

Healthy Pathways



Your Inova Employee Assistance Newsletter

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Family Separation Stress and Military Personnel

The demands of military service often require extended periods away from loved ones. This can strain relationships and mental well-being. Stress is made worse by missing family milestones and not being physically present during tough times. Take steps to prioritize communication with loved ones through regular phone calls, video chats, and letters, but more importantly, make this a habit or ritual so you proactively manage stress in your career rather than react to it. Make goals for your time with your loved ones to create cherished memories, as they'll become positive memory anchors when you are away. Not following these guidelines can strain relationships further and make you feel more isolated and even resentful. For more tips, support, and referral help, your EAP and other resources are available.



Don't Just "Fix and Forget" Customer Complaints

Go further when resolving customer complaints by discovering root causes. Start by understanding the customer's experience. Ask, "Can you tell me more about what led to this issue?" or "What were your expectations before this problem occurred?" Think about why—and keep asking to discover the root causes. Once confirmed, brainstorm and develop potential solutions. Implement, monitor, and evaluate a solution. Taking these steps will lead to fewer complaints, happier customers, and more love for your job. This is called root cause analysis. Increase your value by learning more about it at www.tableau.com/learn/articles/root-cause-analysis.



Planning a Staycation in Grand Style

If vacation money is tight, try a staycation—a vacation spent at home and within one's local area. Here's how to make it exciting and refreshing: 1) Set a budget so you know what's possible. 2) Brainstorm ideas—museums, new hikes found on alltrails.com, new restaurants, movie nights, exhibits, or special events. 3) Create the itinerary and schedule with detail. 4) Disconnect from social media and smartphones, and don't check email if possible. Limit television viewing. 5) Relax and have fun. With real planning, you will have a great staycation.



Drowsy Driving Intervention Tips

Every year, hundreds of drivers are killed by drowsy driving. One in 25 people reported driving while drowsy in the past 30 days—heavy eyelids, falling asleep at a red light, swerving, slamming on the brakes in a frightful "nod-off." Drowsy driving is more likely between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m., but the recommendation is to pull off the road—safely—to get refreshed. A nap is ideal, if possible. Recognize approaching drowsiness: yawning, blinking more than usual, and straining to keep your eyes open. Caffeine (drinking water can work too), fresh air, sitting up straight, and walking for a few minutes can also restore alertness.



Find more solutions at <https://www.edriving.com/three60/are-you-at-risk-of-falling-asleep-at-the-wheel/> and www.cdc.gov/sleep/features/drowsy-driving.html.

Be Cautious with Artificial Intelligence Health Analysis Tools

Internet tools to help self-diagnose medical conditions are commonplace, and new artificial intelligence (AI)-backed tools are emerging fast. However, studies show misdiagnosis is common, so it is crucial to consult with the proper medical professionals. This is especially true of mental health diagnoses. It is easy to query mental health symptoms and then convince yourself that you or someone you know “matches all the criteria” when, in fact, you or they do not. Many people tend to misinterpret or overinterpret emotional experiences. Over-attending to one’s moods and using AI tools to generate information in a bulleted list that excludes subjective interviewing by a mental health professional can create much unneeded anxiety. Mental health conditions are complex. You won’t obtain a definitive diagnosis with AI. A trained professional explores many nuances when reviewing an individual’s unique emotional experiences and circumstances. Mental health conditions can significantly impact a person’s emotional well-being, and self-diagnosis without professional guidance can lead to unnecessary anxiety and confusion. You might even experience new related symptoms created by the anxiety of a false diagnosis. While technology can play a valuable role in health care, it should be a complement to and not a substitute for the experience of a professional who can personalize treatment and offer ongoing support. Start with your company’s employee assistance program when you have concerns about any problem or condition, or consult a trained professional. You’re more likely to get the answers you seek.



Create a Transition Ritual for Your Stressful Job

Emotional and mental exhaustion is common among public safety professionals and first responders at the end of their shifts. If that’s you, do you have a “transition routine” for when you go home so you are more emotionally available to family members? This might include structured relaxation exercises, listening to calming music, or engaging in a mindfulness exercise. When you do these routinely, you can develop a habit signal that helps you shift your focus more quickly. You’ll then be more naturally responsive with less effort, both in conversation, active listening, empathy, and eye contact with your partner. Talk to your EAP, and don’t rule out some couples counseling to help make it happen. Be cautious about alcohol use. It can relax you but can lead to larger problems and strained relationships, or it can interfere with a truly beneficial transition routine.



Parent Alert: Use of Non-LSD Hallucinogens Surging Among Young Adults

Consumption of non-LSD hallucinogens is rising among young American adults—mescaline, peyote, psilocybin (“magic mushrooms”), and PCP. In 2018, 3.4% of 18-to-30-year-olds had used one of these drugs within the past 30 days, but by 2021, the number nearly doubled to 6.6%. These drugs can have dangerous psychological effects along with physical risks, impaired judgment, and risk of accidents. They may also trigger long-term psychological effects like schizophrenia if a biogenic risk is present in the user. Legal consequences can ensue where these substances are illegal. Signs of possible non-LSD drug use may include changes in behavior and mood, withdrawal, secretiveness, and uncharacteristic mood swings; a high/low demeanor; neglect of schoolwork, chores, and activities; and the loss of interest in school. Sleep problems, nightmares, and appetite issues may also occur without apparent explanation.



Have a Better Mood All Day

Have a more positive day at work by experimenting with these positivity strategies, and see if they don’t become a habit for having a more productive day.

- 1) Be intentional about making your day positive by reminding yourself of the things you appreciate about your job.
- 2) Have achievable goals each day. Don’t just “let things happen.”
- 3) Prioritize tasks associated with these goals.
- 4) Practice time management during the day.
- 5) Initiate positive interactions with others and nurture these relationships to maintain a positive and enjoyable workplace.
- 6) Consciously practice gratitude for a minute or two during the day to reflect on what you like about your job. Doing so cultivates a positive mindset and builds resilience for when the going gets tough. Incorporating these strategies into your daily routine will empower you to navigate challenges that may arise, ensuring a fulfilling and resilient journey in your professional life.

