Healthy Living Newsletter

April 2015
Stress Awareness Month

Activate Your Body’s Natural Relaxation Response

For many of us, relaxation means zoning out in front of the TV at the end of a stressful day. But this does little to reduce the damaging effects of stress. To effectively combat stress, we need to activate the body’s natural relaxation response. You can do this by practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, rhythmic exercise, and yoga. Fitting these activities into your life can help reduce everyday stress and boost your energy and mood.

With its focus on full, cleansing breaths, deep breathing is a simple, yet powerful, relaxation technique. It’s easy to learn, can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides a quick way to get your stress levels in check. Deep breathing is the cornerstone of many other relaxation practices, too, and can be combined with other relaxing elements such as aromatherapy and music. All you really need is a few minutes and a place to stretch out.

Breathe to Relieve Stress in the Moment

The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting as much fresh air as possible in your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

- Sit comfortably with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should rise. The hand on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth, pushing out as much air as you can while contracting your abdominal muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in as you exhale, but your other hand should move very little.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to inhale enough so that your lower abdomen rises and falls. Count slowly as you exhale.

If you find it difficult breathing from your abdomen while sitting up, try lying on the floor. Put a small book on your stomach, and try to breathe so that the book rises as you inhale and falls as you exhale. Try practicing your relaxation technique at least 10-20 minutes per day to help ease stress and anxiety.

Source: www.helpguide.org

Relax & Rejuvenate your mind and body with our Wellness Program Yoga Class...See Page 3
It’s been exciting and inspirational to hear about some of our fellow coworkers wellness journeys. I’ve talked with a lot of people lately who are experiencing great improvements in their health and wellness from positive changes that they have been making. I thought it would be great to share their stories. Below is our first of hopefully many stories that I am going to share.

**Name:** Shelley Shaw  
**Department:** Foundation

**What inspired you to make a change?**  
My Health. I was on blood pressure medicine for prehypertension, and my doctor was about to put me on cholesterol medicine because my levels were too high. I looked at myself and my family history and with a family history of heart disease and stroke, I said enough. I had to make a change.

**What type of changes have you made on your wellness journey?**  
With the help of my doctor, I changed my diet completely. I started eating more fruits and vegetables and stopped eating any white (sugar) foods completely. I started to be more active in the things I do everyday, taking stairs, parking further out, walking around every hour. I traded my work chair for a balance ball chair to help with my back and relieve stress during work.

**What improvements have you seen in your health since making these changes?**  
Since I started, I have lost 20 pounds. I have lowered my cholesterol by 100 points and I was able to get off my blood pressure medicine within 3 months.

**What advice would you give others looking to take a step to improve their health?**  
I would tell them it is HARD, very hard, but so worth it once you start. You feel better, you look better, and have more energy. If you can make it through the first 21 days of diet and exercise, you can keep it up. The hardest part is that first 21 days. It takes lots of self control and determination but the results are far beyond explanation. It is the way I feel now that makes it worth every moment.

I would like to continue to share these inspirational stories. If you feel that yourself or one of your fellow coworkers has a positive or inspirational wellness journey to share, please contact Kelly Darbonne.

**Relax and Rejuvenate with our Wellness Program’s Yoga Class!**

Yoga involves a series of both moving and stationary poses, combined with deep breathing. As well as reducing anxiety and stress, yoga can also improve flexibility, strength, balance, and stamina. Practiced regularly, it can also strengthen the relaxation response in your daily life. Try our yoga class for a relaxing break in your day.

**Instructor:** Dr. Elizabeth Hait  
**Days/Time:** Monday & Wednesday (11:30am-12:10pm)  
**Location:** Rec Aerobics Room

Free for faculty & staff. All fitness levels are welcome. Wear comfortable clothes. Mats are provided or you may bring your own.
Revitalize Your Walk

Walking alone is a great way to relieve stress. Change up your walking routine to get even more benefits. Have a break in your day? Revitalize your mind and body with an easy walk that includes these stress-busting techniques from Carolyn Scott Kortge, author of Healing Walks for Hard Times.

**Step 1:** Focus on your feet. Feel the firm ground beneath you as each foot rolls from heel to toe. Try to hold awareness of your steps for 2 to 3 minutes.

**Step 2:** Turn your attention to breathing. Lift your torso to stand upright and increase lung space. As you inhale, imagine you are drawing in renewed energy. Exhale tiredness and pain. Let fresh life flow into your lungs and your cells.

**Step 3:** Mentally talk to yourself. Thinking *Fresh air in, stale air out* as you breathe can help you maintain focus.

This type of walking while focusing on your feet and breathing is called mindful walking. Instead of thinking about everything on your to-do list, focus on the steps above when walking. Want help to practice mindful walking? Search your app store for walking meditation apps.

Source: www.prevention.com

Quick Stress Relief at Work

**Quick stress relief at work**

- **Meetings.** During stressful sessions, stay connected to your breath. Massage the tips of your fingers. Wiggle your toes. Sip coffee.
- **On the phone.** Inhale something energizing, like lemon, ginger, peppermint or coffee beans. While talking, stand up or pace back and forth to burn off excess energy. Conduct phone business outside when possible.
- **On the computer.** Work standing up. Do knee-bends in 10-minute intervals. Wrap a soft scarf around your neck. Suck on a peppermint.
- **Lunch breaks.** Take a walk around the block or in the parking lot. Listen to soothing music while eating. Have a quick chat with someone you love.
- **Your workspace.** Place family photos on your desk and display images and mementos that remind you of your life outside the office.

Source: www.helpguide.org
Eat a Well-Balanced Diet to Fight Stress

Eating a well balanced diet can help to boost your immune system and leave your body better able to handle stressors.

Add a few of these super foods to your day:
- Oranges
- Blueberries
- Small square of dark chocolate
- Spinach
- Hot tea
- Warm milk
- Nuts
- Salmon
- Avocado
- Whole grains

Super Foods To Fight Stress

Stress Management & Behavioral Health Resources

- **Kay Dore Counseling Clinic**—Provides affordable counseling services for McNeese Employees. The Clinic deals with a variety of issues and concerns, including: depression, anxiety, time management, job stress, anger, grief, defiance, and life transitions (marriage, divorce, child raising, death, etc.). Located in Farrar Hall, Suite 223. For more info, go to www.mcneese.edu/kdcc.

- Check with your insurance provider about services that are covered under your insurance plan. Go to www.bcbsla.com/OGB.

- **Christus St. Patrick Hospital Behavioral Health Services**—St. Patrick Hospital's ACCESS Center is your direct line to immediate help. Just call (337) 431-7936, anytime, any day, and our professionals go right to work identifying your needs and matching them to the appropriate care. Our first priority is to help you in any way we can.

  Services available through the ACCESS Center include:
  - Emergency information and assistance.
  - Free, confidential assessments, 24 hours a day.
  - Details on hospital Behavioral Health programs and services.
  - Information on state and local agencies and support groups.
  - A community referral network.