Destress: Is Simplicity the Answer?
By Capital Regional Medical Center

Is your life more or less complicated than it was 10 years ago? More and more people are finding out that, in spite of technology and other modern conveniences, they have less time, get less sleep and are more stressed than they were a decade ago. Can simplicity help to relieve some of this stress?

Making changes to simplify certain aspects of your life can be the antidote to living in such a complex society. However, simplification is a very individual matter. What is considered simple and stress relieving to one person might be burdensome and stressful to another. The most important part of the simplification process is introspection—taking an honest and in-depth look at yourself and your life and then identifying things that can be changed. What makes the concept of simplicity difficult for some people is that it implies that you must give up something, but many people derive invaluable benefits from simplifying their lives—more time, freedom, self-expression and a chance to live with more clarity and meaning.

Here are ways to simplify your life:

- Do your shopping all at once and preferably in the same place. Shop during off-hours.
- Reduce the clutter in your home and office. Throw out things that you do not use.
- Donate your clothes that you have not worn in a couple of years.
- Downscale to a smaller home or less expensive car.
- Make a conscious effort to reflect upon and appreciate the simple things in your life.

For the full article, visit Capital Regional Medical Center’s Health Library.

Claim Your Reimbursement by April 18

Don’t miss the deadline to claim your flexible spending account (FSA) reimbursement! FSAs have a “use it or lose it” policy, which means that you forfeit any amounts unused and not reimbursed for services received during the plan year. You may use what you set aside for the plan year for services up to March 15 of the following year.

Claim your reimbursement account benefits by submitting a claim form and appropriate supporting documentation to People First by April 18. The regular deadline to file is April 15; however, the 2017 deadline has been extended to April 18 to align with Tax Day.

For more information about FSAs, visit http://mybenefits.myflorida.com/health/tax_favored_spending_accounts.

A Laugh A Day To Keep The Doctor Away?

April is National Humor Month. You may have heard the saying “Laughter is the best medicine,” but did you know that research shows that laughter can have a positive impact on your health? According to the Mayo Clinic, a good laugh can have worthwhile short-term and long-term effects. In the short term, laughter can activate and relieve your stress response, stimulate many organs and soothe tension. In the long term, it can improve your immune system, relieve pain, increase personal satisfaction and improve your mood. So this month, focus a little more on what makes you laugh, and maybe offer a little laughter to the people in your life too.

Watch this video to learn more about the benefits of laughter: http://www.benefitfocusmedia.com/content/benefits-laughter

The information contained in this newsletter should not be construed as medical advice. Please see your health care provider.
Self-Care During Tough Times
By E4 Health

If you’re like most people, you accept that life comes with day-to-day stress. But if you’ve been experiencing unusual or prolonged stress, it’s time to practice some re-centering techniques for your own self-care. Try these:

- **Be honest about what is at the root of your stress.** Because prolonged stress leads to fatigue and irritability, small things can provoke a strong reaction, even if there’s a larger issue that’s at the root of it. When this happens, it can be easy to place blame on the small provocation while overlooking what’s really going on. Ask yourself what’s really causing you stress and what you can do to address it.

- **Take a timeout.** That shouldn’t mean compromising your lifestyle, but for your mental wellbeing, you should allow yourself a break from whatever is provoking your stress until you re-center.

- **Practice daily affirmations of gratitude.** The worst part of stress is that it can make us feel negative. Regain control over negativity by setting aside a few minutes every day to identify what you’re grateful for. When you give it some thought, you can remember that there are positives, even if stress has been overshadowing them.

- **Talk to someone.** While it can be healthy to vent to a friend or colleague, if you’re needing more professional guidance, call 844-208-7067 to speak to an E4 Health counselor who is qualified to listen to the issues that are causing you stress and offer personalized strategies for coping.

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Stressed? Take Time to Breathe, Stretch and Move
By Florida Blue

**Keep Your Stress in Check**
Many of us spend so much time stressed that it becomes a normal part of life, but your body will let you know when the stress has become too much. One of the most important things you can do is pay attention to your body’s clues and take steps to relax.

**Observe your muscles and insides.** Are your muscles tight/sore? Is your stomach tight or sore? Do you find yourself frequently clenching your hands?

**Observe your breath.** Is your breath shallow? Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. Watch your hands rise and fall with each breath. Notice when you breathe fully or when you “forget” to breathe.

**Lower Your Health Risks**
Chronic (long-term) stress puts you at an increased risk of many health problems, including the following:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive problems
- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration impairment

The good news is that there are things you can do every day to help lower your stress and your health risks.

**Take a Break**
When your body says “I’m stressed,” give yourself a break. There are many ways to reduce stress, and you’ll start feeling calmer in just a few minutes.

Three quick techniques to remember are to move, stretch and breathe. You’ll notice how quickly your body begins to relax, and soon, taking breaks will become a healthy habit.

- **Get up and move.** Choose an activity that works for you: march in place; walk a flight of stairs; or simply wiggle your arms and legs. Moving helps improve the oxygen to your brain, and within three to five minutes, your body will start to relax.

