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Public Employee Benefits Alliance

# EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



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## DEER OAKS EAP PRESENTS:

### January OnDemand Seminar *Reframing Your Way Through 2022*

Available on-demand starting on January 18th

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# Change Your Life with SMART Goals!

No matter how good you are at something, there is always room for improvement. Wanting something is one thing, but as millions of broken New Year's resolutions show every year, setting a goal is much easier than meeting that goal. A good goal is SMART: *specific, measurable, action-focused, realistic, and time-bound*.

- **A goal should be as specific as possible.** If your broad goal is to lose weight and you lose 2 ounces, you've technically met your goal. A good goal, on the other hand, would be to lose 10 pounds in the next 3 months.
- **Measurable goals are best,** because it's apparent if you're making progress toward meeting your goal.
- **Action-focused goals require an action on the part of the goal setter.** For fitness goals, a personal readiness device or a health application can be a great aid in reminding you of the actions you need to take.

- **Good goals are realistic.** A smart goal setter needs to make an honest assessment of how much improvement is possible in a given period of time and base the goal on that assessment. As the old adage goes, Rome wasn't built in a day. Trying to do too much too quickly can be just as detrimental as doing nothing.
- **Lastly, a SMART goal is time-bound.** When setting a goal, you need a deadline to reach it.

Source: Cook, L. (2013, November 22). *Change your life with SMART goals!* [Excerpt]. Retrieved December 4, 2020, from <https://www.army.mil>



# Get Back to the Basics to Find Balance in Life

These are exciting times. Consider how different life is now than it was in the past. Until the industrial revolution in the 1800s, life was structured by the rhythms of day and night and the changing seasons. Excitement, stimulation, and change were all dangerous, to be avoided. Then imbalance was a sign of danger.

Now contrast this with modern life. All of the wondrous inventions—electricity, the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the internet—have stripped away the natural, external limits, boundaries, and structure that had dictated life in the past. Nowadays, you can do anything, anywhere, with anyone at any time. Life is filled with possibilities.

But this exciting, limitless life can leave you out of balance. Without the soothing structure that guided mankind over the ages, you can become driven by instinctive mental energy. When your nervous system senses that your life is out of balance, it cries out in alarm, as it was programmed to do by millions of years of evolution. You feel more and more stressed, uneasy, and worried.

The answer to this problem is creating a framework to achieve balance in your life. Think of these seven rules of balance as operating rules for your brain—a guide to a healthy pattern of living.

## 1. Balance your time alone and time spent with people.

Too much of our contact with other people is superficial and virtual—through television, the internet, over cell phones, on crowded city streets, in shopping malls. Even though you may come into contact with dozens of people every day, in reality, you may be alone. Living without the calming structure of a relationship with a person you know and care about leads to depression, loneliness, and frustration.

Balance the overstimulated loneliness of modern life by maintaining at least five close, supportive relationships. Use your natural style to build relationships. If you like music, use it to find people. If you're an athlete, build relationships through sports and activities. If you're an avid reader, build close relationships through a book club. The antidote to today's superficial contact with people is to take time to build relationships based on who you are, and your unique interests and abilities.

## 2. Balance movement and rest.

If you spend your day sitting—in a car, at a desk, in front of a computer, sitting on a couch watching TV or talking on the phone—you can't feel rested and relaxed. Instead, you'll

feel a gradually rising sense of tension and restlessness. You need healthy movement to truly relax.

The human body was designed to move. The purpose of resting is to let one gather strength and energy to move again. If you think of the lives of our prehistoric ancestors, it makes sense: You either moved—to find food, water and shelter, or to escape danger—or you died. In prehistoric times, movement was life.

A regular program of movement—walking, working out at a gym, yoga, dance, tennis, gardening, and so forth—will dissolve the restless tension that comes from a mentally stimulated but physically inactive state.

## 3. Balance living in the moment with thinking about the past.

The time-saving tools available to us—automobiles, mobile phones, the internet—are seductively efficient. They can draw you into a moment-to-moment, overstimulated, and overwhelmed kind of existence. Before you know it, you can lose focus.

Keep your balance by staying focused on who you are—what you've been good at and why you chose to do what you do. Are you doing things in ways that make sense for you? Are you sticking to your plans? Are you maximizing your skills and minimizing your risks and liabilities?

