

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Maintaining Healthy Habits When Life Changes

We may have the best of intentions when making plans to eat well, exercise and get more sleep, but then a stressful situation, a new challenge or a life-changing circumstance throws everything off and we end up back at square one. However, it is possible to gain traction with health and lifestyle changes and begin to see benefits even when life happens.

Here are a few techniques to consider when trying to establish lasting routines and habits:

Identify your intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is what drives our actions in the long term. It is our deep desire for something that we value. You can identify it when you hear yourself say, “I want to…” versus, “I need to…,” “I have to…” or “I should….” Identify all the positive reasons you want to do something and write them down in a wellness journal that you can then review to remind yourself of your goals and revise them over time.

Set a time, make a plan and commit. Remind yourself of the reason you want to make a change or form a positive habit and develop specific strategies outlining when and how you’ll do it. For instance, “I will drink eight glasses of water per day by drinking one while the coffee is brewing, four while at work, one while cooking dinner, and two after dinner while watching television. I want to do it because I have more energy when I am well hydrated.”

Pair your good intention with something you’re already doing. Pick an established routine like brushing your teeth and perform the routine or habit you’re trying to establish immediately after. This will help you remember to stay on track.

Make a list of all the benefits of the habit you’re adopting. You might surprise yourself when you start listing all the positive things it will do for you.

Practice self-compassion. On the days when you’re committed to performing your new routine or habit, tell yourself that you'll do it for five to ten minutes. Then, you will give yourself permission to stop if you’re not feeling up to continuing. This works particularly well with habits like exercise because many times getting started is our biggest roadblock.

Flex your mindfulness muscle. When you're doing the activity think about what you’re noticing and appreciating about it. This will make you more present in the moment, anchoring the quality of life benefits you perceive and value.

Think of building healthy habits as an experiment. It’s important not to put unnecessary stress on yourself. It takes time to figure out what works and what doesn't. Seeing your habit as a learning experience will help you will succeed. Once you've established clear benefits to forming your habit, it will be hard not to continue because you don't want to give up what you gain in quality of life.

Develop a minimum necessary standard. Paring down your healthy habits to the basics like sleep, hydration, nutrition, and some form of exercise can help you when you go through periods of peak stress. When life calms down a bit, you can resume the healthy habits you’re developing to keep you on track to live your best life.

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