

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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In this issue:

- Creating healthy habits
- Starting and sticking to an exercise plan
- Steps for caring for your mental health



Anthem® EAP

Making healthy changes

A year is ending, a new one is beginning – and it's an ideal time to start fresh with a renewed goal to live a healthy lifestyle. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help, with ideas for getting started and support along the way.

Creating healthy habits

What if exercising was as much of a habit as brushing your teeth in the morning? What if eating healthy foods was a constant, something you did without even thinking about it? By making health-positive actions part of your daily routine, you can make them less of a challenge, and more of a way of life. Here's how to start.

Recognize your habits.

Think about the regular things you do, from taking a shower to washing the dishes. Those repetitive behaviors can make you feel good, and they can actually affect your brain, too. Habits often become automatic, occurring without much thought.

If you have a habit that isn't a positive one, the first step to changing your behavior is to become aware of what you do regularly. Look for patterns in your behavior and note what triggers any unhealthy habits you want to change. Then work toward disrupting those patterns and creating healthy ones.



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Make a plan.

Make a plan that includes small, doable goals and specific actions you'll take to move toward them. If you're used to having a 10 a.m. snack, try making it a 10 a.m. bottle of water or exercise break. If you like a dessert with dinner, consider substituting it with a decaf cup of flavored tea.

Also, consider what you think you'll need to be successful. Can you reach out to social media friends to find some walking buddies? Or adjust your family's diet to make sure you're all eating healthy foods? Think about obstacles. What has to change to help you meet your goals? Do you need to cut back on hours at work? Get a sitter so you can go to the gym? This is all about you taking charge of your health, and everyone who depends on you will benefit.

Stay on track.

Doing positive things for yourself can feel great, but there will also be times when you wonder if you can stick with it.

Keeping a record can help. You can use a paper journal, computer program, or mobile app to note things like your diet, exercise, stress levels, or sleep patterns. Even when you think you're about to "fall off the wagon," continue to track your behavior. Sometimes, when you feel like you're failing, you can learn the most and make positive changes.

Think about the future.

Some people have a harder time than others resisting their impulses. By learning that this is an issue and fighting the need for immediate gratification, you can make decisions that are better for you in the long run.

Be patient.

When you're trying to adopt healthier habits, other health issues can get in the way. For example, mental health conditions like depression and anxiety can be tied to unhealthy behaviors. A health professional can work with you to address any underlying issues to make change feel easier and to help you be more successful. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help. Contact them any time if you need help starting, maintaining, or getting back into healthy habits. They're here to help you succeed.

It's never too late to make healthy changes. Make these wise choices to build healthy habits.

- **Plan.** Identify unhealthy patterns and triggers. Set realistic goals. Write down steps to help you achieve them.
- **Change your surroundings.** Find ways to make healthier choices easy choices. Remove temptations. Work for changes in your community, like safe places to walk.
- **Ask for support.** Find friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, or groups for support, or ask people to join you.
- **Fill your time with healthy activities.** Try exercise, a favorite hobby, or spending time with family and friends.
- **Track your progress.** Record how things are going to help you stay focused.
- **Imagine the future.** Think about future benefits to remember why it's important to stay on track.
- **Reward yourself.** Give yourself a healthy reward when you've achieved a small goal or milestone, like a massage or personal time.
- **Be patient.** Improvement takes time, and setbacks happen. Focus on progress, not perfection.

Source: National Institute of Health: *Creating healthy habits: Make better choices easier* (accessed August 2022): [newsinhealth.nih.gov](https://www.nia.nih.gov/newsroom/creating-healthy-habits).



Starting — and sticking to — a healthy plan for exercise

The new year is an ideal time for fresh starts. It's also a great time to work toward a healthier you, with a new plan to make exercising part of your life. How do you start?

Step 1: Get rid of your roadblocks

You know all the reasons why you should start exercising, but it's easy to come up with just as many reasons, if not more, why you can't. Take on these roadblocks — head-on.

Roadblock: I don't have time.

Solution: Break your exercise routine down into 10-minute chunks. Take a quick, brisk walk. Spend 10 minutes doing jumping jacks. Or spend 10 minutes standing in front of your desk instead of sitting.

Roadblock: I don't belong to a gym.

Solution: You don't need one. Do you have stairs in your home or your office? Try going up and down them a few times. Is there a hill near your house? Walking up hills can give you a great workout. Other ideas: try using filled laundry detergent bottles or gallon jugs of water as arm weights.

Roadblock: I don't think I'm healthy enough to exercise.

Solution: Start small. If you're worried about making it on a long hike, go around the block a few times so you can take a break at home if you get tired. Also, talk to your doctor and let them know you're worried about exercising. They should be able to help you create a plan that's safe for you.



Step 2: Stick to it.

Once you're in a routine, it's easy to get a little bored. Here are a few tips to stay motivated:

- **Use online tools like the [NIH Body Weight Planner](#).** This planner can guide you through creating personalized calorie and physical activity plans to reach specific goals.
- **Try using a wearable.** Devices like pedometers and fitness trackers can help you count steps, calories, and minutes of physical activity.
- **Keep an activity journal.** Writing down what you've done can make you feel more accountable.
- **Set goals.** As you track your activity, try to set specific short- and long-term goals. For example, instead of "I will be more active," set a goal like, "I will take a walk after lunch at least two days a week."
- **Get support.** Ask a family member or friend to be active with you. Your workout buddy can help make your activities more fun.
- **Remember that you're the boss of your own health.** And if you need help, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is ready to support you.



Caring for your mental health

Chances are, you've heard that you need to exercise and eat right to keep a healthy body. But what about your mind? Do you take any actions to work toward your mental health? Read on, and get a few basic tips for working on your mental wellness.

Eat well

The food you eat can affect your energy level, physical health, and mood. Talk to your doctor about which foods are best for you. You can also visit myplate.gov for tools to help you make good food choices.

Get moving

Experts say people should be active every day for good health — and that includes your mental health. In fact, exercise has even been shown to help with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Your body makes certain chemicals called endorphins before and after you work out. They relieve stress and improve your mood. Exercise can also slow or stop weight gain, which is a common side effect of some medications used to treat mental health conditions.

Sleep well

Your mind and body will feel better if you sleep well. Your body needs time every day to rest and heal. If you often have trouble sleeping — either falling asleep or waking during the night and being unable to get back to sleep — try these ideas:

- Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. Don't sleep in. It could make you feel worse.
- Create a bedtime ritual by doing the same things every night for an hour or two before bedtime so your body knows when it is time to go to sleep.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Eat on a regular schedule, and avoid a heavy meal before going to bed. Don't skip meals.
- Eat plenty of dairy foods and dark green, leafy vegetables.
- Exercise daily, but avoid activities that are too hard or might give you more energy before going to bed.
- Take a warm bath or shower before going to bed.



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at no extra cost.*

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For more advice on caring for your mental health, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) team of experts. They can provide resources for counseling and give you advice on nurturing total wellness – including your emotional well-being.

Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office on Women's Health, *Good Mental Health* (accessed March 2018): [womenshealth.gov](https://www.womenshealth.gov).

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