



YOUR HEALTH

Wellness in the Workplace

In an era of rapidly rising medical costs, more employers across the nation are taking an interest in the health of their employees.

Some companies are spending up to 20 percent of their bottom lines on healthcare coverage for their workers. Increases in medical costs and new stipulations within the Affordable Care Act have left many employers looking for ways to cut down that percentage.

But instead of simply telling employees they need to improve their well-being, companies are developing innovative ways to make healthy living a fun, collaborative experience.

YOU'RE BEING WATCHED

Biometric screenings examine a person's blood pressure, cholesterol, body-mass index and other factors. These tests allow medical professionals to pinpoint and develop plans of action for potential health issues down the road.

Companies can use this information to identify strategies for their health and wellness programs. Having such accurate baseline data for employees across the company helps decision-makers set new goals, track their employees and refine processes as they go.

YOU'RE BEING REWARDED

As companies get more serious about their health program-

ming, they are implementing incentive-based policies that align their cost goals with the wellness of their workers. The healthier you are, the better rate you can get on your policy in many cases.

That means avoiding non-healthy activities such as smoking, overeating and excessive alcohol use can help your wallet more than you may think. Making the right decisions can keep more money in your pocket as opposed to more money going to pay your healthcare costs.

CREATIVE PROGRAMMING

The goal of many wellness programs has evolved over the years from employee education to employee engagement. This means getting workers involved in activities such as charitable walks or competitive sporting events.

Other ways of getting employees excited about making healthier choices include the coordination of speakers or health professionals to make on-site presentations. Some companies also bring in nurses to deliver flu shots or advice on specific health risks. Consider these options if you are involved in your company's health and wellness programming.



Dealing with the Blues

We've all had a bad day. It's how we bounce back from negative experiences that helps us move forward and achieve our life goals. And the key to bouncing back is having a strong support group around us.

People who are lonely have more physical and mental health problems than those who feel connected to others, according to a new report in *Psychological Science*.

The report details the importance of creating and maintaining positive relationships in the workplace, family and other social circles. Without people to interact with and vent to, we can become even more inclusive and shut ourselves out to the external world. This behavior has been proven to be harmful to our confidence levels and abilities to cope with negative situations.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND LONELINESS

Scientific research shows the positive impact that strong social lives can have on our overall health. One Colorado State University study found that the more positive social interactions people with depression had, the more improvement in the symptoms they experienced.

Other research in the journal *Health Psychology* has shown that you'll eat less healthful food if you frequently eat by yourself, and you are more likely to be



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physically inactive the lonelier you feel.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS

Your community is likely

ripe with opportunities to meet new people and build new relationships. Try visiting local businesses to establish rapport with business owners and workers.

Even if you don't actually interact with these types of

connections on a daily basis, the conversation and camaraderie can be enough to make you feel more comfortable in other social situations.

Other ideas for making new connections include joining a

professional association, enrolling in a cooking class at your local community college or signing up for a gym membership. You will find like-minded people, leading to common ground and easy, comfortable conversations.

Sleep to Better Health

Are you bright-eyed and bushy-tailed today or beat down and just plain bushed? Being chronically tired to the point of exhaustion translates to decreased performance in nearly every physical and mental activity.

If we do not recharge our brains and rest our muscles, our body is not given the chance to fully recover from various activities.

Sleep plays a critical role in our health across immunity, metabolism, memory, learning and other vital functions.

SLEEP & LEARNING

Researchers at the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School are conducting studies that suggest various sleep stages are involved in the consolidation of different types of memories and that being sleep deprived reduces one's ability to learn.

You'd probably guess that the better rested you are, the more likely you are to focus and learn new information. But what about after you learn?

