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# Breaking Free: Why quitting smoking is the best New Year's resolution

Amanda Franco, SIA Executive Assistant

As the New Year unfolds, many of us reflect on how we can improve our lives. For smokers there's no better resolution than quitting. It's a decision that offers transformative health, plus financial and emotional rewards. If you're considering making this powerful change, here's why now is the perfect time to start:

## Health Benefits: A Gift to Your Body

Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body, but the benefits of quitting start almost immediately:

- Within 20 minutes: Blood pressure and heart rate begin to drop to healthier levels.
- Within 24 hours: Carbon monoxide levels in the blood normalize, improving oxygen flow throughout your body.
- Within a few weeks: Circulation improves and lung function starts to rebound, making activities like walking or climbing stairs easier.
- Within a year: The risk of heart disease drops by half.
- Beyond a decade: The risk of lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases significantly decreases.

Quitting doesn't just add years to your life; it improves the quality of your days, making it easier to breathe, exercise and enjoy the little things.

## Financial Benefits: Reclaiming Your Wallet

Smoking isn't just harmful to your health, it's expensive. Here's how much you could save:

- If you smoke a pack a day at $8 per pack (a conservative estimate), that's more than $2,900 a year.
- Over 10 years you could save nearly $30,000—enough for a down payment on a home, a dream vacation, or college tuition for a loved one.

Beyond the immediate savings on cigarettes, quitting also reduces long-term healthcare costs associated with smoking-related illnesses.

## Emotional Freedom: Breaking the Chains

Many smokers feel trapped by their habit, tethered to cravings and the need for "just one more." Quitting is a liberating step toward regaining control of your life. It means fewer interruptions during work or social activities and no more worrying about the health effects on loved ones exposed to secondhand smoke.

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# Reaching out for mental health

Eric Thygesen, SIA Prevention Services


Chances are you know someone who has experienced a mental health challenge. According to the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, one in five adults in the U.S. will experience a mental health challenge in any given year. A mental health challenge is defined as:

- A major change in a person's thinking, feeling or behavior.
- The change interferes with the person's ability to live life.
- The interference does not go away quickly and lasts longer than typical emotions or reactions would be expected to.

As uncomfortable as it might be to approach someone, it might be helpful to talk about what the person might be experiencing. The ability to direct a family member, friend or coworker to resources or information can be vital to the process of coping with and

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## Breaking Free

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### Why the New Year Is the Perfect Time

New Year's resolutions provide a fresh start—a chance to set meaningful goals and commit to positive change. Quitting smoking aligns perfectly with this mindset. To succeed, you'll need a clear plan and support:

- Set a quit date: Choose a specific day to stop smoking, ideally within the first week of January.
- Seek support: Talk to friends and family, join support groups, or use tools like nicotine replacement therapies or smoking cessation apps.
- Celebrate milestones: Acknowledge and reward your progress, whether it's one smoke-free day, week or month.

### Looking Ahead: A Smoke-Free Future

Quitting smoking is a challenge, but it's one of the most empowering choices you can make. With improved health, more financial freedom, and a renewed sense of control, you'll step into the New Year with a stronger, healthier and more confident version of yourself.

***Make this resolution the one that lasts a lifetime. You've got this!***

Sources: https://www.cancer.org, www.lung.org

*Cyber Safety Corner*

## How AI is transforming health and wellness

Gustavo Mastroianni, SIA Chief Information Security Officer

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a game-changer in various fields, but its influence on health and wellness is particularly profound. From personalized medicine to mental health support, AI's capabilities are reshaping how individuals approach their well-being.

### Enhancing Diagnosis and Treatment

- **Early Detection of Diseases:** AI-powered tools, like machine learning algorithms, can analyze medical data to detect diseases at an early stage. For instance, AI systems are improving the accuracy of cancer screenings by identifying patterns in imaging data that might be overlooked by human eyes.
- **Precision Medicine:** AI enables personalized treatment plans by analyzing genetic, lifestyle and environmental factors. This tailored approach increases treatment efficacy and reduces potential side effects, particularly in chronic illnesses like diabetes or cardiovascular disease.

- **Telemedicine Integration:** AI-driven platforms enhance telemedicine by triaging patient symptoms, recommending potential diagnoses and connecting patients with the appropriate healthcare professionals.

