

CLAREMONT EAP *Your trusted resource*

EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER

IMPACT

October-December 2018

Be Social to Be Well



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Want one more reason to exercise? It can help you stay socially active. And an active social life is important to your health.

In fact, keeping up your social network can mean as much to your physical health as the aerobic benefits you get at the gym, says Gene Cohen, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Center on Aging, Health and Humanities at George Washington University. Even without exercise, people who spend time with others tend to stay healthier and more independent.

Dr. Cohen, author of "The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life," points to a study of a group of "couch potatoes." While they got little or no daily exercise, they were very active socially. They took classes, joined clubs, played games, enjoyed hobbies or volunteered. "After 11 years," Dr. Cohen says, "social engagement proved to have the same positive impact on health as regular exercise."

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Claremont EAP distributes this newsletter to provide employees with general behavioral health information. If you have concerns about these or other behavioral health issues, you can call Claremont to arrange for assistance. You will be directed to an appropriate, experienced professional who can offer guidance in a variety of work and family matters.

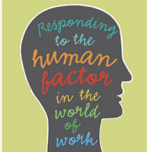
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"Our social functioning is part of what makes us human," adds Allan Anderson, M.D., who chairs the Maryland Psychiatric Association's Geriatric Committee. "Our interaction with others lets us get the things we want out of life." Those who give up their social life are more likely to be diagnosed with depression. "Depressed people suffer more physically," he says. For instance, chronic illness tends to get worse with depression.

Drs. Anderson and Cohen also point to research showing that staying socially and mentally engaged helps the immune system. "There are two research streams that point to the same thing," Dr. Cohen says. "The first is behavioral. When people are involved in social activities they get a sense of mastery and control and tend to stay healthy. The second is biological. Biologists often note a positive effect on the immune system in people with a sense of mastery and control."

Losing your social network is a risk of age. "Some people develop age-related disabilities," Dr. Anderson says. You may have language or mobility problems from a stroke, or you may have a condition such as arthritis that makes it hard to get around. Some people withdraw, embarrassed or scared by hurdles to staying active.

It can seem tough to keep up social networks when people around you move away, get sick or die, Dr. Anderson says, but it's important. "Marilyn is one of my

successful patients," he says. "When her husband died, she decided she needed to become more involved with others. So she consciously became more active in her church and started visiting nursing homes regularly. She's always played the piano, so she goes and plays for an hour a week at two different nursing homes." She makes people happy with her music and finds many new friends.

To add social activities, start by listing the things you enjoy. If you have always felt creative, for instance, take art classes or craft workshops at the local college. Many health clubs and YMCAs have exercise programs for seniors that let you stay physically active while meeting new people.

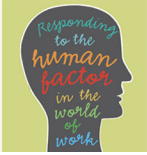
You can look up your local Office on Aging in the phone book and check on volunteer programs, senior citizen clubs and other classes aimed at seniors. And working part time, both doctors say, is an option you shouldn't overlook.

Remember two things, Dr. Cohen says:

- Look for activities that last. "If you take a three-day class in something, chances are you aren't going to have much time to get to really interact with people. Most friendships come from knowing someone for a long time. So consider long-term volunteering or taking a class that lasts a whole semester."

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- It's never too late. "If you feel you're in a rut," he says, "it's not because of age, and it's never too late to get out of it. A woman who is 94 came up to me at a conference recently and said she'd taken up sculpting two years before. Then she said, 'I don't know what I was doing for the first 92 years of my life.'"

Caregivers, take care of yourself

Exclusion from social networks and a growing sense of isolation pose serious risks for caregivers.

"People often try to take on too much," says Dr. Anderson, "and they're unaware of it happening to them until they are isolated."

"The trouble with caregiving is that the stress is often unrelenting," says Dr. Cohen. "It just keeps getting harder and harder every day, and people think they have to handle it all by themselves."

Both doctors say that if you are a caregiver, you should learn about the resources you can tap. Talk with a doctor or social worker about help in your area that can give you relief and let you tend to your own social needs.

Support groups are a great resource. Joining a group will help you learn what help you can get and give you a social network of people who understand the stresses you face.

Balance your social portfolio

A balanced activity portfolio can help ensure your social well-being.

"Think of a square divided into four boxes," says Dr. Cohen. "Across the top are group activities and individual activities. Underneath are high energy/high mobility and low energy/low mobility.

The idea is to combine those concepts to balance and diversify your portfolio." Here are some examples:

- Group activity/low mobility: a book club at the local library.
- Group activity/high energy: a travel club or bowling league.
- Individual activity/low mobility: writing memoirs to share with your family.
- Individual activity/high energy: recording the neighborhood in photos.