Get a sense of who you are. Then keep a reminder of your skills to orient you to the power of your own experience. Write down three to five activities that you're good at, that you rely on, and that help you to stay on track. Then, when the action starts to get fast and furious, review your skills to make sure you're doing what's right for you.

## 4. Balance your appetites with energetic abstinence, creative problem solving, and planning.

The natural human reaction to abundance is to consume. For prehistoric people, this was adaptive since times of abundance were rare. Appetites such as hunger, thirst, and sex were signals from the brain that it was time to plan and take actions to satisfy those appetites.

Now many people live in a world of abundance. There are few periods of abstinence between periods of consumption. One's intuition sometimes says that the right thing to do when feeling a strong appetite is to consume. But intuition is wrong in this case. Physiologically, when feeling the stimulation of an appetite, the right thing to do is to plan an activity, carry out the activity, and then to consume.

You maintain balance in the face of the abundance of modern life by using your mind to think, to plan, and to take action instead of to simply consume. The next time you're hungry, give it a try. Go outside and weed your garden instead of eating. Or visit a friend. Or simply take a walk around your neighborhood. Plan an activity and substitute it for eating or drinking when you know that your appetite is greater than your body's need. That's the path to balance.

### 5. Balance thinking and feeling.

Your brain works best through a dynamic balance of thinking and feeling. Feeling, or emotion, is the energy of the mind. It powers action, memory, and thought. When thinking is powered by feeling, your life has an elegant balance—it's meaningful and motivating and you know why you live the way you do.

Contrast this with the modern dilemma. Life has become mechanized, routine, and repetitive. Too little emotion and you can become flattened, demoralized, and apathetic. If you're feeling bothered and harassed by the inhumanity of it all, you can lose your patience.

Restore your balance by learning to soothe the inevitable frustrations of living in a mechanized world. Take baths, get massages, or sing in a choir. Anything that calms you will do. Then find out what matters to you. The key is to look back at times in your life when you felt powerful, positive emotions. Remember what you were doing, what mattered to you then, and try to recreate those feelings in your everyday life.

### 6. Balance sleep and waking hours.

Balancing sleep and wakefulness is critical. You need the right amount of sleep to refresh the energy and vitality of your body and mind.

It happened naturally in the past. Without electricity, people slept when it grew dark—in balance with the cycle of day and night, in cycle with the seasons. Now it is a 24/7

world and people are losing touch with the basic biologic need for sleep.

Balance sleep and wakefulness by finding out just how much sleep you need. Keep a chart to discover what amount of sleep feels best. Then get that amount of sleep. Train your sleep cycle by sticking to a regular time for waking, getting lots of bright sunlight in the morning, and planning your activities so that you're most stimulated early in the day and gradually calming yourself in the hours before sleep.

### 7. Balance belief and doubt.

Every day you're flooded with information, images, and ideas that demand your attention. In our electronic, media-

driven culture, every moment of life is dissected, analyzed, and questioned. It becomes difficult to know what to do next. The result is worry.

Belief quiets this worried state of mind. Mankind has long used religious belief as an antidote to worry. Researchers have shown that belief in a positive outcome can help rid you of social anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. And research shows that those who have firm beliefs generally have healthier, happier, and more successful lives.

Balance the cynical worrying of modern life by following some practices that strengthen your ability to believe. Learn to talk positively to yourself and reflect on images of success. Pray if you are religious. Accept guidance. Learn to follow the wisdom of leaders. And follow reassuring ritual—whether it's going to church or reading stories to your children at bedtime. Ritual strengthens your belief by reminding you of the simple but powerful truths of life.

Follow the seven rules of balance and you'll find natural pathways within yourself to live a healthy and meaningful life. Apply these principles to truly enjoy the excitement, possibilities and passion of life.

*Source: Sorgi, P. J. (Revised 2019). Get back to the basics to find balance in life (L. Zereski & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*



# Healthy Living: Commit to Get Fit

How will you commit to get fit this year? As you create this year's plan, think about previous plans, keeping what worked and letting go of what didn't.

## Things to Consider

- **Tracking devices, apps and programs** — These are like an electronic finger on the pulse: measuring your vitals, quality of sleep and step count. They can be valuable tools in measuring progress and keeping you on track.
- **Schedule exercise time.** Whether it's paper or electronic, just schedule it! Consider adding alarms to remind you that it's time to start packing up so you can make this appointment.

