

Work Information Newsletter

ERGO-Wise

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Work Information Newsletter

Welcome to *Work Information Newsletter*. This is a newsletter for employers, employees and their families, health professionals and anyone else interested in work-related issues.

Work Information Newsletter focuses on the individual in the workplace. Attention will be given to such issues as stress, work-life balance, and career transition. Job accommodation requirements will be discussed as will ergonomic principles. These topics will be addressed within a wellness approach to the workplace using an occupational therapy framework.

This newsletter has been developed by Adeena Wisenthal, owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre that specializes in preparing workers to return to the workplace.

Sit back and relax as you read through the various articles. There is sure to be something here that you can relate to and apply to your personal and/or work life to make your situation more fulfilling and satisfying.



Stress in the Workplace Adeena Wisenthal, OT Reg. (Ont.)

In today's climate of downsizing and loss of job security, the term 'stress' has taken on serious proportions. More than ever, people need to have strategies to manage their stress.

We all know the role that **exercise** plays in improving our health and feeling of well being. The impact that physical activity has on our mental health cannot be overlooked. Research has shown that the physical

changes that take place during exercise actually have an effect on our mental functioning. Endorphins are released during exercise which help to lift depression and can allay stress. Blood flow is increased during exercise so that internal organs and muscles benefit from improved circulation and oxygen delivery.

Diet is also an important factor in helping us deal with stress. The healthier our diet,



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Adeena owns and operates a private practice in Ottawa known as ERGO-Wise. Her services focus on work-related issues including return-to-work preparation, job accommodation, workstation ergonomic assessments as well as personal and work-related counselling.

the better we feel and the more capable we are in dealing with stressors. Proper nutrition makes us stronger not only physically but mentally as well.

A good **support system** is crucial in helping us deal with burdens. A listening ear, a compassionate friend, or a caring family member enable us to share our feelings, thoughts and fears. This is very cathartic.

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Points of Interest:

- We cannot control stress but we can control how we react to and deal with stress.
- Dealing with stress is a learned response.
- Many of us need to adopt strategies and techniques to better cope with life's challenges.
- Do not spend time and energy on things that cannot be changed.

Take a Moment Strategies for Canadians — The "4 p's"

Source: Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. (2001). National OT Week Poster 2001: Take A Moment. Ottawa, ON: Author.



"Learning how to set priorities, plan and pace oneself are crucial steps in balancing one's life and thereby keeping stress in check."

Priority Setting

Make sure you are balancing your life and making time for all your occupations - leisure/ family and self-care (exercise/ eating properly) - not just work, school or household chores.

Your health and well-being depend on your ability to balance all your occupations.

Planning

Keep your "energy bank" as full as possible, and plan how to spend your energy! Make

time to re-fill your energy reserves:

- Getting a good night's sleep
- Listening to music that soothes and energizes
- Take a walk
- Take time to eat well and with friends/ family

Pacing

Be realistic. If you are anticipating a heavy day, build in time before and after for some rest and relaxation. Your mind

and body cannot run at high speed all the time... Prolonged stress leads to serious health problems. Listen to your body's signals!

Positioning

- Your environment and how you stand/sit can make a difference.
- Avoid awkward positions
- Use proper lifting techniques
- Make sure your work area is at the right height.

Life Stressors are Everywhere!

Job stress

Holiday stress

Stress of a move

New role (Mom, Dad)

Impending layoffs

Divorce/separation

Post traumatic stress

Travel stress

Death of a loved one or friend

Loss of job

Starting a new school

Starting a new job

Stress of an injury

Poor interpersonal relations

Illness

Financial stress

School stress

Waiting in traffic

Being late

Medical appointment

Overnight visitors

Wedding stress

Big dinner party

Bad weather

Calming strategies and stress busters

Exercise ♦ Yoga ♦ Massage ♦ Progressive Relaxation ♦ Meditation
Deep Breathing ♦ Friends ♦ Delegate ♦ Humour

Tips to Relax

Source: City of Ottawa, Public Health and Long-Term Care; Ministry of Health, Province of British Columbia

1. Simplify your life.

Determine what is important for you and do one thing at a time.

2. Complete things.

Do what you have been meaning to do.

3. Be assertive.

Learn to say “no”. Delegate.

4. Keep active.

Exercise, take up gardening, do an art/craft project.

