

Healthy U @ Work



August 2019

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 **Franciscan**
WORKING Well

Developing Mindfulness

In a world of technological distractions, our ability to be mindful is challenged, and we find that our general sense of well-being has decreased. We are staying on top of the latest news, announcements, and viral videos, but by staying in touch with our virtual world, we are more unaware than ever of what we feel, of what we want, of the needs of the people around us. We are so distracted that, according to a study published in *Science Magazine*, we spend almost half our day “mind wandering,” stealing focus from what we are doing or seeing or experiencing. More, we’re unhappy during this mind wandering,” the study goes on to say, and happy when instead engaged in physical activity (such as exercise) or interacting with people.

So, to be happier, we have to live in the moment. But it is not easy, especially each time our smartphone dings with a new notification. In fact, living in the moment – or being mindful – is a habit, one that can and must be developed. Choosing to focus on what you are doing, what you are physically feeling, and what is present in your environment - the light, the sounds, and the people around you - can keep you grounded in the present.

There are immediate benefits to being mindful. The more mindful you are, the more stable your moods will be and the less stress you will feel. Also, increased mindfulness is related to more controlled behavior (meaning you can achieve the life outcomes you want) and greater happiness. It is associated with clearer thinking and reasoning, too.

Mindfulness is developed by practicing it: yoga, meditation, or simply stopping to take a deep breath from time to time. If you are attached to your tech, consider an app for mindfulness. There are a number of them that will guide you through a simple meditation or even monitor your use of the phone, reminding you to take a break! Other ideas include taking a moment before turning on music or the television. Be in silence as you unpack after work or get ready to leave in the morning. Don’t rush getting up in the morning. Pay attention to your breathing for a minute or two in order to start your day more grounded. When you find yourself feeling stressed, sit in a chair, put your feet on the floor, close your eyes and focus on your breath for 2 minutes. No matter what you try, the more often you focus on you in the moment, the easier it will become.



E-Cigarettes – Not a Safe Alternative

E-cigarettes are battery operated devices that distribute flavor and nicotine. Electronic cigarettes come in many shapes and sizes and can be called “e-cigs”, “vape pens”, “JUULs”, “mods”, or “tank system”. Users suck on the mouthpiece of the electronic cigarette and breath in a “vapor” as opposed to smoke from a normal cigarette. The question is, are e-cigarettes a safe alternative to regular cigarettes? The answer is no.

This “vapor” released by the e-cigarette is not water vapor--in fact, e-cigarettes don’t release vapor at all. E-cigarettes release fine particles of liquid aerosol that can contain varying levels of nicotine, solvents and flavorings including harmful substances like diacetyl (a chemical linked to the lung disease known as popcorn lung), propylene glycol (anti-freeze), heavy metals, and cancer-causing chemicals. Recent research points to the possibility that exposure to e-cigarette smoke may cause irreversible lung damage.

While not all solutions contain nicotine — the highly addictive ingredient in cigarettes, most do, and the amount of nicotine is not regulated. Some e-cigarettes that are advertised as nicotine-free have been tested to find nicotine. Some e-cigs contain as much as 36 milligrams per milliliter of nicotine, compared to an average of 10 milligrams per milliliter in a cigarette. The popular JUUL pod contains roughly the same amount of nicotine as 20 cigarettes. This high exposure results in increased blood pressure and possibly headaches, dizziness, nausea, and anxiety. For teens and young adults (who account for over 25% of e-cigarette users), nicotine harms the still developing brain.

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Produce of the Month Grapes

There is about a month left in grape season, so it’s not too late to take advantage of summer’s sweet fruit! Grapes are available in green, red or purple varieties – most of them seedless. Grapes are heart healthy and have anti-inflammatory properties.

The Basics: Choose grapes that are firm, plump and show no sign of mold. Store unwashed grapes in the refrigerator for 3-6 days. When ready to use, wash gently and eat! You can freeze grapes for a sweet treat (wash, pat dry and freeze in a single layer on a cookie sheet).

Try This: Add grapes to any salad or serve with cheese for an appetizer or snack. Add sliced grapes to broccoli or brussel sprouts before roasting or try adding diced grapes to your favorite homemade salsa to enjoy on grilled chicken or with corn chips.

