

# ERS PRESS

A Publication of **Employee Resource Systems, Inc.**

An Employee Assistance Program



**Dear ERS Advisor:**

**As hard as I try, I can't seem to get make headway on my list of "things to do." I always feel behind. I wish I could find more hours in the day. Can you give me some helpful tips on how to manage my time better?**

**Running Behind**

Dear Running Behind:

There's no such thing as time management! Time slips past at the same rate for everyone, and there's nothing we can do about it. The only solution is self-management.

First, find out where all your time goes. For one week, keep a schedule to track how you actually spend your time. You will probably be surprised!

Next, do some planning. Use a weekly calendar to plot out all the activities you must do, including eating, social activities, personal hygiene and time in transit. If you get seven hours of sleep per night, you will have 119 hours per week to work with. Schedule the entire 119 hours and try to stick to your schedule for one week. This will help you see what your priorities **really** are.

If you have trouble following your schedule, you may discover a pattern of procrastination. Perhaps you watch more TV than you had planned or linger on the phone for longer than you intended.

Avoid interruptions by working in a quiet place away from the things that distract you most. Learn to say "no" to activities not in your plan so that you can better focus upon your goals and priorities.

Once you have a handle on your week, you can start planning for the month. A good rule-of-thumb is to plan ahead by working backwards. Look at deadlines, then work backward to plan when to start a project and where you need to be with it as time progresses. Write those mini-deadlines in your weekly schedule.

These suggestions are intended to help you to feel more in control of your life instead of always scrambling to catch up. If you are able to employ at least one or two of them into your regular routine, you'll see that a little planning goes a long way towards a sense of accomplishment.

ERS Advisor

*Got a question for the ERS Advisor? Send an e-mail to [aharkleroad@employeeresourcesystems.com](mailto:aharkleroad@employeeresourcesystems.com).*

## Long Distance Caregiving: The Basics

Americans are movers. We grow up and--more often than not--move away from home, sometimes very far away.

This movement has significant impact on our ability to take care of aging loved ones. More than seven million Americans are the primary caregiver to an aging relative or friend who lives at least an hour away. Despite the distance, they spend an average of 35 hours per month providing care.

If you are one of these distance caregivers, you know it creates numerous challenges. Simply commuting back and forth can bring financial, physical, and emotional strain. There are often feelings of anger and guilt.

Such challenges can feel overwhelming.

However, distance caregiving doesn't have to overwhelm. It can be made manageable, but it means being pro-active, doing some planning, and taking good care of yourself.

First, you need to come to terms with what you can and cannot do. Respect is the key word. As a caregiver, you must respect both your own and your relative's needs. If you fail to take care of yourself, you could jeopardize your own health or simply burn out. In either case, both you and your elder will fail to benefit from your efforts.

Remember that the most important voice at the table is your relative's voice. Regardless of how well-intentioned you may be, you must acknowledge that it is not your life. Even though your friend or parent may need care and assistance, know that it is his or her life to lead. You are merely assisting.

In fact, doing too much for your elderly person can be as harmful as not doing enough.

As caregiver, you will need to assess how well your friend or parent can function and where the difficulties lie. Observe how he or she is coping with the Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), such as eating, toileting, getting in and out of bed and chairs, bathing, dressing and grooming. Nearly half of all adults over the age of 85, and nearly a quarter of those over 65, need assistance completing ADLs.

Is he or she having problems with eating properly, paying bills, washing clothes or cleaning the house? Try and determine where the older person may require some assistance and gently discuss possible solutions.

If your friend or relative has certain physical limitations ranging from vision to mobility, you may want to make some home improvements. Older people who have a difficult time seeing at night can be helped by installing higher wattage, non-glare light bulbs for better visibility. It is also helpful to put timers on some interior and exterior lights, and plug in nightlights throughout the house.

To guard against falls, you will want to inspect carpets for ragged edges and tack them down. Mark the edges of steps for increased visibility, and remove throw rugs and furniture that is not sturdy. Clear obstacles that your loved one might trip over, and install handrails and non-skid strips in bathrooms (bath tubs and showers).