- **Plan your meals to save time, money and empty calories.** Planning ahead of time can take the pressure off evening meals and leave time for exercise.
- **Assess your fitness level.** You probably have some idea of your personal fitness level. However, assessing and recording baseline fitness scores can give you benchmarks against which to measure your progress.
- **Annual preventative exams** — Stay abreast of your health status to ward off chronic conditions and ultimately save money at the pharmacy and doctor's office.

*Source: Workplace Options Wellness Team. (2019, January). Healthy living: Commit to get fit. Raleigh, NC: Author.*

# This is Your Year to Quit Smoking

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Office on Smoking and Health (OSH) knows that it may take a number of tries before you're able to quit for good, but it can be done. In fact, so many people have quit that there are now more former smokers than current smokers in the United States. Quitting can be challenging, but you can find support for your quit journey where and when you need it, to raise your chances of quitting for good. This year make a New Year's resolution to quit smoking for good.

"At this time of year, we know that many smokers make a resolution to quit and start off on a healthier course," says Corinne Graffunder, DrPH, MPH, director of OSH. "If now is your time to quit tobacco, there are many tools available to help you find and follow a quit strategy that works for you."

Whether you've never tried to quit or have tried many times, a new year means another chance to create your successful quit plan.

## It's never too early to quit.

No matter how long you've smoked, there are health benefits to quitting. James, a participant in the Tips From Former Smokers® campaign and a smoker for 30 years, started having some trouble doing everyday tasks. He also learned he had diabetes. So, James decided he needed a healthier lifestyle. He put down cigarettes and started exercising. Quitting smoking gave him the energy to bike, run, and swim—things he couldn't imagine doing before.

James said he wanted to send a message to people who think smoking won't harm them because they haven't had a major smoking-related illness. "I want to help people like me quit smoking," he said. "Maybe nothing really bad has happened to you yet. Maybe you're lucky, but you're probably not going to stay lucky."

## It's still a leading cause of death.

Even though adult smoking rates are at an all-time low, cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the country, with 480,000 people dying every year.

Smoking is linked to many dangerous diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, emphysema, and cancer. Smoking around others hurts their health, too. Breathing secondhand smoke can cause many of the same illnesses as smoking does. It can make children get sick more often, and smoking while pregnant raises the risk of a baby dying suddenly in the first year of life. No amount of secondhand smoke is risk-free.

## Find what works for you.

Every smoker's quit journey is different. It may take some time to find the strategies that help you stay quit. It helps to create a quit plan. Some of the steps in an effective quit plan include the following:

- Pick a quit date. Choose a date only a week or two away, and highlight that day in your calendar or phone.
- Tell loved ones and friends that you're quitting. Let them know how they can help you quit.

- List reasons to quit.
- Get rid of cigarettes and anything that reminds you of smoking.
- Pick out feelings, places, and situations that make you want to smoke. It's easier to avoid them if you've identified them!
- Have healthy strategies to fight cravings.

### **Build your strategies.**

Smokers crave cigarettes because they contain a drug called nicotine, and smoking makes your body dependent on nicotine. Stopping smoking causes nicotine withdrawal, which can be uncomfortable, especially in the first weeks. There are ways to get through withdrawal—these can include support from family or a counselor, as well as medication that helps ease cravings.

It may take many tries to quit. The important thing is not to give up. Health care providers such as doctors and nurses can be good supporters in your quit journey. Your doctor may recommend some of the medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to help people quit smoking. These may include nicotine replacement therapy medicines, which are patches, gums, or lozenges that give the body a small amount of nicotine to ease cravings without the other harmful effects of smoking cigarettes. Pharmacists can let you know about the effects of any medicine your doctor prescribes.

### **It's not too late.**

Whether you smoked for decades, like James, or only just started, whether you have a smoking-related illness or haven't felt the damage from smoking yet, quitting right now can put you on the road to better health.

Says former smoker Dean G.: "Can't wait to see my health continue to improve. Quitting is the best decision I ever made."

*Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health. (Reviewed 2019, April 19). It's never too early to quit smoking. Retrieved November 20, 2019, from <https://www.cdc.gov>*