5. Breathe.

Deep breathing helps one calm down during times of stress.

6. Learn to relax.

Try progressive relaxation techniques, yoga.



Find a relaxing spot and spend some quiet time

7. Listen to music.

8. Have a massage.

9. Speak positively.

A positive attitude reduces stress.

10. Change pace/position.

Vary your positioning to reduce muscle stress.

If you have been busy, take a break.

If you have been resting, get up and do something active.

Stress in the Workplace (continued from page 1)

Knowing that we are not alone in facing our troubles can be the difference between handling stress and feeling alone, desperate or out of control.

Everyone needs a **break** sometime. This is true of stress, as well. It is very difficult to be under stress 24 hours a day. The impact on our health and physical functioning can be adversely affected. It is crucial that especially under times of stress, we take repose from it all. Find a place to go to forget about your troubles even if only for 15 minutes a day. The stress will be there when you return, but you may feel a bit more refreshed and better able to deal with things.

Diversion activities are extremely helpful during difficult times. When times are tough, the tendency is to retreat and keep to ourselves. This is a habit that we would be wise to change. Seek out others. Pursue recreational interests. Join your local community group. Volunteer and help someone in need. You would be surprised how ‘therapeutic’ social and community involvement can be.

Assertiveness training can be a major step in helping a person deal with stress. A passive individual learns how to appropriately express his/her opinions thereby feeling less taken advantage of. The aggressive person can learn how his/her attitude and behavior affect other people and how to express views in a socially acceptable manner for desired results. In both cases, stress can be relieved and the individual’s repertoire of skills is enhanced.

Relaxation techniques benefit the individual by learning how to physically calm down and lower the impact of the stress. The result

of relaxation and deep breathing on the body cannot be underestimated.

Time management skills, goal-setting techniques, and life planning strategies can all help an individual better deal with stress. These are not skills that we are born with. Many of us need extra help in understanding their significance and their relation to stress. Coaching in these skills is sometimes necessary to enable a person to deal with the day to day annoyances as well as the major stresses.

Learning how to **set priorities, plan and pace** oneself are crucial steps in balancing one’s life and thereby keeping stress in check. These skills enable a person to maximize the occupations of work, household chores, family, leisure, and self-care. Building in time in one’s day for rest and relaxation can help to alleviate the day’s stressors and avoid some of the health problems that prolonged stress can have on one’s body.

Consider also the position you assume in doing your day’s work. **Proper positioning** is an important factor in avoiding muscle fatigue and muscle stress. Our environment and how we position ourselves can make a difference on how we feel physically and therefore emotionally.

We do not always have control over the stressors that come our way. We do, however, have control over how we choose to react to the stress and pressures of daily life. Many of us need to learn strategies and techniques to better cope with life’s challenges. ■

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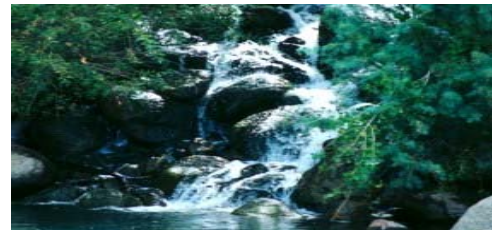
ERGO-Wise offers Occupational Therapy and Counselling services focusing on various aspects of the workplace. Services include return-to-work programs, personal development coaching, and a variety of work assessments.

Our unique cognitive work hardening programs are especially well suited to high tech, knowledge and office workers who are preparing to return to work. Work simulations incorporate state-of-the-art computers and software applications to help a worker improve work stamina, increase concentration and build confidence.

Counselling and targeted skill development are offered within the scope of a work hardening program or as individual services.

On-site work assessments cover physical and/or cognitive demands analysis as well as suggested job accommodations. Work return readiness evaluations provide an assessment of ability to perform job-related skills and functions.

Ergonomic assessments can either be part of a proactive workplace wellness program or can be used to address specific concerns and/or physical needs.



Discover what nature has to offer and enjoy.

ERGO-Wise Tips that Work!

To be truly successful, all aspects of your life must be kept in check—work, home, social, recreational.

When things look bleak, remember: "This too shall pass".

Do not waste time and energy on things you cannot change. Use your time wisely.

If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it then change the way you think about it.

When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot and hold on.

Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be. Think positive.

Nature gave us one tongue and two ears so we could hear twice as much as speak. Listen to others.