In This Issue

- Your Best Year Yet!
- Are You Ready For Change?
- Tips For Healthy Weight Management
- Meditation: A Simple, Fast Way to Reduce Stress
- Five Tips For Staying Healthy

This Month’s Focus: Your Best Year Yet!

Happy New Year from Member Matters!

For many of us, the dawn of a new year brings hope of a year even better than the last.

On that note, we thank you for your survey feedback to help make Member Matters even better. According to our survey results, the most in-demand focus area for Member Matters was wellness, followed by emotional health; family and relationships; financial and legal; and career and work.

Our January edition focuses on wellness and is packed with healthy lifestyle tips to help you make 2014 your best year yet.
Are You Ready for Change?

Nobody's perfect, so there's probably something about your life, habits or routine that you'd like to change. Maybe you want to eat healthier or exercise more. To improve your chances of making a long-lasting change, try these tips:

1. **LIST THE BENEFITS OF HEALTHY CHANGE.**

To increase your chance of success, remember to pick just one or two areas of your life that you want to change. Then write down exactly what you could gain by making a change. You might note that you'd have more energy if you exercised, for example, or lower your blood pressure if you ate healthier meals.

2. **EVALUATE YOUR READINESS FOR CHANGE.**

Behavior change happens over time, not overnight. Knowing where you are in the change process can help you develop a plan for moving forward - and ultimately achieving lifelong change. Which stage of change describes you?

- **Considering making a change** - You're thinking about change, and see some of the benefits. You see a lot of roadblocks, too, though. You're just not sure if change is possible or will be worth the effort.
- **Planning or taking some action** - Change now looks like a real possibility, and you believe that the benefits will be worth the work. You have a plan for overcoming roadblocks and you're starting to lay the foundation for change.
- **Making the change** - You are making the change, and working hard to make it part of your routine. You are committed to your goal.

3. **MOVE TOWARDS CHANGE BY CREATING A S-M-A-R-T GOAL.**

A S-M-A-R-T goal is:

- **Specific** - You know exactly what you need to do.
- **Measurable** - You can track your progress easily and objectively.
- **Attainable** - You have a clear vision of the steps you'll take.
- **Realistic** - You are honest with yourself about the challenges, and have a good plan for confronting them.
- **Timely** - You have a clear, reasonable timeline.

Example of a SMART goal: For the next three months (timely and measurable), I will go for a brisk walk (specific, realistic and attainable).

When creating your S-M-A-R-T goal, try to frame your goal in terms of what you can control.

4. **STAY ON TRACK.**

It takes time for a healthy change to become a solid habit. In the meantime, you're more likely to stay committed to your goal if you:

- **Expect the unexpected** - Be flexible, and develop a back-up plan to keep you moving forward when changes in your life, mood or motivation threaten to stop you in your tracks. Have an
exercise video for rainy days, go-to healthy recipes for busy evenings and a good pep talk for moments of temptation. If you do slip up, learn from the experience and get back on track.

- **Have fun** - Make sure that something about the change is enjoyable for you. For example, find a form of exercise you enjoy, and switch it up if you begin to get bored. Many people are more committed to exercise if they have a work-out buddy. Others appreciate the chance to get lost in their favorite music or a good audiobook. If you're changing your diet, experiment with new recipes and ingredients and share your favorites with friends.

- **Celebrate success** - Make a list of rewards that you can afford, and that won't take you away from your goal. Celebrate large and small victories with something from your list - a good book (and an undisturbed hour to read it), fresh flowers, an evening out. Making new changes can be challenging, so take time to congratulate yourself for staying on track!

**NEED MORE HELP?**
Check out the [Readiness for Healthy Change](#) e-learning program on our member website for extra tips on making a change. MHN's member website provides a variety of resources - from articles to assessments - to help you get fit, eat well, quit smoking and achieve other goals.

