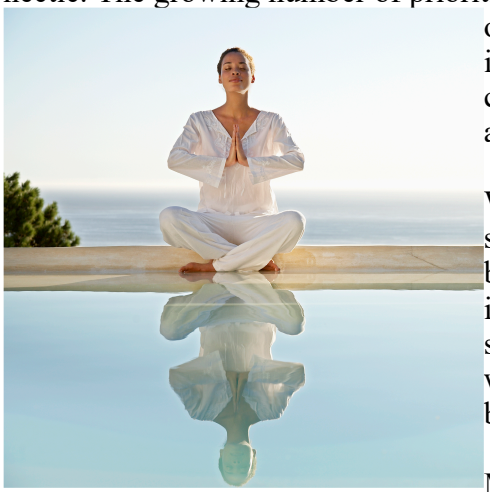
Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Calm connectors: strategies to maintain your emotional equilibrium

With mounting workloads and increasingly busy schedules, our lives can often become extremely hectic. The growing number of priorities to keep track of mentally may leave our minds feeling overwhelmed with a jumble of constant thoughts and emotions. It's important to remember to find peace and balance in your daily commotion, so that you can soothe your already over-stimulated and over-active mind.



When you feel pulled in every direction all at once, it can cause serious mental wear and tear. Taking care of your emotional well-being is **just** as important as eating healthy and staying active, but it's chronically neglected by many of us. *The good news?*There are some simple, straightforward activities you can do to get in touch with your inner peace to help you remain calm, cool and collected, both personally and professionally.

Meditation

Many people are skeptical of meditation and brush it off as silly, boring or awkward. That is, until they master it. Don't underestimate the power of clearing your mind. By focusing all your attention on your breathing, you can enter a state of deep relaxation that's hard to find any other way. Those who've learned this ancient technique not only appreciate what it does to calm the mind, but also like that it's simple, inexpensive and doesn't require any equipment.

Find a quiet place, get into a comfortable seated position, close your eyes and lose your hesitations. Take deep, slow breaths, filling up your whole body with air and a sense of calm. As you breathe out, let go of your tension and frustrations. Think about how it feels when your rib cage expands and contracts and as air enters and leaves through your nostrils. Meditation is not about zoning out or letting your mind drift, it's instead focused on yourself, your breathing and the moment. Once you become more comfortable with meditation, you can add a "mantra" or calming word to your practice. Use the word "release," for example, as an object of focus to help you remove all other jumbled thoughts.

Biofeedback

Knowledge gives you the power to change how your body responds to daily events. This is the thought behind biofeedback—a treatment which uses electrical sensors to measure your breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, skin temperature, perspiration rate, muscle tension and brain activity. Your therapist will monitor your body's signals while you are relaxed. Then, by asking you about stressors in your life, you'll see how your body responds through the tensing of muscles, rising blood pressure and a quickened pulse. By encouraging you to breathe deeply and refocus your thinking, the signals will begin to return to normal right in front of you. After a series of sessions—typically 20 or more—you'll start to understand the connection between your mental state and your body's response. Though it has many uses, biofeedback commonly helps in the treatment of tension and migraine headaches, chronic pain, high blood pressure and even problems with incontinence.

Speak to you doctor or health care professional for a referral to a licensed biofeedback therapist or a legitimate in-home device.

Yoga

Yoga is popping up everywhere from community centres to chic health clubs. Despite its trendy reputation, yoga is an incredibly effective way to calm the mind and relieve stress. Through a series of postures and breathing exercises that test your balance, flexibility and concentration, you're forced to forget about your day. There are very few activities that work you body and mind in such equal parts. Since yoga can be strenuous, it's a good idea to consult a doctor before starting, and to take a few classes—so you ensure you've got good form—before practicing alone.

Tai Chi

Tai Chi is an ancient Chinese martial art that has since evolved into a stress-busting, mind calming, exercise that is great for all ages and physical abilities. Often referred to as "meditation in motion," Tai Chi co-ordinates slow rhythmic movements with breathing. This circulates energy throughout your whole body and helps you stop those wandering thoughts so you can achieve a sense of peace.

Slow It Down

Your body's natural relaxation response is a powerful way to combat stress and this is charged through relaxation techniques. Schedule some time everyday to "go inward" and find a few minutes of peace. There is no single relaxation technique that is better than another. Consider your needs, preferences and abilities to help you choose one that works for you and fits with your busy lifestyle.

It's ironic that the busier we get and the more we crave relaxation, the harder it becomes for us to relax. Finding your "inner chi" takes time, practice and, most importantly, commitment.

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