

# Expat Healthy Living

July 2018



## Embracing change: It's a family affair

Working in another country can be an exciting and enriching experience for the entire family. It can also be stressful adapting to and embracing a world where everything is different – from the language, to the food, to the way of life. It can be especially difficult for spouses and children. Spouses may feel isolated without social supports, opportunities to socialize or the ability to work; children can miss friends, extended family and their familiar activities and routines.

For expats, embracing change is very much a family affair.

### Change fatigue

During any big transition in our lives, it's normal to feel a sense of loss for what we're leaving behind and apprehension for what's ahead. When we experience a rapid succession of changes, we can also suffer what's called "change fatigue" – exhaustion that comes from trying to make sense of things.

Fortunately, most of us accept new situations with time. For most expats, depending on a number of variables, adapting to their new location takes between six to 12 months.

### Embracing change

There are things you and your family can do that will lessen the impact of change fatigue in an unfamiliar environment.

- Get the whole family involved in the expat community. Meeting people who have been through similar experiences can be helpful to the entire family.
- Maintain a sense of normalcy for children by signing them up for their favourite activities – karate, dance, soccer – as soon as possible. It will also help them make new friends quickly. The same goes for adults.
- If you are a member of a faith community, find a place of worship that meets your family's needs.

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- Make your children's new bedrooms as familiar as possible. Bring some favourite toys, games and stuffed animals, and offer to paint their room the same colour as the room they left behind.
- Stick to your children's daily routines, such as reading bedtime stories or family movie night.
- Be prepared for your own emotional reactions. Big changes can trigger big feelings, including anxiety, panic, depression, anger and intense homesickness. Expect each member of your family to experience a wide range of emotions – not necessarily the same ones at the same time – and have a plan in place to support each other.

Also remember that your family will go through the adaptation process again when they return home, as the once strange has become familiar and vice versa. Reverse culture shock is real, and needs to be recognized and managed.

If you or a family member is having difficulty adapting to change, contact your assistance program for support.

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