"People need to balance activities in all those different ways," Dr. Cohen says. "Then when things change, such as a person's ability to get around easily or friends moving, they'll still have activities to keep them engaged until they can adjust."

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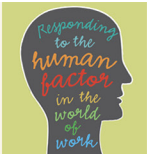
Claremont EAP can help with all of these choices!

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HEAD OFF HOLIDAY HAVOC

“Joy to the World” may be the theme, but a lot of us find this time of year brings more stress than bliss. As we try to meet age-old ideals, we feel pressure to cook the perfect meal and buy the perfect gift.

It’s time for Americans -- particularly the women who bear the brunt -- to make more realistic holiday plans, psychologists say.

“It’s always legitimate to say ‘no,’” says Dorothy Cantor, Ph.D., former president of the American Psychological Association. “People forget that they have that option when the holidays come.” Dr. Cantor, a co-author of “Finding Your Voice: A Woman’s Guide to Using Self Talk for Fulfilling Relationships, Work and Life”, says today’s two-income couple has little time to cook, shop or party. Modern demands mean cutting down on holiday hubbub.

“Women need to realize that it’s acceptable to delegate some of their responsibilities,” says California psychologist Elaine Rodino, Ph.D., who specializes in relationships and stress.

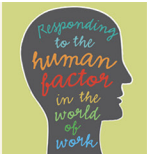
Have a potluck dinner so you don’t end up cooking the whole meal yourself. See what you can pick up at your local bakery. Ask dinner guests to help you clean up after the meal.

It’s wise to plan ahead and decide how the holidays can be most enjoyable for you and your family -- without holding yourself to artificial norms, Dr. Rodino says. Make plans to flee to a mountain cabin with your family. Feel you’re right not to invite relatives if you have a rocky relationship and fear they may spoil the mood. Talk to the family about spending limits on gifts.

“If you’re not going to do it joyfully, then don’t do it,” says Cecile Andrews, Ph.D., author of “The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life.” She urges people to make their own choices about how to observe the holidays.

“The holidays are not just about getting presents,” Dr. Andrews says. “It’s a time of inner growth, finding new insight and meeting your own values.”

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7 Smart Spending Tips to Avoid the Holiday Humbug



Over one shoulder hovers an elf, devilishly waving a credit card, goading you to buy! buy! buy! this holiday season, without regard to the consequences. Over the other shoulder floats an angelic elf, strumming a harp, urging you to be generous yet sensible in your holiday spending.

All the screaming deals, deep discounts and relentless advertising make it easy for consumers to ignore financial reality and their conscience during the holiday shopping season. Yet according to personal finance experts, people who have the wherewithal to resist temptation and stick to sensible spending habits during the holidays will likely come out in much better financial shape than their budgets-are-made-to-be-broken counterparts.

Bloated bills, a depleted bank account, a mountain of debt and a guilty conscience await consumers who choose the devil-may-care approach to holiday spending. “A lot of people end up feeling deep regret after the holidays,” explains, Christine Parker, CFP®, of Parker Financial in La Plata, Md., “because they spent way too much on gift-giving, but also on things like entertaining, decorating and going out to eat. It can quickly get out of hand.”

On the other hand, those who make the effort to set — and stick to — holiday spending limits put themselves in position to fully enjoy the magic of the season, without gnawing worries about their holiday spending splurge. Throughout the year it is important to track your income and fixed/variable expenses. This will help you avoid overspending during the holiday season.

And, just as importantly, they can do so without curbing their holiday spirit or compromising their generosity. Here’s how:

- 1 Determine how much you can spend** this holiday season, taking into account decorating, entertaining, dining, travel, gifts for family and friends, etc.
- 2 Working off that total, draft a detailed budget before you start shopping**, with line items for all the expenses that you factored into your total budgeted amount.
- 3 Get creative to shave costs.** If you’re an artsy-craftsy type, make gifts and decorations instead of buying them. Rather than dining out, host a dinner party at home and ask your guests to bring something to share.
- 4 Resist temptation.** As good as it feels to be generous, fight the impulse to overspend, even if it’s a screaming deal.
- 5 Be flexible.** Despite all your best intentions, you may end up spending more than you planned on an item. Rather than wallowing in guilt, find places in your budget to cut to offset the splurge.
- 6 Use cash instead of plastic whenever possible.** With cash, you can’t spend what you don’t have.
- 7 Give yourself incentive to stick to the plan.** Think of a way to reward yourself for staying within budget — a meal at your favorite restaurant, a spa treatment, etc.

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