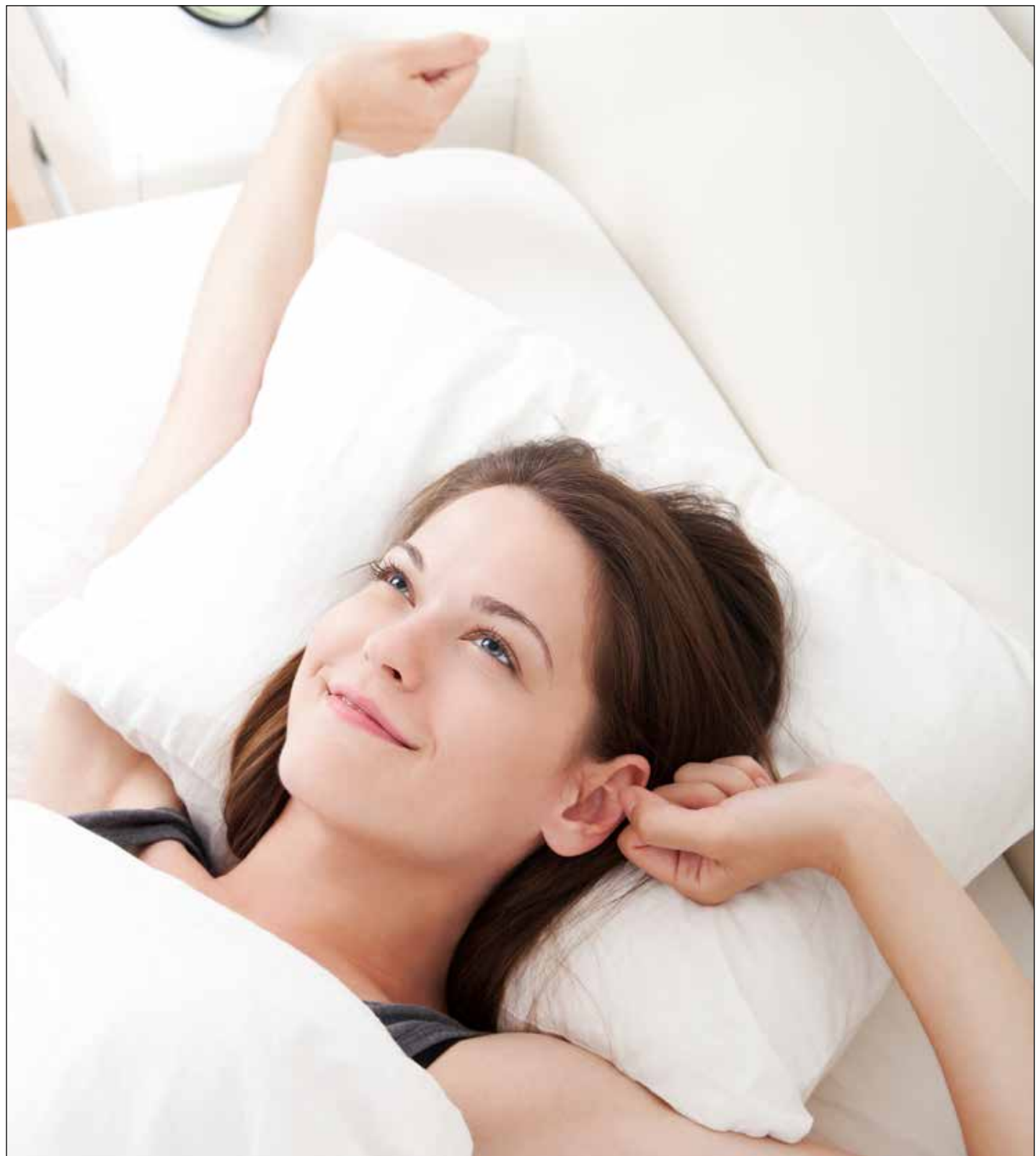
Slow-wave sleep, which is defined as deep, restorative sleep plays a significant role in processing and consolidating newly acquired information, according to Harvard's sleep researchers. REM sleep, on the other hand, is necessary for our ability to consolidate the memory of how to perform repetitive tasks.

HOW TO GET MORE SLEEP

In today's 24/7 world of information-sharing, socializing and working, sleep is getting harder to come by. The fact is, our bodies still require an ample amount of sleep to most effectively get through the day. How much sleep depends on your age. A study by the National Sleep Foundation found that sleep needs vary across populations.

The National Sleep Foundation offers these tips for maximizing your mattress time:

- Choose one consistent bedtime and maintain it, even on the weekends;
- Avoid napping late in the afternoon if you want to catch your Zs at night;
- Daily exercise is beneficial, as long as it doesn't cut into your sleep time;
- Design a sleep-friendly room with the noise and darkness levels best suited to your personal sleep preferences; and
- Reach out to your physician if sleep deprivation is impacting your daily life.



Cut Down on the Candy

The next time you're suffering from a case of the "sweet tooth," remember one word: moderation. Overconsumption of sugar is a major problem that leads to obesity, diabetes and other preventable chronic diseases.

And while numbers are on the decline, about 13 percent of adults' daily calories came from added sugars in things like cake and regular soda, according to new government statistics.

Naturally occurring and added sugars are the two types of the sweet stuff that have found their way into the American diet.

The major sources of added sugars in American diets are soft drinks, candy, cakes, cookies, pies, fruit drinks, dairy desserts and cereals.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture identifies the following foods as some of the main culprits in added-sugar items, as well as the calories from the added sugar per serving.

- Carbonated soda, 12-ounce can, 132.5 calories
- Canned fruits in heavy syrup, 1 cup, 115.4 calories
- Jelly beans, 10 large, 78.4 calories
- Non-fat fruit yogurt, 6-ounce container, 77.5 calories
- Milk chocolate, 1 bar, 77.4 calories

SUGAR TERMS

Not sure if the treat you're about to indulge in contains sugar? Here are some terms that you may find on food labels, according to the American Heart Association.

