



Dear Coordinator,

Welcome to **Getting Started with Stress Management – Relax Your Way to Wellness**. Stress is defined as a person's response to his or her environment. For employees who work in fast-paced, high-stress jobs, awareness of their stress level is critical. Family and social responsibilities can also add to an employee's stress level. The emotional, physical, and mental toll stress takes on our body increases the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and other illnesses.

Stress management plays a big role in keeping us healthy. In order to manage our reactions to stress, we must first identify what situations are most challenging to us, determine the triggers for them, and then create strategies for handling these events.

Here are three easy steps to take to get the program going in your clinic:

- 1** **DISTRIBUTE** **Getting Started with Stress Management – Relax Your Way to Wellness** to your co-workers at your next staff meeting.
- 2** **CHECK** on participants once a week during this month. Ask them if they tried any of the stress management tips included in the packet.
- 3** **SELECT** an activity from the **Idea List** on the following page. Try Movie Day, Blowing Bubbles or Bathroom Humor. Post **Ten Tips for Combating Stress** and **Exercise Can Help Control Stress** tip sheets on your clinic refrigerator.

Key components of successfully managing stress include getting plenty of exercise and maintaining healthy eating habits. If you have questions or concerns, contact The University of Texas Wellness Team at (512) 471-4494 or [UTWellness@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:UTWellness@austin.utexas.edu).

Sincerely,

The University of Texas Wellness Team

## Stress Management — Relax Your Way to Wellness

### Idea List

- ▶ **Blowing Bubbles.** As you distribute **Getting Started with Stress Management - Relax Your Way to Wellness** to employees, leave a small bottle of bubbles at their workstation (find cheap bubbles at a discount store, grocery store, or party place). This will catch their attention and loosen up the office. (Pssst: leave some bubbles in the waiting room for clients to use, too.)



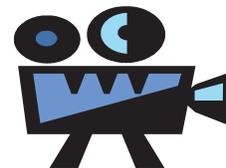
- ▶ **Refrigerator Tip Sheet.** On your clinic refrigerator, post **Ten Tips for Combating Stress** for one month then turn the tip sheet over and post **Exercise Can Help Control Stress** for the next month.

- ▶ **Meeting Icebreakers.** To add some spice to your staff meetings, try these quick suggestions. Remember to reach out to all employees who may not be attending.

**Stress Buster** — Lead the employees through one or two exercises from the Stress Busters page found at the end of the employee lesson. They will appreciate the opportunity to experience this before trying it on their own.

**Last Laugh** — ask employees to partner up and see which one can keep a straight face the longest. Have one person make funny faces, say funny things, or make funny sounds while the partner tries to keep a straight face. Continue pairing up people until you have an overall winner.

- ▶ **Movie Day.** Designate one day a week to show funny movies in the employee break room (or maybe even in the clients' waiting area). Old TV sitcoms are good choices too. People like seeing the old comedies and they are usually pretty short. Video-rental stores usually carry these.



- ▶ **Bathroom Humor.** Ask employees to bring in their favorite funny cartoons from the newspaper or humorous calendars. Post them on the back of the stall doors in the bathroom. (Make sure none of the comics are offensive.)



# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## EXERCISE CAN HELP CONTROL STRESS

### HOW IT WORKS

People who exercise regularly will tell you they feel better. Some will say it's because chemicals called neurotransmitters, produced in the brain, are stimulated during exercise. Since it's believed that neurotransmitters mediate our moods and emotions, they can make us feel better and less stressed.

While there's no scientific evidence to conclusively support the neurotransmitter theory, there is plenty to show that exercise provides stress-relieving benefits.

### FOUR WAYS EXERCISE CONTROLS STRESS

Exercise can help you feel less anxious. Exercise is being prescribed in clinical settings to help treat nervous tension.

Following a session of exercise, clinicians have measured a decrease in electrical activity of tensed muscles. People have been less jittery and hyperactive after an exercise session.

Exercise can relax you. One exercise session generates 90 to 120 minutes of relaxation response. Some people call this post-exercise euphoria or endorphin response. We now know that many neurotransmitters, not just endorphins, are involved. The important thing though is not what they're called, but what they do: They improve your mood and leave you relaxed.