You can encourage independence by purchasing utensils and household tools that are easy to hold and easy to use. For example, a person who loves to bake but has lost the strength in his or her hands and arms to stir thick batter would benefit from an automatic mixer and a battery-operated cookie press.

There are a great many ways to assist your loved one—simple things that will also put your mind more at ease. Be creative and have fun with it.

Of course, some needs cannot be solved by tools, gadgets and home improvements. For instance, who's going to be there when the snow needs sweeping from the front step, or when your parent needs a little company through the dark winter months?

One of the most important things you can do as a distance caregiver is establish a support network of people who live close to your older person. These should be people whom you can call upon in times of crisis, day and night, who will help you out with the day-to-day caregiving duties. Try to have this network in place before a crisis arises.

Work with your elder to draw up a list of support networks. This may not be easy, as your perceptions of people may differ, but it is important to make your parent feel directly involved in these decisions.

There are two types of support networks you should build up: informal and formal. The informal list should include friends, neighbors, club members, and religious affiliates.

If your initial list seems somewhat lacking, try expanding the net. Ask those already involved to do more or find new people willing to help. Try not to overwhelm people, but be sure to explain exactly what it is you expect of them. Be as direct as possible, so that there will be no misunderstandings at a later date.

Get the telephone number and address of everyone on this list, and try to find out their regular schedule. It may also be a wise move to give spare house keys to a close circle of trusted people. Try to make the time, during one of your visits, to sit down with everyone on the list. Explain your situation to them. Draw up a crisis plan with them, and let them know that they can call you collect any time of the day or night if they are worried or if a problem arises. Remember to show your appreciation by sending surprise thank you gifts or cards.

You should also build up a formal support network of services and people you can call upon whenever necessary. The first step is to find out what kinds of services and programs are available in the area where your loved one lives. Ask the telephone company for the Yellow Pages in your elder's home town - most are happy to oblige, especially if you explain why you need it. The local senior center is also likely to offer a wealth of information. Communities vary widely in the types of service they offer the elderly, even in the names of the different services. The types of organizations you should look into include volunteer visitors, adult day care centers, and meal delivery.

Take the time to work closely with your elder to have this support network in place before any crisis or urgent need arises: it will be that much simpler to ensure timely help, if and when it becomes necessary.

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*This article was reprinted with permission from CareGuide,™ a national elder care management program developed by geriatric professionals. For more information on understanding, planning and managing the care of an elderly loved one, visit the website at [www.careguide.com](http://www.careguide.com).*



***We must use time wisely and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right.***

*– Nelson Mandela*

# Caregiving Tips

## PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

- 1) **Prioritize:** Balancing work, family, and time for yourself is difficult. Determine your priorities, set realistic goals, and turn to other people for help with some tasks.
- 2) **Plan:** Thinking through possible challenges will help smooth over rough times. Developing contingency plans can add to your peace of mind.
- 3) **Take one day at a time:** Once plans and priorities are established, know that each day brings its own challenges and blessings. Worrying about the future will make it harder to handle the current day.
- 4) **Accept help:** Friends, family and neighbors are often willing to help, but are not sure how. Be ready with suggestions when they ask what they can do for you or your loved one.

## BE GOOD TO YOURSELF

- 1) **Guard your health:** Get enough sleep, eat properly and exercise. Do not turn to alcohol and drugs. Have periodic health checkups.
- 2) **Make time for leisure:** Carve out time for yourself, even if it's just an hour or two. Go to a movie, have lunch with a friend, or just sit and read a book.
- 3) **Develop a social life:** Spend time with family and friends. While face-to-face contact is important, regular chats on the phone and correspondence by e-mail can help you feel connected.
- 4) **Share your feelings:** Find someone you can talk to and discuss your feelings. All feelings are legitimate, even those that upset you such as anger, sadness, or guilt.
- 5) **Pursue your own interests:** Develop a hobby, work on a craft, join a club or help with a cause you believe in.

