A healthy workplace is multidimensional. Understanding the importance of personal health (adequate sleep and recognizing stress, for example), practicing fitness at work, having open communication and doing things that contribute to a positive work environment are important to achieving wellness and for keeping Canada’s workplaces healthy.

Canada’s Healthy Workplace Month is in October. The goals of Healthy Workplace Month are to increase awareness of a comprehensive approach to workplace health in Canada. The weekly themes for this year are:

Week 1: Safe Workplaces
Week 2: Healthy Bodies
Week 3: Supportive Workplace Cultures
Week 4: Having Fun at Home and Work

Here’s a healthy workplace kit for you — containing tools and articles to help you improve or maintain your health at work!
Week 1: Safe Workplaces
Can’t find your car keys? Having a hard time concentrating? Concerned about your lack of sleep and safety at work? Don’t worry. It’s probably because you’re not getting enough sleep. We all know that a poor night’s sleep can make us feel foggy and cranky the next day, but what we might not realize is that an ongoing lack of restorative sleep can negatively affect our work performance, wreak havoc on our relationships, and lead to mental health challenges such as depression or anxiety.

Most adults need a good eight to nine hours of sleep, but some of us need less and some of us need more. The problem for many of us is that our 24/7, switched on lives make getting quality sleep elusive and difficult. However, the good news is that with a few small lifestyle changes, adequate and good quality sleep can become the norm. For many people, stress and anxiety play a big part in their inability to get to sleep or to stay asleep. If you’re finding it hard to wind down or switch off, here are a few tips to make the transition to restful sleep easier:

**TIPS FOR GETTING TO SLEEP EASIER**

**Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day — including weekends.** You want to stabilize your sleeping/waking cycle.

**Remove as many electronic devices as you can from your bedroom.** There should be no bleeps, beeps, or glowing lights in your sleep space.

**Don’t watch the clock.** Watching the minutes tick by will not help you sleep. Turn your clock around at bedtime so you cannot see it.
If something is worrying you enough to keep you awake, try writing it down. It helps to describe how you feel or to make a list of the things that you need to do or that are on your mind. Make a pact with yourself that you’ll deal with all worries in the morning.

If your mind continues to race and you can’t relax, experiment with different stress management techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, some gentle stretches or yoga. Try closing your eyes and listening to gentle music. Some people find aromatherapy helpful, or filling pillows with lavender, lotus, rose or geranium. To avoid overstimulation, keep the lights low.

Don’t exercise before bedtime. Although regular exercise during the day can help you sleep better, exercising too near to bedtime can have a stimulating effect.

Being kind to your stomach in the evening. Digestion is less efficient and slower at night than in the daytime and the stomach is less protected from the effects of acidic, spicy, or fatty foods. Be kind to your stomach when eating at night or you may experience indigestion and heartburn. Try to eat small frequent meals and avoid high fat food and sugary snacks in the evening.

Keeping physically active. The value of physical fitness cannot be overstated. In addition to energizing you, regular physical activity enhances cardiovascular fitness and muscle tone, improves your ability to manage stress and therefore improves sleep.

Being smart about napping. While taking a nap is a great way to recharge — especially for older adults — it can make insomnia worse. If insomnia is a problem for you, consider eliminating napping. If you must nap, do it in the early afternoon and limit it to 30 minutes.

Be Kind to Your Body!

We all know that a lack of sleep can make us cranky, forgetful and distracted, which can have a negative effect on our safety at work, our relationships, school performance and overall mental health. But did you know that a lack of sleep can also make you physically sick? You can even blame those extra pounds around your middle on sleep deprivation! That’s because while we’re sleeping, our bodies process toxins, release important hormones and generally repair and rejuvenate. In fact, the major restorative functions in the body like muscle growth, tissue repair, protein synthesis, and growth hormone release, occur mostly (or in some cases only) during sleep.

