Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Parking Stress at the Door

You've had a rough day at work. And while you'd like to forget about that disagreement with your boss or a looming deadline, when you get home it plays over and over in your mind. Perhaps trouble on the home front—family strife or care giving demands—makes it hard for you to focus on the job.

While the havoc of stress truly knows no bounds, there are several strategies you can try to stop it at its source and prevent it from spilling over into other areas of your life.

Take a breather. When we experience stress our breathing becomes shallow. Less oxygen is pumped into the body, and we experience a reduction in mental clarity and physical energy. By managing your breathing cycle, from shallow and fast, to slow and deep, you can help control your anxiety and take charge of your body. The more you breathe deeply, the healthier you get!

Deep breathing, even for as little as five minutes, can counteract the effects of stress, clear your mind, and rejuvenate your body. Several deep breathing exercises per day, especially before confronting a challenging situation can increase self-confidence, and bring about a more relaxed attitude.

Create transition rituals. Commuting to and from work each day is a fact of life for millions of Canadians. Rather than getting frustrated by traffic delays, why not make the most of valuable time? If you drive, pop in an audio book or listen to your favourite radio station. If using public transit, read a book or catch up on the daily news. Listening to upbeat or relaxing music on your iPod or CD player is another good way to gear up for your workday or wind down as you head home.

Combine this with 30 to 45 minutes of aerobic activity before or after work, and you've created an effective daily ritual that will help you shed stress.

De-clutter your workload. Setting aside enough time each day to tackle key items on your "to do" list will help you feel less anxious and less overwhelmed. At work, this means staying focused on key tasks rather than getting dragged down by timewasters like e-mail, web surfing and overly chatty colleagues.

At home, consider enlisting help to give yourself a break from time to time. If you can afford it, look into time-saving services like housecleaners or even personal catering. Services that offer healthy, home-cooked meals at the same cost as take-out might be just what you need.

Can't afford to hire out? Enlist the support of friends and family. The people closest to you may be unaware that you're struggling with stress and would be more than happy to help out if they knew you were feeling overwhelmed.

Don't overlook the value of staying in the here and now. These tips can help you park stress and get the most out of both your work and home time.
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