## PREVENT BURNOUT

- 1) **Join a caregiver support group:** Sharing experiences with others can help manage stress, locate resources, and reduce feelings of isolation.
- 2) **Talk to a professional:** Clergy, social workers, psychologists, and nurses are often trained to provide counseling on caregiving issues. Help is also available through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- 3) **Use respite care:** This service provides temporary relief from caregiving responsibilities. It may mean help with a specific task or having a health care provider care for your elderly relative at home or in an extended care facility while you go on vacation.

## WHEN YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED

- 1) **Remove yourself from the situation:** Take a walk, even if it's just around the house. It is normal to feel angry, frustrated, stressed or depressed from time to time.
- 2) **Talk to someone:** Keep in mind that caregiving can be a difficult as well as a rewarding undertaking. It can help to talk over your mixed emotions with a caring friend.
- 3) **Keep a journal:** Writing and/or drawing can give you a way to express your thoughts and feelings in a safe way. It also allows you to look back and reflect on the challenges and rewards of caregiving, and keep them in perspective.
- 4) **Call the Eldercare Locator:** This nationwide information and assistance directory can connect older persons and their caregivers with the National Aging Services Network. Call toll-free at 1-800-677-1116 or visit the website at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).

Sources: *National Alliance for Caregiving and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*



### [www.bestcaregiverinfo.com](http://www.bestcaregiverinfo.com)

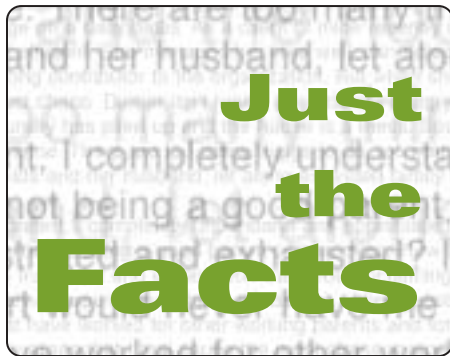
This website includes articles on a wide range of caregiving topics, including medical care and home safety, forgetfulness and crimes against the elderly. Readers are encouraged to submit requests for articles they would like to see published on the site.

### [www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/services/apact/index.html](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/services/apact/index.html)

Within the web site of the Federal Trade Commission ([www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)) are a series of 10 articles produced in partnership with American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) on eldercare issues. The series includes articles about money management, alternative living arrangements, and long-term care insurance. Each article comes with a list of resources. The series is listed under A/PACT, which refers to Aging Parents and Adult Children Together.

### [www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org)

The National Alliance for Caregiving provides support to family caregivers with how-to guides, event information, research and help tips. The Family Care Resource Connection within the site includes lists of books, videos, a searchable database, and links to related sites.



- ↳ Nearly 80 percent of all care received by older Americans is provided by family members, according to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).
- ↳ Data gathered by the National Family Caregivers Association shows that at least 22 million adults provide ongoing care for older people living at home. Double that number — more than one quarter of the adult population — has provided care to a family member or friend during the past year.
- ↳ Research by the National Alliance for Caregiving reveals that women spend as many years caring for their elderly parents as they do raising their children.
- ↳ According to a study published in *Archives of Neurology*, the number of people affected by Alzheimer's Disease could increase 70 percent by 2030, when the youngest baby boomers are over age 65. Scientists are working to make this prediction obsolete by learning more about the disease and discovering ways to prevent it.

## WE CAN HELP

As part of your Employee Assistance Program, you can call day or night and receive free, confidential help with your personal difficulties — including financial concerns, domestic discord, addiction, and worries about children or parents. Call 800-292-2780 anytime.

**Editor** Andrea Harkleroad

**Contributing Editor** Judy Miller

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Dear ERS Advisor,

My 19-year-old daughter admits to smoking marijuana several times a week in college. When I confronted her about this she told me I was hypocrite since she knows her father and I smoked pot in college. I think she has a point, yet I am still concerned that she doesn't see anything wrong with regular pot use. What do you think?

