

# LET'S Talk

SUMMER 2004

HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

## In the good old summertime . . .

It's summertime, a time filled with family-oriented events and activities. Sports, family reunions, vacations and projects at home all vie for time in your busy schedule.

Sometimes trying to fit it all in can become a chore. But carving out family time doesn't require major adjustments. Quality time can be woven into every day. Here are some suggestions:

- Children want your undivided attention. When they talk, look at them and show your interest.
- Ask them what they want to do. Is baseball their love? Play catch in your backyard with them.
- Establish new family traditions. Set a specific time each week for them, such as Friday pizza nights.
- Develop your family as a team. Give everyone chores. Do them together.
- Make one-on-one time with each child.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can provide a wealth of resources to help you with life's challenges. It's confidential. Call to be connected to a counselor in your area. Or visit EAP's Web site at the address below.

800-222-0364  
(TTY 888-262-7848)  
[www.FOH4You.com](http://www.FOH4You.com)

## Managing Stress With Exercise

STRESS CAN MAKE YOU FEEL drained, anxious, even depressed. And while there are several ways to manage run-away stress, none is as enjoyable and effective as a regular exercise routine.

"Numerous studies have shown exercise provides excellent stress-relieving benefits," says Cedric Bryant, chief exercise physiologist for the American Council on Exercise in San Diego.

### How It Works

Exercise causes the brain to release endorphins, opiumlike substances that ease pain and produce a sense of comfort and euphoria. It also encourages the nerve cells in the brain to secrete other neurotransmitters that improve mood.

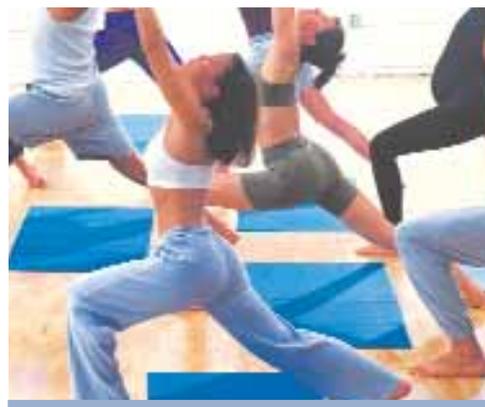
Deficiencies of these substances have been linked to symptoms of depression, anxiety, impulsiveness, aggression and increased appetite. According to a study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, exercise increases the levels of these natural antidepressants.

According to the National Institutes of Health, exercise also improves people's ability to relax and sleep, promotes self-esteem and enhances energy, concentration and memory.

### Stress-Reduction Moves

The following guidelines can help you find activities likely to be effective for you.

- CHOOSE AN EXERCISE YOU ENJOY. "It's important to choose activities that



are accessible and feasible for you to do regularly," says Bryant. "You also need to determine if you want to play competitive sports, such as basketball or tennis, or if you'd rather do noncompetitive activities, such as walking, bicycling or taking an aerobics class."

- EXERCISE EVERY DAY IF YOU CAN. The U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health recommends 30 minutes of activity on most, if not all, days of the week.

- CONSIDER MIND/BODY ACTIVITIES. In yoga and tai chi, your mind relaxes progressively as your body increases its amount of muscular work. "These forms of exercise are effective for honing stress-management and relaxation skills," says Bryant.

Controlling stress ultimately comes down to making time to exercise. Physical activity provides an enjoyable and effective way to cope with life's troubles as it promotes lasting strength and empowerment.

what's new

## Late-Breaking Health News

**>>Americans are too slow in responding to heart attacks.** When feeling chest pains or shortness of breath, most Americans wait it out for an hour or two, to see if the symptoms go away.

“But that’s the worst way to react to such symptoms,” says Eric R. Bates, M.D., a heart attack specialist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. “If you’re having a heart attack, every minute of delay may mean the difference between life and death, or between health and disability. Many treatments work wonders, but only if given soon after an attack.”