The Facts: One cup of grapes is 62 calories and is a very good source of manganese and vitamin K.

Caution: Grapes are a choking hazard for children.





You may have heard the expression, “eat clean.” But do you know what it means? Eating clean means eating food as close to its natural state as possible and replacing processed meals and snacks with fresh, whole food ingredients like vegetables, fruits, nuts, healthy fats and proteins. Why is this important? Because the more natural our food, the more nutritious! Our body was designed to eat this way!

So, what can you do to *eat clean*?

Spend your time in the produce department.

The more fruits and vegetables you eat, the better, so spend most of your grocery shopping time in the produce department. You will get the needed fiber, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, and even protein from eating whole vegetables and fruit! Frozen fruits and vegetables are also a great option for stocking up on healthy ingredients that are easy to prepare in a pinch.

Read the ingredient list.

If you are buying any packaged foods, read the ingredient list located under the nutrition label. The ingredients are listed in order of quantity: the ingredient used in the greatest amount is listed first and the remaining ingredients are listed in descending order. Be sure you can identify each ingredient and avoid long lists of chemical sounding ingredients. If you can't pronounce one or more ingredients, consider putting it back on the shelf.

Eat at home.

Though some restaurants specialize in clean eating, most restaurant meals lack vegetable options and are loaded with salt, sugar and unhealthy fats. Cooking at home allows you to use whole foods and control all added ingredients.

Drink clean.

What you drink is important, too. Avoid sodas, sports drinks, and anything else with added colors or sweeteners. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated!

Buy organic or local.

Choosing organic produce is a great way to eat clean. You can also buy local: farmer's markets, local butchers, etc. Knowing where your food comes from will help you make good dietary choices and choosing organic options reduce your exposure to toxic pesticides and herbicides.

Make It Work for You.

Don't think of eating clean as an all or nothing proposition. Rather, try to eat clean most of the time. Or consider an “eat clean” meal or day. Incorporate a few “eat clean” principles into your weekly meal plan and you'll see how easy it is to eat and feel better.

Workouts + Water

Fitness and hydration go hand in hand. Make sure you know the facts!



Myth: I don't need to hydrate regularly. My body will tell me when I'm thirsty!

Truth: By the time you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated. Drink water regularly, especially during and after exercise or spending time outdoors in the heat.



Myth: Bottled water is better than tap.

Truth: That depends. Water sold in plastic bottles may absorb toxins from the plastic while being shipped or stored. Tap water quality varies from community to community. Your local community or state should have a report on the safety of your water. Purchasing a filtration system (whole house, faucet, or pitcher) can ease your mind about tap water and save you money on bottled water. Fill up a stainless-steel water bottle before heading out for work or the gym.



Myth: Sports drinks are better than water.

Truth: Not necessarily. While some serious athletes may need a sports drink after a lengthy, vigorous workout (like a marathon), water is the best choice for the majority of us. Remember, sports drinks are, for the most part, water and sugar.



Myth: I've gained 5 pounds in a day!

Truth: The daily fluctuations we experience in our weight are mainly due to water retention in our body's cells often caused by the kinds of foods we've eaten. Eating too much salt, sugar, processed foods and carbohydrates, or drinking alcohol can cause temporary "water weight". This happens because the excess salt or sugar binds to the water in our body. You can help reduce bloat and water weight by eating clean, exercising regularly, and staying hydrated with plenty of pure water.

E-Cigarettes – Not a Safe Alternative

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Both children and adults have been poisoned by swallowing, breathing, or absorbing e-cigarette liquid through the skin. E-cigarettes have also caused unintended injuries from defective batteries that catch fire or explode.

E-cigarettes were once seen as a way to reduce smoking but have actually increased smoking behavior, especially in teens and young adults. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention clearly state that the use of e-cigarettes is not safe for teens, young adults, or pregnant women. There is little evidence that, for adults who smoke, switching to e-cigarettes that do not contain nicotine help in the quitting process. In fact, a recent CDC study showed most e-cigarette users instead continue to use both cigarettes and e-cigarettes. For proven methods that can help you quit smoking or vaping, call **1-800-Quit-Now** to talk to a quit coach and learn more about FDA-approved cessation medications like the patch, gums, lozenges, and inhalers.