---

**Tips For Healthy Weight Management**

Get started with healthy weight management in the new year by learning strategies for enhancing your weight loss efforts with this training.

Check out the [Tips for Healthy Weight Management](#) e-learning program on our member website for extra tips on enhancing your health. MHN's member website provides a variety of resources - from articles to assessments - to help you get fit, eat well, quit smoking and achieve other goals.

---

**The Basics of Exercise**

A report of the U.S. Surgeon General states that more than 20 percent of all people in the U.S. are overweight and do not exercise enough. There's a simple solution. Exercise can not only help you lose weight, it can add years to your life and help you feel good about yourself!

**EXERCISE: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?**

- Increases your energy level
- Strengthens your heart and lungs
- Lowers risk for diabetes and stroke
- Lowers blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Develops stronger muscles
- Improves flexibility
- Relieves stress
- Helps you control weight and appetite
- Improves sleep
- Boosts self-esteem

**ACTIVE KIDS = HEALTHIER KIDS**

The number of overweight children in the U.S. has tripled within the last 20 years. More than a third of high school students do not get regular exercise. You can help your family become more active by doing the following:

- Make a list of activities you and your family would like to do, then do them! Remember, walking is one of the best activities you can do.
- Set a good example. Kids will follow your example. Take a family walk in the park. Walk to school or the store instead of driving.
- Make housework a family event. Let kids vacuum the carpet or mow the grass.
- Limit TV watching and the amount of time your kids play video or computer games.
- Send kids outside. Encourage a game of tag or hide and seek for younger children. Roller-skating, baseball, basketball, Frisbee or kickball are great for older kids.
- Encourage kids to try team sports. Check out after school activities.

**EXERCISE SAFELY**

To exercise safely every time, follow these steps:

- Take five minutes to warm up before you exercise. Walk, stretch or march in place or use an exercise bike on the lowest level.
- Listen to your body. Pain is a warning sign. Stop if it hurts.
- Take the talk test. If you can't carry a conversation while exercising, you're working too hard. Work hard enough to increase your heart rate and still be able to talk.
- Allow your body to adjust to warmer weather. As it gets hot in the summer, exercise slowly and build up to a comfortable level.
- Exercise during cooler times of day. If possible, exercise in the morning or before sunset. Be careful exercising outdoors after dark.
- Exercise in safe, open places. Find safe trails to walk, run or bicycle that are away from traffic.
- Cool down for three to five minutes after exercise. Walk, stretch or march in place or use an exercise bike on the lowest level. Slowly bring your heart rate down to normal.
- Finish with five to seven minutes of stretching. Hold each stretch for 10 to 15 seconds. Avoid bouncing.

**START SMART**

When you're ready to begin:

- Choose an activity you enjoy. The best type of exercise is the one that you will do!
- Start slowly. Think about how much you exercise now and what you can do.
- Get 30 minutes of exercise on four or more days each week. You can do 30 minutes once a day or 10 minutes three times a day.
- Wear comfortable clothes to move freely. Wear shoes with rubber soles and cushioning to help prevent injury.
• Bring fluids with you. Drink two to four glasses of water (16 to 32 ounces) for every hour of exercise or try a sports drink that provides minerals such as sodium and potassium lost in sweat during extended exercise.

Note: You should always check with your doctor before you start an exercise program, especially if you have a chronic health condition like diabetes or high blood pressure.

WHAT DOES "MODERATE" MEAN?
Moderate means not exercising too much or too little. In order to get the right amount of exercise most days, try:

• Washing a car for 45 to 60 minutes.
• Gardening for 30-45 minutes.
• Playing basketball for 30 minutes.
• Bicycling five miles in 30 minutes.
• Dancing fast for 30 minutes.
• Pushing a stroller a mile and a half in 30 minutes.
• Walking two miles in 30 minutes (15 min./mile).
• Swimming laps for 20 minutes.
• Stair walking for 15 minutes.