Instead of waiting, people should call 911 and get emergency help immediately for chest pain, arm or shoulder pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, abdominal pain or nausea.

**>>Mindfulness improves quality of life.** According to the *Harvard Women’s Health Watch*, the ability to pay attention to an experience from moment to moment — without drifting into thoughts of the past or concerns about the future, or getting caught up in opinions about what’s going on — can increase life’s enjoyment, expand the ability to cope with illness and possibly improve physical and emotional health.

One of the more popular ways to practice mindfulness is through meditation. Other ways to achieve mindfulness in everyday life include:

- Pay attention to your breathing or your environment when you stop at red lights.
- Before you go to sleep and when you awaken, take some “mindful” breaths. Instead of allowing your mind to wander over the day’s concerns, direct your attention to your breathing.



**>>WITH THE U.S. SURGEON GENERAL CALLING OBESITY AN EPIDEMIC, some state legislatures have enacted laws to encourage healthful food choices and ban the worst temptations.**

Here’s a sampling of some of the laws that have been passed:

- In Arkansas, six schools will test the BMI — body mass index, a ratio of height to weight — of students and send results home.
- California has banned junk food from vending machines in schools. New York City banned hard candy, doughnuts, soda and salty chips from its schools’ vending machines.
- Louisiana will require physical education programs in schools. Such daily classes now are required by state law only in Illinois.

The statistics show the need for such efforts. The number of obese adults has doubled in 20 years and now is up to nearly 59 million people, or almost a third of all American adults. Childhood obesity has tripled, with one child in six considered obese. Obesity is linked to diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

See your physician for guidance and advice regarding a specific health condition.

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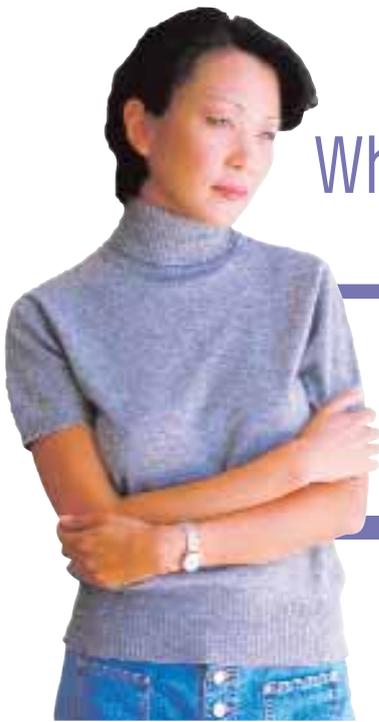
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# When to Seek Help for Your Mental Health

Admitting that something is wrong and getting help doesn't mean you've failed or are weak. The key question to ask yourself is "Could I use some help right now?"

YOU'VE BEEN FEELING STRESSED for days with no break in sight. Some nights you wake up at 4 a.m. and can't get back to sleep. You've been reaching for a drink as soon as you get home from work. What's going on?

"Admitting that something is wrong and getting help doesn't mean you've failed or are weak," says Robert E. Hales, M.D., the Joe P. Tupin professor and chair of the department of psychiatry at the University of California, Davis. "The key question to ask yourself is 'Could I use some help right now?'"

The truth is, if the stresses and strains of life have pushed you to your limits, you're not alone. A survey of more than 8,000 people between ages 15 and 54 found 48 percent had experienced depression, alcohol abuse or anxiety at some point in their lives.

And, just as you would talk to a medical doctor instead of a friend or family member if you had a broken bone, it makes sense to see a mental health professional if you need help with your behavior, thoughts or feelings.

## When to Seek Help

No one's life is problem-free, and on any given day you may feel angry, blue or in a panic.

But what distinguishes problems needing attention from problems of daily living is their severity or persistence over time.

Seek help if you:

- Feel depressed or sad for several weeks or more
- Experience extreme mood swings
- Feel helpless or hopeless

- Feel that life is out of control
  - Have sudden feelings of panic
  - Drink excessively or use illegal drugs
  - Are unable to stop destructive behavior, such as gambling
  - Threaten violence or become aggressive and violent
  - Think about or attempt suicide
- If you or a loved one has any of these symptoms, call your doctor or a mental health professional.