Exercise can make you feel better about yourself. Think about those times when you've been physically active. Haven't you felt better about yourself? That feeling of self-worth contributes to stress relief.

Exercise can make you eat better. People who exercise regularly tend to eat

more nutritious food. And it's no secret that good nutrition helps your body manage stress better.



### IT'S TIME TO GET STARTED

Now that you know exercise can make a big difference in controlling stress, make some time for regular physical activity. We'll help you get started by listing three activities you can choose from:

**1** Aerobic activity. All it takes is 20 minutes' worth, six to seven days a week. Twenty minutes won't carve a big chunk out of your day, but it will improve your ability to control stress significantly.

**2** Yoga. In yoga or yoga-type activities, your mind relaxes progressively as your body increases its amount of muscular work. Recent studies have shown that when large muscle groups repeatedly contract and relax, the brain receives a signal to release specific neurotransmitters, which in turn make you feel relaxed and more alert.

**3** Recreational sports. Play tennis, racquetball, volleyball or squash. These

games require the kind of vigorous activity that rids your body of stress-causing adrenaline and other hormones.

### NOT JUST ANY EXERCISE WILL DO

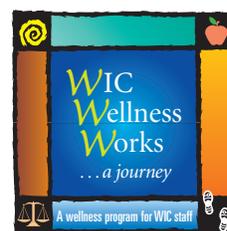
Don't try exercising in your office. Outdoors or away from the office is the best place to find a stress-free environment. Even a corporate fitness center can have too many work-related thoughts for some people.

Stay away from overcrowded classes. If you work surrounded by people, a big exercise class may be counterproductive. Solo exercise may be more relaxing for you. If, however, you work alone, you may enjoy the social benefit of exercising in a group. A lot depends on your personality and what causes stress for you.

Don't skip a chance to exercise. Take a break every 90 minutes and you'll be doing yourself a favor. Ninety-minute intervals are a natural work-break period. And four 10-minute exercise breaks at this time will burn about as many calories as a solid 40-minute session. Work-break exercises can be as simple as walking or climbing stairs, stretching or doing calisthenics.

Controlling stress comes down to making the time to exercise. You're worth it!

### Compliments of:



# Ten Tips for Combating Stress

## 1. BELIEVE IN YOUR ABILITY TO COPE.

Embrace your strengths. Remind yourself that you can influence the outcome of events in your life. Create action plans to address problems at work and at home.

## 2. LEARN RELAXATION EXERCISES.

Try deep breathing, visualization and meditation. A hot bath, a walk in the park and stretching exercises are also good stress relievers.

## 3. GET A GRIP ON GUILT.

Guilt robs you of your energy and motivation. Be realistic about your expectations of yourself at home and on the job. It's neither possible nor desirable to try to be a perfect parent, employee or child of an aging parent.

## 4. TALK TO A FRIEND.

Talking about problems can help you blow off steam and give you the perspective you need to solve problems more easily.

## 5. DEVELOP LEISURE ACTIVITIES.

Practice a craft, learn to play a musical instrument, join a community choir or a weekly bridge game.

## 6. ESTABLISH A REGULAR EXERCISE ROUTINE.

Stress produces chemicals that make you feel tense. Exercise helps move these chemicals through your body. Try to get at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week. Choose a fun exercise you'll enjoy and stick with.

## 7. GET PLENTY OF REST.

Most people need seven or eight hours of sleep a night to feel renewed and refreshed. If you have trouble sleeping, increase the duration or frequency of your exercise sessions. Take a warm shower before bed.

## 8. EAT A BALANCED DIET.

Stock up on whole grain bread, cereal, rice and pasta. Include lots of fruits and vegetables in your diet. Add calcium, in the form of milk, yogurt and cheese, and two to three servings per day of protein from meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs or nuts. Use fats, oils and sweets sparingly.

## 9. IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

Learn to ask for help when you need it. Defuse misunderstandings before they occur by talking things over with your coworkers, spouse and children.

## 10. LEARN TO ACCEPT AND ADAPT TO CHANGE.

Change is a fact of life. Major work and life changes are common. Whether you welcome or dread these changes, they can all be extremely stressful unless you learn to adjust to them. Take time to recover, refocus and regenerate during a major change such as promotion, relocation, parenthood or divorce.

