

# Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

**PARTNERS**  
**FOR HEALTH**  
EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM

## The benefits of being physically healthy

*An IT analyst, Mary got some unwelcome news when visiting her doctor following some lab tests. She'd need to change her lifestyle or depend on medicine to regulate her blood pressure and glucose levels for the rest of her life. Extra pounds had been causing high blood pressure, insomnia and heartburn—and made it difficult for Mary to keep up with her young children.*

Whether your doctor tells you to adopt better health habits, or the motivation comes from not being able to fit into last year's outfits, the realization that change will be needed can be a harsh wakeup call. It helps to keep in mind the basic benefits of living more actively.

Better weight control. Both a healthy eating plan and regular physical activity play a critical role in reaching and maintaining a healthy weight. If exercising has proven daunting to you, try to be more active in simple ways throughout the day such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Reduced risk of disease. Being active boosts your HDL or "good" cholesterol and decreases unhealthy triglycerides. This keeps your blood flowing smoothly, which decreases the risk of cardiovascular diseases. In fact, regular physical activity can help you prevent or manage a wide range of health problems including stroke, metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, colon and breast cancer and arthritis. It also helps support better digestion and bone density.

Better emotional balance. Getting regular exercise is one of the best ways to reduce stress, anxiety and depression, elevate and stabilize your mood (via production of endorphins, the feel-good neurotransmitters), improve sleep quality and boost your self-esteem.

*Mary decided to start participating in her health plan's wellness program and make exercise part of her daily routine for the first time. She started tracking her meals with a fitness app and working out. Mary's hard work has paid off. She's lost almost 50 pounds, avoided having to go on medication, and can better keep up with her kids now.*

Have you seen yourself in a group photo on Facebook and been disappointed with your appearance? Have you been doing more "stress eating" lately? Are you moving less and spending more time on the couch?

These are common conditions for busy adults, but remember that there's plenty you can do to get healthier—even if it's been a long time since you ate a healthy diet and exercised.

- Focus initially on taking small, gradual steps toward health. Don't overwhelm yourself with dramatic changes like six-day-per-week workouts or going cold turkey on all your favorite foods.
- Have a can-do attitude. If you remind yourself that you have the power to make positive changes, you'll be more likely to succeed.
- If you are ready to make a change, your ParTNers Wellness Program can help. Call **888-741-3390** to talk with a coach.



# Finding emotional balance

Wisdom has always said that it's better to seek moderation in all things than to go to extremes and this includes our emotional reactions to life events.

When we're susceptible to having strong emotional reactions to everything from traffic to family to work colleagues, deadlines and/or politics, we're like a pendulum swinging back and forth. And, when our emotions aren't in balance, we're more likely to say and do things that we regret later. It's better to learn how to fully experience, identify, regulate and then release our emotions.

- **Don't deny emotions.** When a strong emotion comes up, don't just try to squelch and avoid it. Instead, take a moment to truly feel the emotion. Pushing away every uncomfortable thought and sensation may work temporarily, but over time they can return with more intensity.
- **Identify emotions without judgment.** Putting your emotions into a few words can help you respond with control rather than with an unconscious, habitual reaction. For example, say to yourself, "I'm feeling hurt over this" or "I'm feeling excluded." From a non-judgmental starting point, you can begin to deal with the issue without being overwhelmed by it.
- **Know your emotional triggers.** Everyone has situations in life that always seem to trigger powerful emotions. Being prepared in advance to deal with routinely irritating situations can help reduce their power over you. Keep in mind that the event and your reaction to it are separate. You can fully control how you will react to upsetting circumstances.
- **Remember to breathe.** Once you've identified the emotion you're feeling, take some time to breathe in and out deeply. Exhaling an unwanted feeling can help deflate the power of the emotion. In fact, a key part of meditation practice is breathing and letting go of attachments—in this case, attachment to a negative emotion.
- **Vent to a trusted confidant.** If you've got a friend or family member handy, share your experience of uncomfortable feelings with that person. They may be able to offer you another perspective on the situation. People sometimes lose emotional balance when they feel they are alone in their struggle.
- **Work out the emotions.** Take a brisk 30-minute walk or bike ride, or do whatever vigorous exercise you prefer. Exercise stimulates brain chemicals that leave you feeling happier and more balanced.

## Foods that fuel the brain

Most people know the value of eating well to improve cardiovascular health. Are you aware of how your diet can take care of your mind? Here are several brain-boosting food groups.

- **Fatty fish**—contains omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D that help keep the mind sharp and reduce symptoms of depression and other mental disorders. You can get omega-3s from oily, cold-water fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines and trout.
- **Dark fruits and veggies**—have high antioxidant levels that help cognition and memory. Great antioxidant sources include blueberries, grapes, nuts and leafy greens. Greens high in antioxidants include spinach, kale, collard, romaine, turnip and mustard greens, as well as beets, broccoli and lentils.
- **Complex carbohydrates**—are broken down into glucose to provide energy for the body. Foods like whole wheat products, brown rice, beans, soy, and green and starchy vegetables release glucose slowly, contributing to steadier blood sugar levels and energy than refined flour foods.
- **Lean proteins**—help regulate levels of serotonin, a key brain chemical that impacts our mood. Lean proteins include fish, turkey, lean beef, chicken, eggs and beans.

# Helping children live healthy

Here are some proven ways to get your kids onto the long-term path of healthy living.

## **Be a good role model.**

You don't have to be perfect all the time, but if children see you trying to eat right and getting physically active, they'll take notice of your efforts. You'll send a message that good health is important to your family.



## **Involve the whole family.**

Plan times for everyone to be active together. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, visit a park, garden, or just play hide-and-seek outside. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and time together. Let your children experiment with different physical activities so that they find things they really love doing. This can instill lifelong healthy habits.

## **Limit TV, video game and phone time.**

Too much passive screen time can lead to a sedentary lifestyle and excessive snacking, which increase risks for obesity and cardiovascular disease. Strive to limit screen time to two hours per day.



## **Make dinnertime a family time.**

When everyone sits down together to eat, there's less chance of children eating the wrong foods or snacking too much.

## Small Changes Make Big Differences

Whether you resolve to lose weight, save money, or adopt a healthier lifestyle, making major life changes can be hard to start and to maintain. It takes time and commitment to your plan for your resolution to become a habit.

Setting a small goal, like getting up half an hour earlier in the morning so that you can get where you need to be on time, may be challenging—it just takes practice. After a few weeks or months, it will just be a positive habit. Knowing that you can make small changes can give you the motivation and confidence to tackle a bigger goal. An adult may choose to become a nonsmoker or start exercising regularly; a child could choose dribbling a soccer ball or practicing multiplication tables on a daily basis.

*Additional sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Heart Association, Mayo Clinic, Psychology Today, WebMD, Good Relaxation.*