The Importance of Rest and Relaxation

Rest is an important part of a healthy lifestyle for all ages. It rejuvenates your body and mind, regulates your mood, and is linked to learning and memory function. On the other hand, not getting enough rest can negatively affect your mood, immune system, memory, and stress level.

What you can do

Make time for downtime. Just like with doctor visits and other self-care appointments, make relaxation time a priority. Taking this time is especially important when you are feeling stressed and over-burdened, even if it's only a leisurely walk around the neighborhood.

Follow a routine. Rather than waking up and immediately jumping into the day at high-speed, or vice-versa when going to bed, follow a routine that allows you time to transition from one part of the day into the next. For example, consider waking up 10 minutes earlier and before turning on the TV, radio, computer or cell phone, take the time to do some simple stretches.

Give your mind a break. Relaxation isn't only about resting your body—resting your mind is just as important. If you struggle with constantly worrying or stressing about certain concerns, write it down, put the list aside for a few days and then revisit it. Sometimes when we give our mind a break from certain thoughts, we return with greater clarity. Also, consider participating in an activity that requires your full attention, such as playing an intramural team sport. This type of activity can give you a mental break by requiring you to be fully 'in the moment' both physically and mentally—leaving little time to think about your to-do list.

Try a technique. Below are some 5-minute relaxation techniques that can be practiced any time or place for a quick refresh:

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Put your hands on your abdomen and as you breathe in, let it expand like a balloon filling with air. As you exhale, slowly let the air out. You should feel your abdomen rising and falling as you breathe.
- Try to raise your shoulders up to your ears for 5 seconds, and then let your shoulders drop. One at a time, rotate each shoulder backward 5 to 10 times, and then rotate them together 5 to 10 times.
- In a relaxed position, close your eyes and breathe naturally. Think of the number 'one' as you inhale. Continue this for at least five minutes but try for 10 to 20 minutes. Any time your mind starts to wander, gently pull it back to thinking 'one.'

For more tips about rest and relaxation, contact your Employee Assistance Program.

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