THE RIGHT MOVES
Here's help getting started or staying motivated:

• Write out your exercise goal. Include the kind of exercise you'll do to reach your goal.
• Be realistic. If you are a beginner, start walking three days a week for 10 minutes each day.
• Make it twice the fun! Work out to an exercise video or your favorite music. Use hand weights or exercise bands while talking on the phone.
• Lean on your friends and co-workers. Keep a pair of walking shoes at work. Help motivate one another to stick with it.
• Switch your routine. If you walk one day, swim or ride a bike on another.
• Put it on your calendar. It is harder to make excuses when you've marked the date.
• Keep it simple! Choose a time and a place that help make it easy for you to exercise.

EXERCISE ANSWERS
Here are answers to the most common questions about exercise:

How often should I exercise?
Aerobic exercise helps get your heart rate up. Try swimming, fast walking, bicycling: three to five times a week.

Strength-building exercise helps your muscles become stronger. Try weight training: two to three times a week.

Flexibility exercise helps loosen up your body. Try stretches: every day.

How long should I exercise?
Aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise such as, basketball, gardening or walking fast on four or more days a week. Or, aim to get at least 15-20 minutes of more intense exercise such as
jogging, bicycling or jumping rope on four or more days a week. Encourage children to exercise one hour a day.

**How hard should I exercise?**
It depends on your health, age and fitness level. When you exercise, your body needs more oxygen and your heart pumps faster. Check your [target heart rate](#) to see if you need to change your exercise level.

---

**Meditation: A Simple, Fast Way to Reduce Stress**

Meditation can wipe away the day’s stress, bringing with it inner peace. See how you can easily learn to practice meditation whenever you need it most.

If stress has you anxious, tense and worried, consider trying meditation. Spending even a few minutes in meditation can restore your calm and inner peace.

Anyone can practice meditation. It's simple and inexpensive, and it doesn't require any special equipment. And you can practice meditation wherever you are — whether you're out for a walk, riding the bus, waiting at the doctor's office or even in the middle of a difficult business meeting.

**UNDERSTANDING MEDITATION**

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years. Meditation originally was meant to help deepen understanding of the sacred and mystical forces of life. These days, meditation is commonly used for relaxation and stress reduction.

Meditation is considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. Meditation produces a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This process results in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.

**BENEFITS OF MEDITATION**

Meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace and balance that benefits both your emotional well-being and your overall health. And these benefits don't end when your meditation session ends. Meditation can help carry you more calmly through your day and can even improve certain medical conditions.

**Meditation and emotional well-being**

When you meditate, you clear away the information overload that builds up every day and contributes to your stress.

The emotional benefits of meditation include:

- Gaining a new perspective on stressful situations
- Building skills to manage your stress
- Increasing self-awareness
- Focusing on the present
• Reducing negative emotions

**Meditation and illness**

Meditation also might be useful if you have a medical condition, especially one that may be worsened by stress. While a growing body of scientific research supports the health benefits of meditation, some researchers believe it's not yet possible to draw conclusions about the possible benefits of meditation.

With that in mind, some research suggests that meditation may help such conditions as:

- Allergies
- Anxiety disorders
- Asthma
- Binge eating
- Cancer
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Pain
- Sleep problems
- Substance abuse

Be sure to talk to your health care provider about the pros and cons of using meditation if you have any of these conditions or other health problems. In some cases, meditation can worsen symptoms associated with certain mental health conditions. Meditation isn't a replacement for traditional medical treatment. But it may be a useful addition to your other treatment.

**TYPES OF MEDITATION**

Meditation is an umbrella term for the many ways to a relaxed state of being. There are many types of meditation and relaxation techniques that have meditation components. All share the same goal of achieving inner peace.

Ways to meditate can include:

- **Guided meditation.** Sometimes called guided imagery or visualization, with this method of meditation you form mental images of places or situations you find relaxing. You try to use as many senses as possible, such as smells, sights, sounds and textures. You may be led through this process by a guide or teacher.