Worried Hypocrite

Dear Worried Hypocrite,

Since she's already aware of your own history with marijuana, your daughter will probably not "buy into" any response that doesn't acknowledge your own past use. It's important to point out the damage that people do to themselves nowadays since marijuana's potency has vastly increased since you were in college.

Several studies have documented how marijuana impairs memory, attention and learning skills even after people have stopped using. There is also the fact that those who smoke marijuana are more likely to use and abuse other drugs. Your daughter should also consider the fact that marijuana impairs judgment and can make anyone much more vulnerable to being taken advantage of.

You might try saying something like, "You may be right, I do sound like a hypocrite. In retrospect, I doubt I would have smoked it then, knowing what I do today. As your parent, I want to protect you from making some of the stupid mistakes that I made as a teen." Chances are, your daughter knows someone with a drug or alcohol problem. Try using that as an opportunity for some direct and honest dialogue about making smart choices in life. It may be a discussion that brings you both closer together.

Good luck!

ERS Advisor

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## THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

Employee Resource Systems, Inc. provides nationwide managed mental health care services and Employee Assistance Programming (EAP) — Members Assistance Programming (MAP) for union members — to client company employees and their family members. These free and confidential services were developed to help address the personal difficulties that can affect anyone's life both at home and at work.

The EAP/MAP defines "family" as anyone whose problem impacts the employee/member in a negative way, including in- and out-of-state parents, children and significant others of the same or opposite sex. While the EAP/MAP does not intervene with personnel issues such as salaries, job assignments or other work-related issues, we do help people with a wide variety of life problems including:

- alcohol & drug abuse
- stress
- anxiety
- depression
- marital, family, and relationship conflict
- child & adolescent behavioral problems
- domestic violence
- child & elder care
- financial & legal concerns
- educational & career-related problems

All contact with the EAP/MAP is confidential. The EAP/MAP counselor will not speak with a supervisor, co-worker or family member without permission from the person using the program. Confidentiality is broken only when a threat-to-safety exists (I.e., suicidal/homicidal risk, stalking, or child/elder abuse.)

Callers can receive supportive counseling at anytime –day or night- by calling (800) 292-2780 CST. Our intake services are available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and appointments for in-person sessions are scheduled during the intake interview. Calls are always answered directly by clinical professionals who provide immediate service, even after standard business hours. The 800 hotline number can be used anywhere in the United States. Calling the EAP can be a first step toward resolution of personal difficulties.

# Stress & Substance Abuse

## WHAT IS IT?

Stress is a term we all know and use often, but what does it really mean? It is hard to define because it means different things to different people. Stress is a normal reaction to life for people of all ages. It is caused by our body's instinct to protect itself from emotional or physical pressure or, in extreme situations, from danger.

Stressors differ for each of us. What is stressful for one person may or may not be stressful for another; each of us responds to stress in an entirely different way. How a person copes with stress – by reaching for a beer or cigarette or by heading to the gym – also plays an important role in the impact that stress will have on our bodies.

By using their own support systems, some people are able to cope effectively with the emotional and physical demands brought on by stressful and traumatic experiences. However, individuals who experience prolonged reactions to stress that disrupt their daily functioning may benefit from consulting with a trained and experienced mental health professional.

## THE BODY'S RESPONSE TO STRESS

The stress response is mediated by a highly complex, integrated network that involves the central nervous system, the adrenal system, the immune system, and the cardiovascular system.

Stress activates adaptive responses. It releases the neurotransmitter norepinephrine, which is involved with memory. This may be why people remember stressful events more clearly than they do non-stressful situations.

Stress also increases the production of a hormone in the body known as corticotropin releasing factor (CRF). CRF is found throughout the brain and initiates our biological response to stressors. During all negative experiences, certain regions of the brain show increased levels of CRF. Interestingly, almost all drugs of abuse have also been found to increase CRF levels, which suggests a neurobiological connection between stress and drug abuse.

Mild stress may cause changes that are useful. For example, stress can actually improve our attention and increase our capacity to store and integrate important and life-protecting information. But if stress is prolonged or chronic, those changes can become harmful.