- **Stretch.** Stretching tight muscles will help to relieve muscle tension. Hold your stretch for about 15-20 seconds to feel the benefits.

- **Breathe.** Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body. This is because breathing deeply sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. The brain then sends this message to your body. The things that happen when you are stressed, such as an increased heart rate, fast breathing and high blood pressure, all decrease as you breathe deeply.
Controlling Portions

By AvMed

Portion control can make a huge difference in your diet; in fact, a study showed that 38 percent of people who practiced portion control for two years lost 5 percent or more of their body weight. You don’t have to starve yourself. Just follow these tips to make sure you’re eating the right portion sizes for different foods:

• **Find the balance between starving yourself and overeating.** Plan at least three meals and one snack every day—and try not to go more than five hours without eating at least something small.

• **Get to know serving sizes and number of calories.** Plan ahead and choose your foods wisely!

• **When eating out, remember that restaurants serve above and beyond the recommended portions for one person.** Share large entrees with a friend, or set aside half to take home before you start eating.

• **Plate your food instead of putting a serving dish on your dinner table.** That way, you can avoid those second and thirdhelpings after you’re already full.

• **Don’t eat straight from the package.** The bigger the container, the more you tend to eat. Take out a single serving, and save the rest for later.

• **Snacking is not the enemy.** Don’t worry about spoiling your dinner. Go ahead and grab a healthy snack, like a piece of fruit, if you’re getting hungry before your next meal. This will help you avoid overeating when you sit down for lunch or dinner.

• **Know the difference between serving size and portion size.** If a bag of chips contains two servings, then eat only half the bag, or make sure to double the calorie, fat and carbohydrate numbers on the nutrition label in your daily count.

• **The most important thing you can do is to be mindful of what you are eating.** Planning your meals and eating slowly will make portion control as easy as (a small piece of) pie.

Stay Up to Date on Childhood Immunizations

By Capital Health Plan

Vaccines save lives every day, and in an effort to educate people about the preventive power of vaccines, April 24-30 is designated as World Immunization Week.

Immunizations, or vaccines, are the safest, most effective way to protect you and your child from certain infectious diseases. They work by helping your body develop antibodies against specific diseases so that you are better able to fight off these infections when you’re exposed to them. Immunizations also help reduce the spread of diseases to others around you, especially to those with compromised immune systems such as the elderly or people with cancer. Most vaccines cause only minor side effects that may include fever or redness at the injection site.

While a vaccine cannot completely guarantee that a person will not get sick, it will make the impact of the disease much less severe if someone contracts it. Plus, the cost of an immunization is significantly lower than treating the disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides vaccination schedules for children from birth through age 18 and for those who missed immunizations during their early childhood. To keep track of your child’s immunizations, the CDC has provided easy-to-use downloadable immunization trackers for infants and children (birth through 6 years old), preteens and teens (7 through 18 years old) and adults (19 years and older). Completing a tracker and keeping the document stored in a safe place will enable you to show proof of your child’s immunizations.

Visit the [Healthwise® Knowledgebase](#) to find printable immunization schedules, in-depth articles, videos and interactive tools. Call your doctor to schedule any needed vaccines for your family to help them stay healthy.
Help is always available
People with alcohol problems have different reasons for beginning drinking.

However, one thing is certain: Everyone can get help.

Warning signs
Many people with alcohol issues are successful people who work every day. They aren’t easy to spot.

Here are a few signs:

• **Drinking more** to get the same feeling;
• **Demonstrating withdrawal symptoms**, like hangovers or shaking;
• **Exhibiting a loss of control**, with an overpowering urge to drink; and
• **Experiencing health and legal issues** like injuries or arrests.

Who’s at risk
Anyone can have a drinking problem at any time in life. Someone is more at risk if he or she

• Has a family history of alcohol abuse
• Starts drinking at an early age; and
• Has a behavioral condition like anxiety or depression

The first step
Many people do achieve recovery and go on to live full lives of long-term stability. So if you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol, get help today.

You can start by calling your family doctor. He or she can provide medical advice and treatment options or provide referrals for other services.

More resources
There are many other avenues to turn to for help:

• **Your community resources.** Look for a local or state agency that works with drug and alcohol treatment programs.
• **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).** This group holds meetings in many cities and towns across the country, and it has a clear history of success.
• **Al-Anon.** If you’re a friend or a family member of a drinker, here’s a place where you can find understanding and support.

State of Florida employees have the opportunity to take time off with pay for up to one hour per week, not to exceed five hours per calendar month, to take part in the Governor’s Mentoring Initiative by participating in school or community volunteer activities. Speak with your supervisor to learn more about how to take advantage of this benefit, and visit the MyBenefits website for more information.

April 23-29 is National Volunteer Week, so use this week to get involved in volunteer opportunities in your area and to enjoy the benefits of volunteering. Find volunteer opportunities at https://www.volunteerflorida.org/volunteer/.