- **Mantra meditation.** In this type of meditation, you silently repeat a calming word, thought or phrase to prevent distracting thoughts.

- **Mindfulness meditation.** This type of meditation is based on being mindful, or having an increased awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment. You broaden your conscious awareness. You focus on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath. You can observe your thoughts and emotions but let them pass without judgment.

- **Qi gong.** This practice generally combines meditation, relaxation, physical movement and breathing exercises to restore and maintain balance. Qi gong (CHEE-gung) is part of traditional Chinese medicine.
• **Tai chi.** This is a form of gentle Chinese martial arts. In tai chi (TIE-chee), you perform a self-paced series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner while practicing deep breathing.

• **Transcendental meditation.** You use a mantra, such as a word, sound or phrase repeatedly silently, to narrow your conscious awareness and eliminate all thoughts from your mind. You focus exclusively on your mantra to achieve a state of perfect stillness and consciousness.

• **Yoga.** You perform a series of postures and controlled breathing exercises to promote a more flexible body and a calm mind. As you move through poses that require balance and concentration, you’re encouraged to focus less on your busy day and more on the moment.

**ELEMENTS OF MEDITATION**

Different types of meditation may include different features to help you meditate. These may vary depending on whose guidance you follow or who’s teaching a class. Some of the most common features in meditation include:

• **Focused attention.** Focusing your attention is generally one of the most important elements of meditation. Focusing your attention is what helps free your mind from the many distractions that cause stress and worry. You can focus your attention on such things as a specific object, an image, a mantra, or even your breathing.

• **Relaxed breathing.** This technique involves deep, even-paced breathing using the diaphragm muscle to expand your lungs. The purpose is to slow your breathing, take in more oxygen, and reduce the use of shoulder, neck and upper chest muscles while breathing so that you breathe more efficiently.

• **A quiet setting.** If you’re a beginner, practicing meditation may be easier if you’re in a quiet spot with few distractions — no television, radios or cellphones. As you get more skilled at meditation, you may be able to do it anywhere, especially in high-stress situations where you benefit the most from meditation, such as a traffic jam, a stressful work meeting or a long line at the grocery store.

• **A comfortable position.** You can practice meditation whether you’re sitting, lying down, walking or in other positions or activities. Just try to be comfortable so that you can get the most out of your meditation.

**EVERYDAY WAYS TO PRACTICE MEDITATION**

Don’t let the thought of meditating the “right” way add to your stress. Sure, you can attend special meditation centers or group classes led by trained instructors. But you also can practice meditation easily on your own.

And you can make meditation as formal or informal as you like — whatever suits your lifestyle and situation. Some people build meditation into their daily routine. For example, they may start and end each day with an hour of meditation. But all you really need is a few minutes of quality time for meditation.

Here are some ways you can practice meditation on your own, whenever you choose:

• **Breathe deeply.** This technique is good for beginners because breathing is a natural function. Focus all attention on your breathing. Concentrate on feeling and listening as you inhale and exhale through your nostrils. Breathe deeply and slowly. When your attention wanders, gently return your focus to your breathing.

• **Scan your body.** When using this technique, focus attention on different parts of your body. Become aware of your body’s various sensations, whether that’s pain, tension, warmth or relaxation. Combine body scanning with breathing exercises and imagine breathing heat or relaxation into and out of different parts of your body.
Repeat a mantra. You can create your own mantra, whether it's religious or secular. Examples of religious mantras include the Jesus Prayer in the Christian tradition, the holy name of God in Judaism, or the om mantra of Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern religions.

Walk and meditate. Combining a walk with meditation is an efficient and healthy way to relax. You can use this technique anywhere you're walking — in a tranquil forest, on a city sidewalk or at the mall. When you use this method, slow down the pace of walking so that you can focus on each movement of your legs or feet. Don't focus on a particular destination. Concentrate on your legs and feet, repeating action words in your mind such as lifting, moving and placing as you lift each foot, move your leg forward and place your foot on the ground.