Stress and Drug Abuse

Stressful events may influence profoundly the use of alcohol or other drugs. Stress is a major contributor to the initiation and continuation of addiction to alcohol or other drugs, as well as to relapse or a return to drug use after periods of abstinence.

Stress is one of the major factors known to cause relapse to smoking, even after prolonged periods of abstinence.

Children exposed to severe stress may be more vulnerable to drug use. A number of clinical and epidemiological studies show a strong association between psychosocial stressors early in life (e.g., parental loss, child abuse) and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, impulsive behavior, and substance abuse in adulthood.

## STRESS, DRUGS, AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Stressful experiences increase the vulnerability of an individual to relapse to drugs even after prolonged abstinence.

Individuals who have achieved abstinence from drugs must continue to sustain their abstinence – avoiding environmental triggers, recognizing their psychosocial and emotional triggers, and developing healthy behaviors to handle life's stresses.

A number of relapse prevention approaches have been developed to help clinicians address relapse. Treatment techniques that foster coping skills, problem-solving skills, and social support play a role in successful treatment.

Physicians should be aware of what medications their patients are taking but should not discourage the use of medical prescriptions to help alleviate stress. Some people may need medications for stress-related symptoms or for treatment of depression and anxiety.

*Excerpted from National Institute on Drug Abuse Community Drug Alert Bulletin – Stress & Substance Abuse, January 2002.*  
<http://165.112.78.61/StressAlert/StressAlert.html>



*"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."*

*– Mahatma Gandhi*

# Breathing to Relax

Andrea Harkleroad, LCSW

Most of us take the activity of breathing for granted. It simply happens while we go about our day's activities. By bringing awareness to your breath, you will be able to induce a sense of relaxation.

Breathing exercises can help us to slow our hectic pace down and increase our ability to focus upon one thing at a time.

1. **Close your eyes.** This helps to eliminate the visual distractions around you. It's best to do this in a quiet room away from possible interruptions.
2. **Breathe with your diaphragm.** Many people hold in their stomachs while breathing in with the upper chest area. This actually inhibits the amount of air that your lungs take in and is called "shallow breathing". By using the diaphragm muscle (the muscle that separates your lungs from your stomach) you will work your lungs like bellows, sucking air into your lungs by expanding your stomach outward. Make sure to fully exhale the stale air in your lungs by bringing in your stomach under your rib cage.
3. **Slow it down.** Try to extend your breath by slowing your breathing down. Close your eyes and visualize your breath as a cool mist that you're taking in through your nose. Yoga instructors advise you to inhale and exhale through your nose; however, do whatever feels most comfortable to you. If you find that you are still breathing quickly and shallowly, try constricting the back of your throat so that your breath sounds like a faint hissing sound.
4. **Sit up straight.** By slumping, you are also restricting the amount of space that your lungs have to expand. Sitting up straight also relieves the amount of strain that you are placing upon your back, neck and shoulders. Try to relax your shoulders down and away from your ears.
5. **Empty your mind.** Too many of us run around distracted, thinking of multiple demands and feeling increasingly frantic. Focus upon your breath. If you find your mind wandering, try bringing the focus back to your breath and the imagery of the cool and relaxing mist that you're breathing into your body. You might also try repeating to yourself "I am relaxed." over and over again as a focus point if your mind begins to stray.

By simply doing this deep breathing for one to three minutes, you'll notice a significant difference in your stress level. For more stress-busting tips and an evaluation of your stress level, call the Employee Assistance Program at (800) 292-2780.

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*Andrea Harkleroad, LCSW is a former EAP counselor and now an Account Manager and Trainer with Employee Resource Systems, Inc. She has been with them for eight years.*



- ↳ September is National Alcohol & Drug Addiction Recovery Month! Treatment centers and community events will highlight the need for greater support for those struggling to get into treatment as well as recognizing the efforts of treatment providers.
- ↳ Scientists have been able to prove that rats can develop an addiction to cocaine, just as human beings can. This fact has been difficult to prove until now. This may be a valuable source of information as scientists explore ways to combat or even prevent addiction for future generations.
- ↳ Youths who perceived that their parents would "strongly disapprove" of their use of illicit substances were much less likely to use those substances than youths who perceived that their parents would only "somewhat disapprove" or "neither approve nor disapprove." 2002 National Survey on Drug Use & Health (NSDUH)
- ↳ A report by Georgetown University's [Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth](#) found a 39-percent increase in the number of alcohol ads aired on local and cable television in 2002 compared to the previous year.



