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Daily Activities to Help Change Habits

"I should change, but I've tried and failed." Does this sound familiar? Often, changing habits does seem insurmountable. Many of us simply don't have enough motivation to change our habits - all of our bad habits - in a way that would truly affect our health. We cling to them because we see them as rewards.

But your habits determine your health. Below is a strategy and focus on daily activities to help you change and eliminate bad habits.



It Takes 21 Days to Break a Bad Habit

To begin with, choose one unhealthy habit you wish to eliminate or change. Or, choose a healthy habit you want to adopt as part of your behavior. If it is a habit to eliminate, you may wish to go "cold turkey" or have a gradual tapering off. Caution: If it is a drug or chemical habit you are planning on eliminating, be sure to obtain an expert's opinion as to whether you need to taper off usage as opposed to quitting cold turkey.

Now that you have decided which unhealthy habit to eliminate, or new habit to adopt, decide on the date you will begin your behavior change. Give this date a good deal of thought and then write it down. For example, "On February 15, 2015, I will become a non-smoker."

In order to ensure behavior change, experts agree that it takes a minimum of 21 days to change a behavior. Again, look at the date you are planning on changing your habit. Count ahead 21

days and mark that date down. Now, make a commitment that you will follow your plan for 21 days.

Helpful Suggestions

Your target date has arrived. It is the first day of your 21-day cycle. Here are some helpful suggestions for habit change:



1. Write down your goal. There is magic in the written word when it applies to you. Experts recommend stating your goal in positive terms, such as "I want to be lean and physically fit," instead of "I've got to get this flabby body out there huffing and puffing." So, begin with writing down, as a positive goal, the habit you will change.

2. List your reasons for changing or eliminating your habit. Writing it down will force you to think out in specific terms what this habit represents in your life and the meaning you believe your life will hold for you upon changing the habit. This will also help with your commitment toward taking positive action.

3. Find substitute routines. For example, if you are changing eating habits and you have identified a particularly difficult time of the day when eating habits are poor, create an activity, a new routine for that time.

4. Talk to yourself. Tell yourself you're making progress. Remind yourself that you are moving closer to your goal. Talk to yourself throughout the day about how you are going to avoid triggers that can get you off track and make healthy substitutes.

5. Recruit helpers for support. Explain to them why you are making this change. Ask for their support. Their support may be needed encouragement.

6. Be prepared for people who may sabotage your change. Be assertive and tell them what they are doing.

Sustaining Motivation

The following are some suggestions to follow each day in order to sustain motivation and determination:

- Review your list of reasons for quitting or changing.
- Create mental pictures of yourself as having already succeeded with your habit change.
- Make affirmations, positive self-statements about your habit change. For example, "I am filled with so much health and vitality now that I exercise four times a week."
- Reward yourself. Make up a list of self-rewards. Reward yourself verbally.
- Remember to take one day at a time. If you do backslide, don't label yourself as having failed. Get out your list or reasons for quitting or changing and begin again.

Fatigue, boredom, depression, stress can all make it difficult to stick with your program. But having a relapse isn't as important as how you deal with the relapse. If you are so devastated by failure that you call your good intentions into question, that will make habit change harder for you. But, if you allow for an occasional relapse and treat it as nothing more than a slight misstep that teaches you something, then you're on the right track.

Follow the suggestions in this article, adopt the more helpful attitude of evaluating your progress and accepting relapses, and you will find yourself reaching many of your goals. You will have achieved true behavior change.

Contact Your EAP

Remember, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is always available to help you or your immediate family members with most-any type of personal, family or work-related issue. If you or a dependent needs help, you can contact your EAP for FREE and CONFIDENTIAL counseling, referrals or information. If you need help, why not call an EAP counselor today? We're here to help you.

Improving Your Family Communication

Your family can provide a safe environment for family members to share feelings, thoughts, frustrations, fears, hopes and dreams. What's the single-best thing you can do to improve family communication? Make a daily effort to talk with each family member alone and together as a family. Below are additional ideas that can help you improve family communication:



1. Become a better listener. Listening is as important as talking. When you listen well to family members, you encourage them to talk about what is most important to them. Sometimes a person can find a solution to a problem or discover the source of stress just by talking. For more effective listening you should:

- **Listen to the whole story.** Give your family member the opportunity to communicate their thoughts, feelings, needs or desires without interrupting. Listen for understanding. Put aside your opinions, thoughts or conclusions until after you've heard what they have to say.
- **Clarify meaning.** Guard against assuming that you know what your family member means or feels by asking them questions to assure your understanding. Ask questions such as, "Do you mean _____?" or "I understood you to say _____."