### Mental Health Support

- **AI Chatbots for Therapy:** Virtual assistants and chatbots provide 24/7 support for individuals dealing with anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges. These tools offer coping mechanisms and monitor users' moods over time.
- **Predictive Analytics for Mental Health:** AI systems can analyze behavioral patterns from social media, wearable devices or other sources to predict mental health crises, enabling timely interventions.

### Wellness and Lifestyle Optimization

- **Wearable Technology:** AI is at the heart of fitness trackers and smart watches, analyzing data such as heart rate, sleep patterns and physical activity. These insights empower users to make informed decisions about their health.
- **Nutrition and Diet Planning:** AI-powered apps can create personalized diet plans based on an individual's goals, preferences and health data, making healthy eating more accessible.
- **Stress and Mindfulness Tools:** AI-driven apps offer guided meditations, breathing exercises and stress management techniques tailored to individual needs to promote mental clarity and relaxation.

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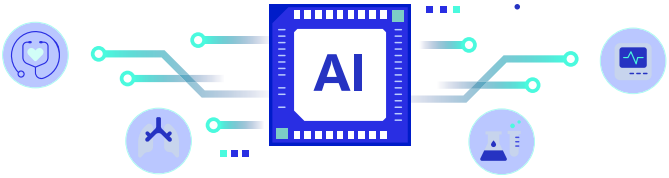

# Free Resources and Support: SIA's Employee Assistance Program (EAP)


Sometimes life hands us challenges that can leave us feeling swamped and unable to cope. Even small worries can add up and be too much. If you're going through something tough, you don't have to do it alone. If you're an employee with one of the districts participating in SIA's EAP, learn what free benefits it has to offer you, your family members, even a best friend who might be sleeping on the couch – basically anyone currently under your roof – by joining one of the live EAP employee orientations.

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## Mental health challenges

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ultimately resolving a problem. Below are some things to consider if you feel someone you know is going through a mental health challenge:

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm.
- Listen non-judgmentally.
- Give reassurance and information.
- Encourage appropriate professional help.
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

If someone you know needs immediate mental health assistance, reach out to the following resources:

Emergency Medical Services: 911

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Call 988 Crisis Text Line: Text CRISIS to 741-741 or visit crisistextline.org.

## Cyber Safety Corner

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### Ethical and Privacy Concerns

Despite its potential, the integration of AI into health and wellness raises critical ethical and privacy issues:

- **Data Security:** AI systems rely on sensitive health data, making them targets for breaches. Ensuring robust encryption and compliance with data protection laws is essential.
- **Bias in Algorithms:** AI models can reflect biases present in their training data, leading to unequal outcomes in treatment or wellness recommendations.
- **Reliability and Accuracy:** Over-reliance on AI tools without sufficient human oversight can result in errors, emphasizing the need for balanced integration.

### Future Directions

As AI evolves, its role in health and wellness will expand further. Advancements in natural language processing, real-time analytics and wearable technology are likely to deepen AI's impact. Collaborative efforts between tech companies, healthcare providers and policy-makers will be crucial to maximizing AI's benefits while addressing ethical concerns.

AI is revolutionizing health and wellness by providing innovative solutions for diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle improvement. While challenges remain, its potential to enhance quality of life and promote healthier living is undeniable. By embracing AI responsibly, society can unlock a future where well-being is more accessible and personalized than ever before.

*Watch for future cyber safety tips in upcoming issues of SIA's Wellness & Safety's "Cyber Corner" and let's all work together to build a more secure digital world.*

# The Novelty Blueprint: Simple changes to ignite a joyful life

Deborah R. Camacho, M.S., SIA Prevention Services

Have you ever felt like your days blend together? Many of us experience this as we age, but there's a fun and effective way to change it. Enter the Novelty Rule—a simple concept backed by neuroscience that can help you slow down time, create lasting memories and bring more joy to your life.

The Novelty Rule, popularized by Liz Moody in her podcast (based on research by Dr. David Eagleman from Stanford), suggests that by adding small new experiences to your routine your brain forms new pathways, making your memories stand out and slowing down your perception of time.

