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Wellness in your
Life

Your Personal Environment

The wind blows in excessive amounts in Kansas. Does that affect our health?

Coworkers are always sniping at the things we do. Does that affect our health?

Family members are always depressed about one thing or another. Does that affect our health?

The computer screen we look at most of the day at work does not align with our chair. Does that affect our health?

Environmental factors in our lives do affect our health, whether it is the physical conditions we must work and live in or

the social relationships we must live with at home and at work.

We can see the “right” health care providers for each condition that arises. We can exercise the “right” amount and type. We can take supplements and medication properly. And we still may have to adjust for the conditions around us, both at work and at home. Our environments are a major factor in our health.

This month we will explore our personal environments, both physical and social, and at work and home.

Calendar

Mar. 8 - Day-light Savings Begins

Mar. 17 - St. Patrick's Day

Mar. 20 - Spring Begins

Mar. 26 - 27 - Dr. Cheney and Dr. Buchanan will be out of the office.

Our Home Environment

Sorry, you can't choose your parents - eliminating your control over your genetic influences on your health. But you can control many of the conditions in your personal environment - your house, your exposures, your diet and even your habits to an extent.

Our physical environment - at home, work, friends, shopping, and in between - has an impact on our physical well being (accidents, etc.), but also on our health.

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences published a pamphlet in 2000 called **20 Easy Steps to Personal Environmental Health Now** (webcenter@niehs.nih.gov). We are going to sample only a few of its suggestions along with some other ideas here.

The most hazardous substances in the home are household and garden chemicals. Always read labels for proper use and make sure they are out of the reach of children and pets.

Be sure your batteries are good in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. An additional problem, mostly (but not only) for smokers may be radon exposure. Radon tests are

inexpensive and a simple way to be safe.

Growing plants can be an easy way to keep the air in your home clean and fresh. Make sure that when you think you have a cold, that it's not actually an allergy to something in the house, whether pets, dust mites, or cleaning products. Sometimes the aller-

gies could be to foods, so don't rule that out when checking.

Sound can also be a health hazard, whether it's from the kid's music, toys, or the vacuum cleaner or dish washer.

Many colds and other contagious diseases are spread from one member of the household to another.

Be sure to wash hands and food preparation surfaces. While you're at it, be sure to prevent colds as much as possible with a healthy diet and regular consumption of antioxidants.

Be sure your living areas are well lighted, to avoid accidents. Check for slippery surfaces or install slip-resistant floors. Have abundant handrails available if that is going to be a problem.

Getting abundant sleep and exercise are also concerns for your home environment. Control of light, noise and temperature are important for adequate sleep. Enjoying outdoor gardening and walking are also good ways to "sneak" in some exercise.

Home computers with access to the internet are becoming important sources of information for maintaining a healthy home and lifestyle. If information found there seems inconsistent with other information or there is something hard to understand, double check it with your health care provider, health department or even the county extension office.

Friends and family can be a source of information, but also a source for a healthy lifestyle as well. (see next page).



“Social support is one of the most important factors in predicting the physical health and well-being of everyone, ranging from childhood through older adults,” begins Corey M. Clark from the Rochester Institute of Technology in a report on **Relations Between Social Support and Physical Health**.

Support from family and friends can have a positive effect on our mental well-being, but there is also critical research showing it has a positive effect on our physical health.

A social support network is different from support group or even what is being called social networks. Your social support network is made up of family, friends and peers, while a support group is generally a structured meeting run by (but not always) a health provider. A social network is the connections you may develop using things like “Facebook,” “MySpace,” “Twitter,” “Flickr,” “YouTube,” or your own email or instant messaging.

These social network devices may provide you a means to communicate within your social support network, but they may not be private or supportive enough to provide the social support we need for more specific problems.

A social support network can give you a sense of belonging, increased sense of self-worth and varying levels of security. Many of the studies that have been conducted so far focus on the reduction of stress and anxiety, and the support to get through emotional traumas such as divorce or the death of a loved one. Some studies

are looking into the physical wellness issues, and it is becoming clear that social support can help in this area also.

One of the factors in this may be the reduction of stress. While we look at stress as a cause of emotional problems, depression and anxiety, stress is also a contributing factor for things like heart problems, high blood pressure and even high blood glucose levels.

How do we cultivate our support networks? Focus on the word “network.” As we interact with friends, they may introduce us to others who may become friends.

Also, stay in touch. Phone your friends, return e-mails and go to coffee when you have the time. Sometimes you need to make the first move and contact friends rather than waiting for them to contact you.

Don’t compete with friends over who had the best accomplishment and be a good listener when someone else is celebrating a good thing, as well as when they are having problems.