Therefore, without adequate and good quality sleep, your body can’t repair and rejuvenate and its delicate metabolic balance can be thrown off kilter. This can result in impaired glucose tolerance (a risk for diabetes) and the release of greater amounts of the hormone ghrelin (associated with hunger for high calorie food), and a decrease in the hormone leptin — which reduces appetite.
HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING?
HOMEWOOD HUMAN SOLUTIONS™ PRESENTS:
MY SLEEP DIARY

Feeling restless or waking up in the middle of the night? Having trouble at work due to fatigue? A first step to improving your sleeping habits is to track and understand what they are. Below you will find a helpful sleep-tracking tool. Using this sheet, you track your sleep habits, so that you can determine what you need to do to improve your sleep.

### MY SLEEP DIARY

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How many times did you hit the ‘snooze’ button, and did you wake up before your alarm?  

How many times did you wake up in the night?  

How long were you awake after you first attempted to go to sleep?  

Did you take any naps during the day? How many?  

How many caffeinated beverages did you consume?  

How many alcoholic beverages did you consume?  

Rate your sleep quality last night from 1 to 5 (5 being the best)  

Did you wake up feeling refreshed? (rate from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most refreshed)  

On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you feel this morning?  
1 = 'so tired I want to go back to bed' and 10 = 'I feel great'
Week 2:
Healthy Bodies
Most of us spend half of our waking hours on the job. With the added personal and family responsibilities, it can be a challenge for many of us to include physical activity in our daily routine. However, recent studies have shown that sitting for long periods of time can contribute to diabetes, heart disease and early death, even for those of us who maintain exercise regimes before or after work. We need to be more physically active, even at work. Physical activity helps us cope with stress, improves concentration, alertness and memory.

Does the thought of cramming more exercise into your busy day seem daunting? There is good news. More and more research is showing that throughout the day, small frequent actions can significantly impact your health, and ultimately improve your overall physical and mental wellness. The following are some ideas for incorporating more movement into your day:

**TIPS FOR INCORPORATING MORE MOVEMENT INTO YOUR DAY**

**Move more, sit less.** Look for opportunities to break up your time seated. Set an alarm to remind you to stand up and move around every hour. Tape a reminder to your phone to remind you to stand up when you answer it. Instead of telephoning a colleague, walk over to his or her office. Go for a walk around the block after lunch and during breaks. When afternoon tiredness sets in, stop and do some stretches.

**Utilize a step counter to monitor your movement over the course of the day.** Set a target and work up to it. The act of wearing a step counter is motivating, and you’ll soon discover that every step counts.
Take the stairs. It’s often faster than the elevator, raises your heart rate, works muscles, and the oxygen from breathing more deeply is rejuvenating.

Turn a short discussion or meeting with a colleague into a walk to the coffee shop or a walk around the block.

Park your car fifteen minutes away from the office, or use a bicycle to get to work. Or if taking public transit, get off a few stops early and enjoy a nice walk to start your morning.

Organize fitness challenges at work. For instance, things such as a stair climb challenge, activity tracker challenge or walking challenge.

Keep fitness equipment in your desk. Keep resistance bands or light hand weights in your desk drawer or cabinet to use a couple of times a day. Better yet, sit them on a corner of your desk so that you’ll be reminded to use them.

Drink more water. Not only does it keep you hydrated, but it forces you to get up to go to the bathroom more often!

Use your lunch hour to run errands or just take a walk to a local park.

Be Respectful

We know there is a need for healthier practices both in and out of the workplace. But is exercise itself welcome at work? Be sure to check with your employer.

