

SELF CARE/LEISURE TIME

For a significant portion of the workforce the job has become more demanding often requiring additional time and energy for specific tasks while workers are also expected to be able to do more with less in today's climate. As a result the ideal of a well-balanced life can be rather challenging these days and folks often end up neglecting self-care including leisure time activities and or recreation.

Often one of the first things people let go of as a result of the increased demand on time and effort is the commitment to take care of themselves. For some that trip to the gym, date night or weekly yoga class does not seem to fit or feel as appealing as it did before.

The ability to remain steadfast in taking care of self can become more difficult as many lose the desire to do much upon returning home after a long day at work. While some see this as a natural result of a change in life conditions wellness advocates insist it is even more important to allocate time for self-care during trying times in order to rejuvenate.

Nowadays an increasing number of workers encountered by Employee Assistance Programs are presenting with major leisure area deficits. For some, when asked what do you like to do for fun or leisure and recreation? The response is often some version of "I don't have time for that these days" or "I haven't really thought about that much" and when the question is followed up with, "even if you are not doing these things as much as you'd like now, what do you enjoy doing?" This follow-up inquiry will typically invoke a surprising response; a grappling to remember something enjoyable or a struggle to come up with things they used to do is fairly typical and also symptomatic of just how far down the priority list leisure time activities and self-care may have slipped.

The challenge becomes helping workers to see that now more than ever before self care is important as we seek to draw from our inner wells to meet increased demands both in the workplace and at home in family life. There are a few simple activities that nearly everyone can utilize on a daily basis to help. A short casual or brisk walk is still highly recommended by health professionals and proven to provide positive overall health benefits; try make a slight adjustment in your schedule to fit this in.

An even easier, abbreviated practice is conscious relaxation or deep breathing; beginning with the focus of attention on our bodies to raise awareness of stress we may be carrying. Setting aside even as little as 2 minutes a couple of times during the day to be still and focus on slowing down our breathing can pay dividends.

Start with both feet flat on the floor and begin to increase your focus and attention on your breathing and then on altering the length of your inhalation, drawing your breath in slowly and deeply to a count of 5, all the way into your lungs. Next pause and hold the breath in for 5 seconds and then exhale very slowly; release the breath to a count of 5 very, very slowly. As you continue to inhale imagine yourself breathing in peace,

relaxation, love, kindness, compassion and well being, and with each exhale breathe out and let go of stress, anger, fear, anxiety, and all negativity. Repeat the 5-5-5 breath cycle (inhale, pause, and exhale) three times during each session and you should feel an immediate energy shift in and around your body. Slowing down our breathing will almost always produce an instantaneous feeling of calm and relaxation. Go ahead try it right now. Give yourself the break you deserve!

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