At the same time, if you are trying to get yourself out of some negative thoughts or habits, don’t encourage friends who have similar problems who don’t want to change. Be a positive influence while you surround yourself with others who are positive for you.

Relationships change as you age. As old friends move out of your life, cultivate new friends. An investment in quality friendships will pay off in better health and a brighter outlook in the years to come.

Our Work Environment

Our work environments can easily be seen as affecting our physical and emotional health, depending on what our work is. Cartoon strips like “Dilbert” and “Blondie” show us ways of relating with our environment and our co-workers. It may be argued that the physical and mental environment at work is one of the most important factors in our productivity as well as our emotional and physical well-being.

We are becoming more and more in contact with computers and telephones at work, and these as well as other office machines can have a positive or negative impact on our health.



Also the support from the office chair or the desk we sit at, has a

big impact on our physical comfort as well as our health.

With tongue only slightly in cheek, **Ali Hale** writing in her blog, offers suggestions for creating a work environment that is guaranteed to “**drag your mood down**” and give you plenty of excuses for why you can’t finish your project, or why you must take the day off.

“First off,” she writes, “**avoid privacy.**” Work where you can be overlooked by everyone and interrupted frequently. While working in a group is

beneficial for some projects, some privacy is also needed.

Another big one is “**make it cramped.**” This is closely related to “**clutter your desk**” and “**leave it dirty.**” These working together or separately will definitely help to bring your productivity and mood down to the floor (if you can find a bare spot).

Next have “**crappy lighting, an uncomfortable chair and desk,**” and make sure the “**noise level**” will distract and annoy you enough to keep you from your work..

These factors will definitely help to make a work environment less than desirable. “Calling in sick” does not always relate to our health condition.

Ron Prewitt on the other hand, is a “life coach” who has some suggestions for a **healthy work environment.**

An office or work site where “**employees laugh often**” is going to be more pleasant for working. Does management truly have an open-door policy? If “**employees can freely share their ideas**” they will feel more secure and accepted in their work.

If “**employee values and expectations are clear**” there is less anxiety and second guessing. Codes of conduct, an easily understood job description and professional values are vital and should be reviewed frequently.

Frivolous demands and activities can add stress to an already busy schedule. Try to keep “**the work simple**” if possible and watch out for tasks that are beyond our capabilities.

And, “**employees should have strong connections with each other.**” Working with people you respect and

care about will go a great distance to increase a pleasant and productive work place.

In 1997 a report was issued by the Department of Energy concerning the effects that improved buildings and indoor environments would have on health-care costs and sick leave as well as worker performance. This report concluded a productivity gain between \$30 and \$150 billion annually could be achieved with some building improvements.

The health effects they were studying included communicable respiratory disease (e.g., common colds and influenza), allergy and asthma symptoms, and acute sick building syndrome such as headaches, and irritation of the eyes, nose, throat, and skin.

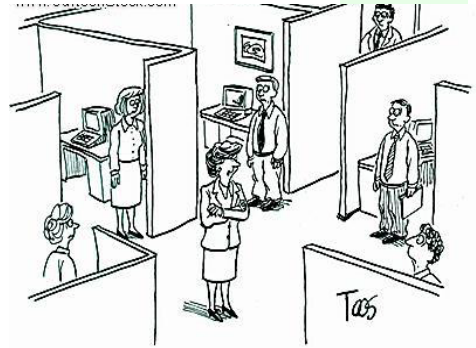
Social support networks are also important in the workplace. A study of 268 Japanese day workers found that "greater job strain and lower social support at the workplace may be associated with increased concentrations of HbA1c (blood sugar)." This may also be a connection between job strain or social support and coronary heart disease in the workplace.

Back pain and repetitive motion are common conditions in many workplaces. Around half of all working Americans admit to having back pain at some time during the year. One of the most common reasons for missing work, back pain is the second most common condition for seeing a health care provider.

The most common cause of back pain has to do with the chairs we sit in at work, the positions we take while in those chairs, and things like the angle

of our computer screen or the height of our desk.

The majority of this back pain



"I like to end these meetings with a group hug, if you'll step out of the cubicles."

can be treated through simple adjustments at your chiropractor's office. Knowing how to prevent back strain can also cut down on the amount of time away from work.

Some ways to prevent back strain is to maintain a healthy diet and weight, maintain a proper posture, both sitting and standing and wear comfortable shoes.

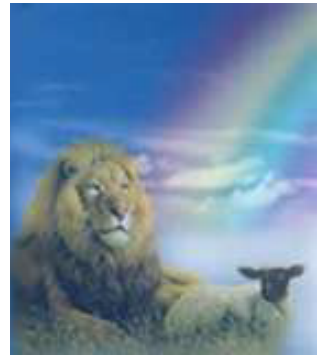
More suggestions are to remain active, avoiding prolonged bed rest or inactivity. Warm up before exercising or physical activity, and sleep on a medium firm mattress for proper support of your back.

