeling of greater relaxation is as close as your next breath. By using the simplest of tools—deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and meditation—you can be rejuvenated and refreshed, again and again.
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