Engage in prayer. Prayer is the best known and most widely practiced example of meditation. Spoken and written prayers are found in most faith traditions. You can pray using your own words or read prayers written by others. Check the self-help or 12-step-recovery section of your local bookstore for examples. Talk with your rabbi, priest, pastor or other spiritual leader about resources.

Read and reflect. Many people report that they benefit from reading poems or sacred texts, and taking a few moments to quietly reflect on their meaning. You also can listen to sacred music, spoken words or any music you find relaxing or inspiring. You may want to write your reflections in a journal or discuss them with a friend or spiritual leader.

Focus your love and gratitude. In this type of meditation, you focus your attention on a sacred object or being, weaving feelings of love and gratitude into your thoughts. You can also close your eyes and use your imagination or gaze at representations of the object.

BUILDING YOUR MEDITATION SKILLS

Don't judge your meditation skills, which may only increase your stress. Meditation takes practice. Keep in mind, for instance, that it's common for your mind to wander during meditation, no matter how long you've been practicing meditation. If you're meditating to calm your mind and your attention wanders, slowly return to the object, sensation or movement you're focusing on.

Experiment, and you'll likely find out what types of meditation work best for you and what you enjoy doing. Adapt meditation to your needs at the moment. Remember, there's no right way or wrong way to meditate. What matters is that meditation helps you with stress reduction and feeling better overall.

Five Tips for Staying Healthy

In today's hectic world, it takes more than "an apple a day" to stay well. Instead, a healthy lifestyle requires a balanced diet, regular exercise, a tolerable amount of stress (just enough to keep you motivated), and quality time with the people you love. As you juggle multiple demands of everyday living, try including these five tips.

1. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY DIET

Did you know that eating habits that you may have established in a month or so could have long-term effects on your health? They can -- and you can use such habits to your advantage by eating healthy! A diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in fat is good for your waistline and more. It can help lower your risks for heart disease and high blood pressure, while improving your quality of life. More than 50 percent of Americans are overweight, but simple eating habits can help reverse this trend.
2. STAY FIT WITH YOUR KIDS

Think about this -- you can mix your exercise time with your kids and keep fit while strengthening family ties. Brisk walks, bike rides, swimming, trips to the gym, skiing and hiking are just a few ideas to get you started. Everyone needs regular exercise to stay healthy and fight stress, and helping your kids develop an exercise routine now could have lifelong benefits. Talk with your doctor about the amount and intensity of exercise you and your kids need to reach your fitness goals. More than mild discomfort, during or after exercise, is a warning sign to take it easy. Keep in mind, doctors advise parents to choose activities that match their child's aerobic capacities, coordination and skill levels.

3. KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Is your glass half full or half empty? Research shows that many illnesses -- including headaches, backaches and heart disease -- can be influenced by attitudes. Having a positive attitude can help speed recovery from illnesses and may keep you healthier than someone with a negative attitude. By "looking on the bright side," you can counter the negative effects of stress and improve your overall health.

4. MANAGE STRESS IN YOUR LIFE

Are you among the many adults who suffer adverse health effects from stress? When you feel the telltale signs of stress -- muscle tension, headache and upset stomach -- take time out for yourself. Even a few minutes to relax and clear your head can help you gain a new perspective on a difficult situation and on life. Plus, reducing stress can help lower high blood pressure, lessening your risk for heart disease and stroke. The bottom line, manage your stress and you're managing a big part of your health!

5. STAY CONNECTED

Have you heard -- those who stay connected to family and friends live longer? Also, those who maintain a harmonious marriage increase their longevity. Successful relationships take work, but they're worth it. So, make time for family and friends.

Put these tips to work and you'll be five steps closer to maintaining a healthy life!

Getting Started is Easy!

Call your EAP for more information