

Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

**PARTNERS
FOR HEALTH**
EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

Finding time to unwind

You're sitting at your desk with thoughts of a remote forest where birds and the breeze make the only sounds beneath a canopy of blue sky. The air is crisp, cool and clear. The sun is streaming down through the tall trees. Then your phone rings, and there's a new work crisis. The mental vacation is quickly over.

Does that scenario sound familiar? Many of us move from one obligation to the next within our crowded schedules with little or no relaxation time left in the day. There's often too much going on to consider getting away, pursuing a long-neglected art project or sitting in the forest doing nothing at all. But these very sorts of activities are essential to maintaining well-being over the long term.

Your relaxation time should be a priority. For most people, relaxing is at the bottom of their list of priorities. However, to boost your health and wellness, you'll need to place relaxation higher up on your list. The key is balance: a manageable mix of work, family and friend time, relaxation, study, rest/sleep, healthy eating and exercise.

Brainstorm to identify missing life essentials. Jump off the daily treadmill for a few hours and take a thoughtful look at your life. Do you value all of the elements of your current daily routine? What do you really enjoy doing, yet have little time to do? Are there non-essential components of your day that you could minimize or drop entirely?

Schedule your unwind time! Whether it's having a cup of coffee with a friend, going for a Saturday morning jog, or taking a day trip to that lovely, remote forest, be sure to schedule your relaxation times. They are every bit as important as the other to-do's on your weekly calendar. View them as appointments that you won't cancel unless an emergency arises.

Kids need relaxation too! If you have children, don't forget about the many stressors and pressures that they face amidst their busy, hyper-scheduled lives. As you adopt relaxation techniques that you find helpful, teach them to your children as well.

Do you often feel overworked, overcommitted and overwhelmed—while under-rested? This is a typical way of living for many people today.

When your life isn't in optimal balance, the unwelcome mental and physical signs of stress usually show up:

- Fatigue
- Decreased concentration
- Stiff or aching muscles
- Increased irritability, impatience
- Headaches
- Perceived mental overload

When you recognize these sorts of stress-related symptoms, it's probably time to chill—to allow yourself some type of break in which you can relax, unwind and restore your energy and vitality. However, you may need to make some small life changes in order to regain your balance.

If you need ideas on how to find more unwind time, tap into your **ParTNers EAP** for some no-cost expert counseling advice—by phone or in person. Dial **1.855.Here4TN** (1.855.437.3486) or visit www.Here4TN.com for more information.



Relaxation techniques

It sounds easy enough. When life gets too busy, just slow down a little. But do we always take the time to really relax—to the point where the body can begin to recover from stress?

With practice, relaxation techniques can benefit many areas of your life. When you take time to practice relaxation, even briefly, you'll get a quick energy boost or a time-out from a perplexing problem or project. Then when you return to the challenge, you're often able to develop fresh new solutions.

Here are just a few of the easiest relaxation methods that you can do almost anywhere:

Deep breathing—Deep breathing can be used at any time, and no one will know but you. It involves taking slow, deep breaths through the nose, and exhaling gradually through the mouth to let the whole body relax a little more with each breath. Paying close attention to your breath can relax and calm you down (if needed) so you can experience the present moment more clearly.

Meditation—Practiced in many cultures for centuries, meditation involves resting in a comfortable position without distractions. Focus your attention on only one thing. This can be a word or phrase, your breathing, a sound, or an image or object. By refocusing your attention each time you become distracted, you learn to be more present and aware in every moment.

Progressive (deep) muscle relaxation—This involves alternately tensing, and then releasing, groups of muscles throughout the body. Start with your facial muscles, then move on to other muscle groups—shoulders, arms, chest, stomach, legs, and feet—until you've tensed and relaxed all muscle groups.

Imagery or visualization—This involves using your imagination to create a visual image of a relaxing, soothing or healing place or thing. Imagine every part of this image—sight, sound, taste, motion and texture—to make it as real as possible.

Other simple relaxation methods—Additional techniques that can help relieve body tension include yoga, tai chi and stretching exercises. Other simple tried-and-true “unwind time” activities include taking a warm bubble bath, reading a book, listening to music, or taking a long, mindful walk in nature with all of your senses attuned.

Call us today at **1.855.Here4TN** (1.855.437.3486), or visit www.HERE4TN.com for more information and support.

Ways to set time aside to recover and relax

Sometimes it takes a focused effort to make small changes as part of a healthier life. Consider these ideas for finding more relaxation time.

- Closely examine how you spend your time. Most of us aren't aware of how much time we lose to non-essential distractions. Document in detail all your activities for several days.
- Identify activities that are time-wasters for you. This could include internet surfing, texting with friends, chatting with colleagues or responding to every IM and email as it arrives.
- Seek more efficiency. Once you've spotted the dead zones in your day, strategize on how to minimize that wasted time so that you'll have more time to yourself later.
- Experiment with doing relaxation activities at different points in your day.
- Tell others what you need. Don't worry about reminding friends and family that you need some quiet alone time. Similarly, don't hesitate to decline non-priority social invitations.
- Remember to take brief breaks during your workday, as appropriate to your job. Deep breathing, stretching and walking are good at-work activities.
- Put restorative activities on your schedule!

Teaching children how to unwind

Children can feel anxious and exhausted trying to keep up with academic pressures, peer problems and packed schedules. They may have little opportunity for unstructured relaxation. Here are tips for helping them unwind.

Coping skills help at any age. Keep in mind that, like adults, children need to escape stressful concerns so they can restore their still-developing bodies and minds.



Demonstrate basic relaxation

exercises. Teach them to breathe in and out deeply three times when feeling anxious. Or, they can alternately tense and relax the body's muscle groups. Learning to relax can be a valuable life lesson.



Share the benefit of breaks. If a homework assignment is proving daunting, recommend that your child step away briefly for a healthy snack, stretching, a walk, or some cuddle time with the dog.

Exercise cuts stress. Activities such as climbing, running, bike riding, or simply playing outdoors with friends or siblings can provide healthy diversion.

Use laughter. Being silly with your child can provide a great tension-busting break.



Tap the power of touch. Offering loving hugs or back massages will help ease your child's stress.

The importance of relaxing

Still not sure about the health and wellness benefits of relaxation? Numerous studies show that relaxation:

- Helps release accumulated muscle tension
- Keeps your heart healthier by slowing the heart rate, lowering blood pressure and decreasing risk of heart attacks and other heart problems
- Improves the mood—warding off depression, anxiety and other mental health problems
- Gives your immune system a boost so it can better overcome infections and viruses
- Helps you avoid obesity by improving digestion and keeping at bay the junk food cravings brought on by stress
- Improves brain function and memory
- Helps you cope with stress related to various health problems such as cancer and pain.

Relaxation may sound like another term for goofing off, but it's essential to your health! Research shows relaxation training can help alleviate the symptoms associated with many medical and psychological disorders.

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