## How to use the Novelty Rule in your life

By making small changes to your life, you'll witness a big impact on how rich and fulfilling your life feels. Try these tips:

**1. Weekly Tiny Changes**

Try one small new thing each week to break the monotony of your routine. These mini-adventures don't need to be time-consuming or expensive.

- **Wear something new:** Experiment with a new color or bold accessory.
- **Change your routine:** Swap your usual TV for a dance class or dinner with a friend.
- **Refresh your space:** Rearrange furniture or add a plant for a fresh vibe.

**2. Monthly Novelty Adventures**

Once a month, go for something a little bigger. The idea is to break away from your routine in a more meaningful way.

- **Learn something new:** Take a one-day workshop or cooking class.
- **Visit a new place:** Explore a local museum or hiking trail.
- **Give back:** Volunteer in your community and meet new people.


## Why the Novelty Rule works

New experiences stimulate your brain, creating vivid memories and a sense of fulfillment. By stepping out of your comfort zone, you slow your perception of time and add excitement to your life.

## For Employers and Leaders

Incorporate the Novelty Rule at work to boost morale and creativity:

- **Create a Novelty wall:** Let employees share their new experiences to inspire others.
- **Promote learning days:** Offer workshops or skill-building sessions.
- **Host team events:** Plan fun, out-of-the-box activities to foster camaraderie.

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## Free EAP Resources

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Monday, January 27 at noon: Join the meeting now

Tuesday, February 4 at 5:30 p.m.: Join the meeting now

Participating School Districts:

- Arcohe Union School District
- El Dorado County Office of Education
- Folsom-Cordova Unified School District
- Galt Joint Union Elementary School District
- Galt Joint Union High School District
- Hayward Unified School District
- Latrobe School District
- Natomas Charter School
- Natomas Unified School District
- Placerville Union School District
- Rescue Union School District
- River Delta Unified School District
- Robla New Hope Charter School
- Robla School District
- Sacramento City Unified School District
- Sacramento County Office of Education

Unable to attend an orientation, reach out to your supervisor or human resources department for more information on how to access the EAP program and make 2025 your best year ever.

# Free virtual trainings to enhance your life

SIA provides the staff of our member districts with virtual training on a variety of topics that apply to both personal and professional life. To learn more or register for any of the training courses listed, click on the course title below or contact tfranco@sia-jpa.org. You also can join our email list to learn of future events at SIA – Schools Insurance Authority (sia-jpa.org).

## January

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1/7/2025 | How to Coach for Success | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/8/2025 | Intimate Partner and Family Violence Awareness for Managers | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/9/2025 | Creating Harmony Between Generations at Work | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/14/2025 | Eating Healthier On-The-Go | noon-1 p.m. |
| 1/15/2025 | Moving to Improve Mental Health | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/16/2025 | Quit Smoking | noon -1 p.m. |
| 1/21/2025 | How to Understand Nonverbal Communication | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/23/2025 | Losing Weight Healthfully | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/28/2025 | Money and Mental Health | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/29/2025 | Preventing Burnout | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 1/30/2025 | How to Manage Customer Expectations | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |

## February

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2/3/2025 | How to Beat Fatigue and Sleep Better | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 2/5/2025 | How to Manage People Effectively | 5:30-8:30 p.m. |
| 2/12/2025 | Caregiving in Multigenerational Families | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 2/13/2025 | How to Navigate Workplace Change | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 2/18/2025 | Embracing Happiness | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 2/20/2025 | How to Use Conflict as Opportunity for Employees | 5:30-6:30 p.m |
| 2/24/2025 | Maintaining Balance in Life | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 2/25/2025 | Making Time for Fitness | noon to 1 p.m. |
| 2/26/2025 | Move to Improve Mental Health | 5:30-6:30 p.m. |
| 2/27/2025 | Preventing Sexual Harassment, Employee | noon to 1 p.m. |

## The Novelty Blueprint:

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### Start Small and Make It a Habit


Consistency unlocks the power of the Novelty Rule. Start with one small change today and, over time, these moments will transform your life routine into a rich tapestry of memories.

Want to learn more? Listen to Liz Moody's podcast and discover how the Novelty Rule can bring joy and meaning to your everyday life. https://www.lizmoody.com/thelizmoodypodcast-novelty-rule

## QUOTE TO NOTE

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving."

-Albert Einstein

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