The workplace environment is as important to our emotional and physical health as our homes, families and social support networks outside of the workplace. We are never isolated symptoms but a web of factors inside of an environment. All components need to be considered in preventing or healing disease and maintaining our wellness.

From the Desk of . . .

Bruce Anderson, D.C.

March - In like a Lion, Out like a Lamb



There's that old joke from when we were kids: On April 1st why were all of the soldiers so tired? Because they had 31 days of March.

I want to spend some time visiting with you about walking and why this is so important. Whether it's a leisurely evening stroll, a brisk cardio (heart enhancing) based quick walk or jogging, this is one of the healthiest things we can do for ourselves.

When considering the definition of walking or the purpose behind it, anyone can figure out what walking is. It is primarily a means of self locomotion in order to transport ourselves from one point to another.

Walking is both indirectly and directly related to our cardiovascular system. What does walking have to do with helping keep my heart and arteries healthy? Let's explore these items further.

First, our red blood cells (which transport oxygen from the blood to our body's tissues) are manufactured inside the bone marrow (spongy fluid inside the bone). When we walk, the impact of the long bones of the leg striking the ground, stimulate this red blood cell production. Napping in the recliner does not.

Second, the cardiac system (being divided into two basic categories)

has the red blood of the cardio system and the blue blood of the pulmonary (venous) system. The pulmonary (blood that needs to get to the lungs) has only one way to get from the toes, feet and legs back to the lungs and that is by walking. There are valves in the veins of the legs which, when squeezed upon by the leg muscles during walking, will slowly move this blue blood upward towards the lungs. Every step we take allows this blood to return to the lungs. Napping in the recliner does not. We were made to walk.

We may have jobs that require much walking: forestry, fish and game, nursing, chiropractic or waiting on tables to name a few. Those of us with chair jobs like clerical, administrative, sales clerk or teacher to name a few, will have to make an extra effort to get some extra walking in.

So, how much walking should we do and how often? If location and time permits, 2 miles or 40 min per day, would be desirable. Of course play counts: bike riding, sports, playing tennis, (yes) golf too, walking the dogs, working around the yard. Something to consider when the warmer temperatures settle in this spring. An excellent way to have "**Wellness in your Life...**"

Dustin S. Cheney, D.C., D.A.B.C.I.

Our "Health Stimulus Package"

As we talked about our environment in this article, I began to think about the things that matter most to us. We certainly value our homes, our families, our relationships with our friends, and for many of us we value our careers.

In this time of economic unrest, many people are forgoing the "extra's" in life trying to pinch a few pennies here and there. This is not only a good idea, but it is certainly required, in order to "weather the storm."

However, there comes a time when saving pennies costs you dollars. The perfectly analogy is the car that is out of alignment. If your vehicle is out of alignment and you don't repair it, it wont take long before the tires, tie rods,



and eventually the entire front end is ruined.

Your health is the same way. Putting off 'till tomorrow (or financially better times), what needs to be done today, not only causes increased costs, but shortens our lives. This is not an option in my opinion.

We are all waiting for an "economic stimulus" package. Now let's have a health stimulus package. Here is my offer: I will give the first 50 people who contact me via email a \$20 credit in our office. Our email address is

editor@WellnessInYourLife.com and we request that only one member per household respond. This small token affords us the opportunity to give you a little **"Wellness In Your Life...."**

Massage is Real Medicine

Massage, as a therapy, can help with a number of physical and mental conditions, beyond making us feel good.

Helping to boost our immune system, massage can help us ward off colds and other conditions that need a strong immune system to keep us healthy. Cortisol is a hormone that is necessary when we are in the "fight or flight" mode, but too much cortisol can kill our immune cells. Massage helps "turn off" the cortisol so the body can go back to its normal state.

Last month we saw how controlling the cortisol level can increase the serotonin and dopamine so we feel less

stress, anxiety, and depression. This can also relax us by increasing delta waves - those linked with deep sleep - making it easier for us to get to sleep and to feel more relaxed when we wake up.

Massage also helps reduce pain levels in lower backs, necks and even with PMS. You might try combining a good relaxing massage with some "medicinal" dark chocolate to possibly reduce stress levels.

Jennifer Kibbee is the massage therapist available at the Phillipsburg Chiropractic Center. She has hours available on Tue. and Thurs. evenings and on the first Sat. of the month. Call the Center at 785-543-2700 to schedule an appointment.

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