 <http://getfit.samhsa.gov/alcohol/tests/>

Has your drinking or someone else's drinking habits become unhealthy? Are you worried that you or someone you know might have a drinking problem? How much is too much? See how your alcohol consumption is affecting your body based on height, weight, and drink type. Get the answers to all of these questions by visiting SAMHSA's website and using their online alcohol tests.

 <http://www.carbwire.com/>

If you've jumped onto the "low carb" bandwagon, you'll want to check out the Carb Wire site for low-calorie news, research and information on a variety of diets and products.

 <http://www.un.org/events/tenstories/>

Interested in learning more about world events? Check out Ten Stories site. Here the UN attempts to "shine a spotlight on some of the important international issues and developments that often do not get sufficient media attention."

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## Stress Free Holidays

The holidays are upon us! This is a time when we come together with family and friends to celebrate the joys of the season and the rich traditions in our history. We may also experience increased pressure from planning events, purchasing gifts and living up to the "expectations" of the season. Careful planning, flexibility and a positive attitude are essential when dealing with the demands of the season. This year, try this 10-step plan to create a stress free holiday for everyone!

**1** Develop a family schedule and include holiday activities for each family member and plan time for shopping. Be realistic about your commitments to yourself and your family.

**2** Make holiday child care arrangements for school-age children.

**3** Plan special times to come together with family and friends that do not involve added responsibilities.

**4** Review your traditions, if they are no longer meaningful and enjoyable; create new traditions that reflect what is important to you and your family.

**5** Avoid the holiday shopping crowds by using catalogues or on-line shopping sources for holiday presents. Visit holiday fairs to find more unique and one-of-a-kind gifts.

**6** Re-evaluate your holiday greeting list; send greetings to the people who really matter to you. You may decide to send New Year greetings in January when you have more time available.

**7** Maintain your normal family routine as much as possible. Stick to your exercise schedule and make sure you get sufficient sleep.

**8** Develop a realistic budget for both gift giving and all holiday expenditures. Once the budget is developed, keep your spending within the budget.

**9** When you're feeling overwhelmed, examine your holiday involvement. Re-evaluate your plans and only participate in those activities that have meaning to you and your family.

**10** Build relaxation time into your schedule. Creating a balance of fun social activities and quiet family times will help keep energy levels high and will prevent holiday melt down.



*"If you can't  
make it better,  
you can laugh at it."*

*- Erma Bombeck*

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29 East Madison Street, Suite 1600

Chicago, Illinois 60602

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The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a Public Health Advisory about the use of antidepressant medications for children and adolescents.

Antidepressants increase the risk of suicidal thinking and behavior in children and adolescents with Major Depressive Disorder and other psychiatric disorders.

Anyone considering the use of an antidepressant in a child or adolescent for any clinical use must balance the risk of increased suicidality with the clinical need.

Families and caregivers should closely observe the patient and communicate with the prescriber regarding any signs of clinical worsening or unusual changes in behavior.

As of October 2004, Prozac has been the only medication approved to treat depression for children and adolescents. In general, after starting an antidepressant, patients should see their psychiatrist:

- ✦ Once a week for four weeks
- ✦ Every 2 weeks for the next month
- ✦ At the end of their 12th week taking the drug
- ✦ More often if problems or questions arise.



[www.nimh.nih.gov/HealthInformation/depchildmenu.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/HealthInformation/depchildmenu.cfm)

For a full explanation of signs and symptoms of major depression in children and teens, visit the National Institute of Mental Health's website. They also discuss medications and other forms of treatment as well.

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