Q: Hi Erin. I recently completed a 6-week weight loss program I found online. It's been a lot of clean eating and avoiding sugar, caffeine, and so on. I've done really well. I haven't cheated once and have lost 18 pounds. I still have a way to go to reach my goal of 50 pounds but have been fighting cravings the last week or so. I've done some reading that it's okay to have a cheat day once a week. I just need a little something off the plan if possible. What is your take on this?

Samuel G.

A: Hey Samuel. Thanks for reaching out. Awesome job the last few weeks, you should be very proud of yourself. Sounds like you are on the right track. I personally feel you shouldn't deprive yourself 100% when you are trying to lose weight. Having something every once in a while is okay, especially after a 6-week reset of clean eating. Notice how I said a "treat" not a full day. Enjoying something sweet or salty once in a while is realistic and sustainable for a healthy lifestyle, but if you binge for a whole day it can become more difficult to return to eating clean.

Don't go hog wild, and choose something that you know will satisfy your craving so you can feel content and move on. Your number one focus when treating yourself is monitoring your portion size. If your body has gotten used to eating clean, reintroducing unhealthy foods can make you feel sick: I wouldn't recommend going and eating half a pizza or a whole pint of ice cream. Purchase an individual portion or split a treat with a friend or spouse to help keep you accountable. Look into recipes for yummy treats you can make at home that are still healthy. I have a sweet tooth so I like to make sorbet made with real fruit or whole-grain energy bites that taste like a cookie.

If you plan to have a bigger or healthier meal maybe get in an extra workout that day and drink plenty of water. Notice how your body reacts after your cheat meal. If you can still lose weight with one cheat meal or treat that is great, but if it hinders your progress and leads to getting off track I'd recommend to stay away from those foods for a while. I hope this advice helps and that you reach your goal!

Dedicated to your success,

Erin M Long, B.S., NSCA-CPT

Being Kind to Others and Yourself is Good for Our Health

Most of us grew up being taught to be nice and kind to other people, whether it be school mates, neighbors, church friends, etc. Science shows that as children, we are biologically wired to be kind and with practice and repetition we can hone in on this trait. Also, science shows that kindness is good for our health. As we get older and with outside influences, some of us seem to lose this inherent trait.

Here are some ways to be kind. When we are kind it affects our pleasure centers in the brain. Serotonin levels are boosted when we do nice things for others, this is called the “helpers high”. You can pay it forward while in line waiting for your order in a restaurant by paying for lunch or coffee for the next person in line.

1. Kindness eases anxiety. Anxiety is very common and there are several ways to reduce the symptoms of anxiety, such as meditation, exercise, mindfulness. However, being nice is an easy and inexpensive way to keep symptoms of anxiety at bay. When you’re feeling a little anxious you can smile at someone or call a friend and get together for lunch.
2. Kindness is good for your heart. Besides affecting the chemical balance in our brain, it also affects the chemical balance in your heart. Acts of kindness release oxytocin which releases nitric oxytocin which dilates the blood vessels. This reduces blood pressure; therefore, oxytocin is known as the “cardioprotective” hormone protecting the heart by lowering blood pressure. Kindness strengthens the heart physically and emotionally.
3. Kindness can help you live longer. According to Health.com we are at greater risk if we do not have a strong network of family and friends. When we are kind to others we develop strong, meaningful relationships. So, make new friends or strengthen your kindness towards the family and friends in your life.
4. Kindness might prevent illness. If diseases are associated with inflammation in the body and oxytocin reduces inflammation as mentioned above, then being kind could prevent illness.

Kindness is free, and it has healthy benefits, try it out, smile more or volunteer, pay it forward and see how you feel.

Need Help with Being Kind?

Call 219-662-3730 or 1-800-747-7262

EAP Webinar on Being Kind to Others and Yourself is Good for Our Health & Medicare - What You Need to Know Before You Retire on August 21 at Noon

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