2. Improve your talking skills. Negative talking skills can stifle communication. To express yourself more effectively you should:

- **Learn to speak without attacking or blaming.** Avoid starting a sentence with "you." It sounds like an accusation or an invitation to fight (which it often is). Instead, describe how a behavior or situation affects you. Say "I think..."or, "I want..."or, "I feel..." For example, "I am upset because you two are fighting a lot these days. I want to have a more pleasant atmosphere in the house."
- **Describe your feelings.** Don't assume that other family members know your needs, feelings and opinions without you telling them. To express yourself clearly use "feeling" words like "sad," "happy," "excited," "angry," "worried," etc.

Additional ideas that may work well for your family:

- Have a regular place and time for all family communication.
- Spend time together as a family - trips, outings, vacations, religious or family events.
- Be honest about your concerns and wishes.
- With teenagers, discuss an issue. Explain your views. Ask them theirs.
- Accept each of your children as an individual.

- Be supportive. Allow your child to make mistakes and encourage them to do their own problem solving. Work together to determine how a situation could have been better handled.
- Be aware of non-verbal communication too. Your family knows you well and will believe what your face, tone of voice and posture say more quickly than your words.

Successful Couples Keep It Positive

Researchers studying marriage and relationships at the University of Washington report that happy couples in stable marriages don't allow their relationship to be overrun by negative feelings. In fact, say the researchers, successful couples maintain a healthy balance between their positive and negative interactions with each other.

Interestingly, a very specific ratio exists between the number of positive and negative interactions in a successful relationship. That ratio is 5 to 1. In other words, stable couples have at least 5 times as many positive interactions with each other as negative ones.



According to the researchers, a healthy dose of positive interactions builds up an emotional "savings account" that helps to pull the couple through difficult times. Specifically, the researchers say successful couples balance out any negative interactions with positive feelings and actions like showing interest, being affectionate, showing they care, being appreciative, smiling, paying compliments, laughing or showing concern.

Successful Couples Keep Arguments From Getting Completely Out Of Control

Additionally, the researchers report that stable couples still have disagreements and arguments just like all married couples. The difference, however, is that happy couples keep their quarrels from becoming too negative and destructive. Successful couples know how to repair the situation before an argument gets completely out of control. Positive repair attempts include:

- Using humor to break the tension in an argument (like making a silly face or bringing up a private joke)
- Stroking your partner with a caring remark ("I understand that this is hard for you")
- Acknowledging your partner's point of view or feelings ("I'm sorry I hurt your feelings")
- Making it clear you're on common ground ("This is our problem")
- Taking a break if an argument gets too heated and agreeing to approach the topic again when you are both calm.

Your EAP Is Here To Help

Some relationship issues can be too hard to solve on our own. If you need help with a particularly difficult marital or relationship issue(s), contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for CONFIDENTIAL counseling, referrals or information. Why not call an EAP counselor today? We're here to help.

For Your Information

Weight Management 101

Don't skip meals. Skipping meals to maintain or lose weight almost always leads to overeating. The biological wisdom of your body prompts you to eat more whenever you restrict your caloric intake. When you skip a meal you actually set off a series of physiological changes in the body which intensify your preoccupation with food and your urge to eat. Most people mistakenly believe that when they later give in to this powerful urge to eat - and subsequently overeat - that it is because of a lack of will power. Actually, it is the body's own physiology which has urged them to make up for the caloric deprivation.

Recognizing Alcohol or Drug Dependency

Do you or one of your family members have an alcohol or drug problem?

1. Each time you drink or use drugs, does it take more and more to get drunk or high?
2. Do you find yourself using alcohol or drugs to reduce anxiety?
3. Do you ever lose control over alcohol or drug use?
4. Do you ever drink or use drugs first thing in the morning to steady your nerves?

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions above, you may have a problem with alcohol or drug addiction. If you need help, you can contact your EAP for confidential counseling, referrals or information.

Employee Assistance Program Services

PROVIDED BY YOUR EMPLOYER FOR YOU AND YOUR DEPENDENTS

Your Employee Assistance Program is a prepaid and confidential program designed to help employees and their dependents resolve problems which may be interfering with their personal, work or home life. EAP Consultants offers help for marital and family issues, substance abuse, job concerns, emotional problems, life adjustments, legal issues, financial matters, and elder care and child care referrals.

If you're experiencing problems which are causing concern, you and your EAP Counselor can work as a team to find solutions.

For assistance, call EAP Consultants at: **800-869-0276** or request services by secure e-mail on the Member Access page of our website at <http://www.eapconsultants.com/>.