- Brown sugar
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Fruit juice concentrates
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Invert Sugar
- Malt sugar
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Sugar molecules
- Syrup

COMBATING YOUR CRAVINGS

The American Heart Association recommends limiting the amount of added sugars you consume to no more than half of your daily discretionary calorie intake.

For most American women, this means no more than 100 calories (six teaspoons) per day. For most men, no more than 150 calories per day (nine teaspoons).



Dealing with Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a common skin condition that changes the life cycle of skin cells, causing them to build up rapidly on the skin's surface. The condition is a chronic one, with persistent and sometimes painful symptoms.

More than 7.5 million Americans have psoriasis, according to research by the National Psoriasis Foundation.

PSORIASIS BASICS

Psoriasis is not contagious but may run in families. Its occurrence can range from mild cases with small areas of rash to larger, more inflamed areas of raised red areas. Symptoms can oftentimes go into remission, even without treatment, and then return without notice.

Experts with the National Psoriasis Foundation identify many external factors as contributing to flare-ups, including cold and dry climates, infections, stress, dry skin and taking certain medications.

In some cases, psoriasis can cause joints to become swollen, tender and painful. Labeled psoriatic arthritics, this affliction also can affect the fingernails and toenails.

TREATING PSORIASIS

A doctor can diagnose psoriasis by studying the patches on the skin, scalp or nails. Most cases are mild in terms of symptoms and require common skin care.

In terms of dealing with the condition, the National Psoriasis Foundation recommends a balanced diet to be fit and maintain a healthy weight.

Avoiding certain foods may help ease psoriasis symptoms. This may require some trial and error throughout your life, so be sure to log what you've eaten following a particularly notable flare-up.

In treating psoriasis, the primary goal is to stop the cells from growing so quickly. Treatment cannot fully cure psoriasis, but there are many options that can provide significant relief. Some of the most basic forms include:

- Common skin creams or lotions
- Baths or soaks to keep the skin hydrated
- Aloe vera
- Non-prescription cortisone cream
- Exposing skin to small amounts of natural sunlight



Health Literacy

The Affordable Care Act defines health literacy as the degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process and understand basic health information and make appropriate health decisions.

Are you health literate? The more you know about health, the better choices you will make.

There are many challenges keeping people from becoming fully health literate. Whether these impediments are socially, economically or politically driven, everyone deserves access to critical information that could improve their health and related finances.

THE BASICS

So what type of information falls under health literacy? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention establishes the following rights of citizens:

- Find information and services;
- Communicate needs and preferences;
- Process meaning and usefulness of information and services;
- Understand choices, consequences or context of information and services; and
- Decide which information and services match their needs.

IMPORTANCE

A health-literate citizenry can lead to better overall health for people across the nation. Taking care of personal health issues is a part of everyday life – not just during a doctor's visit.

It is important for people to understand common medical terms and the basic science behind how their bodies work. Staying current on emerging medical information and new statistics also helps people evaluate risks to their own health, perform

complicated self-care or become more educated voters for important community issues.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

There are many healthcare

professionals who can make a positive impact on improving the overall health literacy of the American population. Doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists are crucial in this mission because of their daily interaction with the public.

Other professional sectors

that could make a difference include public health workers, human resources professionals, researchers and the media. Disseminating accurate, timely news related to the state of United States healthcare can influence and enlighten citizens.



Preventive Care

Preventive care is a major buzzword in the healthcare world these days, as more and more research is finding that most chronic diseases are highly preventable.

Men and women alike share personal responsibilities when it comes to staying on top of their health. That means scheduling regular checkups with your physician to check for conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, vision issues and various types of cancer.

Unless otherwise noted, John Hopkins Medicine recommends discussing the following conditions with your doctor for clarification and accuracy purposes, as everyone's health care situation may vary.

MEN

Diabetes: At least every three years for adults who have had no symptoms and have sustained high blood pressure greater than 135/80.

Lipid disorders: All men ages 35 and older, as well as younger men with a higher risk for coronary artery disease, should be checked every five years.

Blood pressure: Screenings every two years if blood pressure reading is higher than 120/80, according to the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of High Blood Pressure.

Colorectal cancer: Discuss this with your health care provider to make an informed decision based on your family history and current medical condition.

WOMEN

Cervical cancer: Women between the ages of 30 and 65 should have a Pap test and HPV test every five years.

Depression: Feelings of depression should be addressed at all routine exams, as long as the clinical practice has staff and systems in place to ensure accurate, effective diagnosis and treatment

Vision: Women (and men) should have a baseline comprehensive exam at age 40; if you have a chronic disease, you should check with your healthcare provider for exam frequency.

Breast cancer: Women should have yearly mammograms and clinical breast exams.