## A Better Life

Counseling can be a tool for change and a source of support when you need it most.

"As you work toward recovery, you can learn more gratifying ways of living and behaving," says Hales. "As you regain a sense of being in control, you'll discover you do have options and the ability to make the best choices for you."



## Everyday Problems

IT'S JUST AS IMPORTANT to get help if stress, grief, marital or other family problems are getting in the way of your happiness and emotional stability.

"People generally seek help for three reasons," says Hales. "They notice a significant shift in how they feel about themselves; they become aware of ongoing difficulties in their close personal relationships; or they have chronic problems getting along with people at work."

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I been feeling less happy, less confident or less in control than

usual for a period of several weeks or longer?

- Are emotional problems getting in the way of my work, relationships or other aspects of my life?
- Have my own efforts to deal with a problem failed to resolve the situation?
- Do I feel emotionally "stuck" and helpless to change my behavior or circumstances?

If you answer "yes" to one or more of these questions, contact your FOH EAP at 800-222-0364.

For information and links to helpful Web sites, visit [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov) and click on Mental Health.

# Speak Your Mind: Smart Talk for Couples

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP for too long before you learn that the language of love takes you only so far. You and your mate will need to communicate effectively to help keep and strengthen the bond between you.

## How Do I Love Thee?

Loving relationships are good for you. Having someone in your life on whom you can depend and who cares for you makes it easier to deal with stress. Although other people's good relationships may look easy, all good relationships take work from both people.

Here are some tips to build a better relationship.

- Talk to each other. Tell your partner how you feel about issues in your life. Tell your partner when you are happy about something he or she said or did. Talking honestly is important. Don't forget to say "I love you."
- Be a good listener. Consider the other person's point of view as well as your own.
- Make time for each other. Pay attention to your relationship. Do something fun together.
- Encourage your partner to be healthy. Ask him or her to do the same for you.



Having support from a loved one can help you make a change such as quitting smoking or losing weight. Remind each other to get checkups. This shows that you care.

## Rules of Engagement

Even the most ardent lovers argue. During a calm moment, set up some rules for respectful arguments. These might include:

- No name-calling or criticizing
- Making sure each person gets to have a say
- Really listening to each other

Discussing these ground rules before an argument occurs and agreeing to honor them will help keep your relationship in harmony.

For more information, visit [www.vitality.com](http://www.vitality.com), click on Vitality-on-Demand and enter **VOD407**.

**Learn to let go of guilt** — don't worry so much about what you said to your spouse or whether you visit your elderly parents enough. When you stop feeling guilty, you have more energy and more peace of mind — and you're less likely to get angry with those people you blame for making you feel guilty.

*Family Circle, 110 Fifth Ave., New York, NY*

**Depression may be linked** to low levels of folate in the blood, one report found. So getting your recommended daily allowance of this B vitamin could help lift your spirits and make you happier.

*Research at Tufts University, Medford, MA.*

**To lower your stress**, get involved in religious organizations, civic associations, hiking clubs, sports teams or any other type of networks. Actively developing friendships can reduce stress.

*Tom Sander, executive director, Saguro Seminar, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.*

**Drug abuse can damage your teeth.** Using cocaine and methamphetamines causes severe tooth decay, gum disease, mouth sores, ulcers and broken and worn teeth. These drugs and ecstasy also can have dangerous interactions with anesthetics commonly used in dentistry.

*Academy of General Dentistry, Chicago, IL.*

**This yoga stretch will relax your body's prime tension areas:** Lie on your back with your legs and rear up against a wall, forming an L shape with your body. Place the soles of your feet together and bend your knees out to the sides, relaxing your legs and hips, which will put you in a froglike position. Sit quietly for as long as you like.

*Redbook, 224 W. 57th St., New York, NY*

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