

January 2020 Issue

## Creating Healthy Habits

The beginning of a new year is a great time to reflect on our health and determine the goals that are important to us. This year, consider making a plan to create healthy habits that stick! When we create new habits there is less of a need to rely on willpower and the new behaviors become automatic. Try using the following framework when creating a new habit:



### 1. Identify a Cue or Trigger

A cue or trigger is a current existing habit; something that you do at least once a day like pouring a cup of coffee, brushing your teeth, sitting down at your desk or opening your computer.

### 2. Take Action or Try a New Behavior

The action or new behavior will occur immediately after the cue or trigger. The new behavior must be something that you want to do and can do every day; takes less than 30 seconds; requires very little effort; can be defined in 5 words or less; something you do first thing in the morning (if possible.)

- Take **four** deep breaths
- Do **three** push-ups
- Write **two** sentences in journal
- Take **one** bite of apple

### 3. Experience the Reward

The Reward is done immediately after the action or new behavior and must be something that evokes positive emotion. Emotions create habits.

- Physical touch (hug or high five)
- Take a smiling selfie and text it to someone who supports you
- Play your favorite song
- Tell yourself "I'm Awesome!" and feel the positive emotion

### 4. Control Your Environment

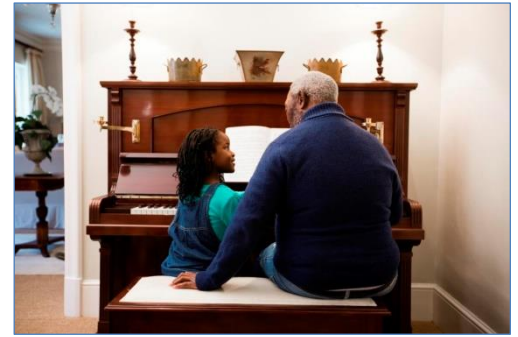
Controlling your environment makes it easier to do the new behavior.

- Set running shoes by the door
- Remove the candy jar from your desk
- Get support (husband walks the dog; kids make their own lunch)
- Set journal out on nightstand

Lastly, be patient. It can take up to 120 days to form a new habit, depending on the difficulty and motivation the new behavior requires.

# Building Self-Care Habits for Life

The demands of work, family and personal responsibilities can often interfere with our need to take care of ourselves. When obligations increase, self-care activities are frequently the first to be cut. But, taking care of our physical, emotional and mental needs is critical to our long-term wellbeing and functioning. Just like a car that never gets maintenance, ignoring our needs will catch up with us eventually! When you make yourself a priority, you will function at your best.



Increasing self-care is a matter of building in small habits that become routine. After all, self-care isn't just a one-time effort, but a way of living that includes regular activities to refresh and energize you. To create a healthy work-life balance, think in terms of three levels of action you can take:

- **Brief Activities (1-5 minutes each)**

- Get up from your workstation and stretch every hour.
- Take 3 deep slow breaths, (pretend you are breathing in and out through a straw.)
- Take a walk down the hall or go up and down the steps a few times.
- Engage your senses: Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful nature scene, eat a peppermint, or go outside and breathe in the fresh air.

Try to find cues to remind you to engage in these simple activities: Take a stretch break from your desk whenever you switch tasks, or take a moment to breathe deeply when you feel frustrated or anxious.

- **Bigger Breaks**

- Get out in nature. Even a 15-minute walk can boost your mood and give you a needed break from your routine.
- Keep up with your exercise routines. Don't sacrifice exercise when other demands ramp up. Exercise lowers stress hormones and blood pressure, and you'll reap the benefits for hours after you finish your workout.
- Try a guided meditation; many can be found online.
- Spend time in a hobby or creative activity. Make time to just have fun! By shifting gears, you rejuvenate yourself and will be more effective in your other roles.

- **Attitude Shifts**

- Make sleep a priority. Set a reasonable sleep schedule that allows you to get a minimum of 7-8 hours of sleep.
- Practice gratitude, recognizing the positive experiences and people in your life.
- Stay connected to loved ones and make time for being really present to one another.
- Unplug for an hour or more each day, breaking away from digital life.

Begin to take better care of yourself today by choosing one or two easy habits that you can do every day!