

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Staying Active

How do you stay active on busy days? Trying to find time to exercise may feel like an impossible task when the stressors at work and at home may be so demanding that the thought of even trying to exercise becomes a stress in and of itself!

However, staying active may be the most valuable tool you have to manage stress. In addition, exercise gives you a boost of energy. Taking a half-hour out of your day to exercise may benefit you with more than an extra hour of energy when you need it most. Long term, of course, exercise provides numerous health benefits to help you maintain your health and prevent disease.

Follow these tips to add physical activity and make exercise a regular part of your workday:

- ❑ **Walk to work.** Walk briskly, part of the way, to or from work. If you take public transportation, get off a few stops early and walk the rest of the way to your destination. If you drive to work, park your car further away from your office to increase the distance of your walk to work.
- ❑ **Take the stairs.** Use the stairs instead of the elevator whenever possible. To get started, ride the elevator to a midway point and climb the rest of the way. Add more floors as you build stamina.
- ❑ **Walk for your lunch.** Take a brisk walk during your lunch hour and then eat your lunch afterwards at your desk. Or walk to lunch spots at a distance from your office instead of frequenting the corner café or vending machine.
- ❑ **Walk to meetings.** Allow time to walk to meeting on campus instead of taking the campus shuttle.
- ❑ **Take a walking meeting.** Instead of taking a meeting with a colleague in an office or café, take the meeting outside and walk. This works best with a short two-person meeting. Ask your colleague if he or she would mind walking as you talk.
- ❑ **Dress the part.** Keep exercise clothes at work in a small duffle bag – comfortable shoes for walking, loose clothing, an extra t-shirt, and a sweatshirt for colder weather. If you are prepared with the right clothes, it will be easier to think about taking that brisk walk during your lunch hour or breaks.
- ❑ **Build an office workout program.** For those with an office or small space around your desk, try exercising at your desk using portable equipment such as exercise bands and small dumbbells (2-5 lb. weights). It's also possible to perform resistance exercises without any equipment; just use your own body weight. Some exercises to try are desk pushups, floor or chair crunches, and squats.

- ❑ **Find a partner.** Exercising may be easier and more enjoyable if you do it with someone else. Find a partner who walks at the same pace you do and is willing to commit to getting together for regular workouts.
- ❑ **Join the Health*Matters Walking Group.** The Walking Group meets year-round, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from noon to 1:00 pm at the Campanile (south side). Led by Walking Leaders, the group walks three different routes on campus and accommodates all levels of exercisers, from beginning walkers to advanced, brisk walkers. It's a great way to get out of the office, break up your day, meet your campus colleagues, and most of all, work out!
- ❑ **Work out at the RSF.** Join the campus Recreational Sports Facility and work out during lunch, or before or after work. A well-timed workout can give you a needed second wind for the rest of the workday.

You may find that the first step is the hardest in becoming more active, but after a few weeks, your physical activity and fitness routine may become a habit that you will look forward to during the day. Try to stay motivated by choosing activities that you enjoy and set realistic fitness goals in small steps, such as “I will walk everyday this week for lunch”. When you reach your goals, reward yourself; for example, treat yourself to a massage or a new outfit.

Also see:

How to Manage the Stress of these Difficult Times, available at www.uhs.berkeley.edu.

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Caffeine Use

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Eating Well

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Headaches & Muscle Tension

Healthful Hints for Stressful Times: Sleeping Soundly

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