If there is an on-site gym, it might be best to do the majority of your exercises there. Even if you have permission to exercise in your work space, always be aware of how it’s affecting you and those around you. If you’re making noise or disturbing your coworkers, your daily office exercise routine may be unwelcome.
Week 3: Supportive Workplace Cultures
Leading organizations demonstrate a commitment to the mental health of their employees by creating a positive, psychologically safe and healthy environment in which to work. Employers that strive to create a positive and supportive workplace culture promote a clear vision to the workforce, and ensure employees understand their individual contribution toward the organization’s success. This, in turn, makes employees feel valued and inclined to support one another. It also enhances their mental well-being. While management is responsible for creating and maintaining a healthy and supportive workplace culture, employees have a role to play too. People shape culture; therefore you play a part in defining it. Making an effort to personally exhibit behaviour that helps sustain a supportive culture at work makes you part of the solution. This helps you feel confident and strong in maintaining your own mental well-being, as well as helping others manage theirs. There are a number of things you can do to make your workplace culture more positive and supportive:

**TIPS FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO A POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE**

**Open communication is a key aspect of a supportive work culture.** Do your part by making an effort to maintain an open line of dialogue with your colleagues and your manager, particularly during times of stress or organizational change.

**Be aware of how your colleagues are doing at work.** So often we focus inward on our own mental health and don’t notice that others may be struggling with their own issues. Be mindful of what the major causes of stress could be for your colleagues, and think about how you can help them cope. Open, non-intrusive dialogue can be a show of moral support, and can have a big impact.
Do not tolerate harassment, discrimination or stigma. Make an effort to be informed about mental health issues and participate in open dialogue about it.

Take pride in your job; after all, you’re part of your company’s success. Setting high standards for yourself sets an example for others, and it reflects not only on you, but your team, your department and your company. This will make you feel more engaged with your work and experience greater job satisfaction.

Promote relationship building at work by participating in, and even organizing occasional social activities. Learning about each other’s lives outside work helps to foster understanding and inclusion.

Participate in health awareness events offered in your workplace. Some of these events could include things like workshops or health challenges to promote proactive personal health awareness and management.

Be a team player in the company-wide team. Avoid the “it’s not my job” mentality. This doesn’t mean you should allow yourself to be taken advantage of, or be extended beyond your capabilities. However, being a part of a team means that you all help each other any time you can.

Be approachable. Present an air of approachability to your colleagues. Wherever possible, act as if you are available and happy to speak with people from all levels and positions. Practice your listening skills. Smile and make eye contact with everyone. Be friendly and call people by name. Show interest in what’s going on.

Be a champion for the cause. Volunteer to participate in your social or workplace committee, and emphasize the “business benefits” of taking further action to create healthy and safe work environments.

Effective Teams

While there are many different characteristics of an effective team — clear, consistent and open communication underlies all of them. Team members need a shared understanding of what is expected of them individually and collectively. They also need to be kept current on where the team is at. This establishes an atmosphere of trust where everyone is empowered to speak openly. For some teams, having weekly meetings for a couple of hours is critical — for other teams, monthly meetings, or regular e-mail communications might suffice. Even if everyone on the team lives in a different country, they can still perform as a team with videoconferencing and other high-tech methods of communication.
RESPECT IN THE WORKPLACE

FOSTERING RESPECT: A TEAM BUILDING WORKSHEET TO HELP YOU DO YOUR PART

Take a few moments to think about your answers to the following questions. Consider sharing your answers with co-workers as part of a team-building exercise, all in the effort of building a respectful workplace.

FOSTERING RESPECT: A WORKSHEET

1. What would you like your workplace to look like with regard to becoming a more respectful workplace in six months time (i.e. safer, more productive)?

2. What are some of the potential barriers to achieving this vision?

3. How can these barriers be overcome?

4. What changes are necessary that you have the ability to impact or influence?

5. What is one thing you can individually work on to contribute to a more respectful workplace?

6. What are some of the things you can do as a team to help ensure your workplace is safe and productive (e.g., training, codes of conduct, team-building activities)?
Week 4: Fun at Home and Work
Laughter really is the best medicine. Researchers continue to find evidence to support the old saying, including laughter’s ability to relieve stresses and discomforts, resolve conflicts, manage pain, promote feelings of well-being, lower blood pressure and even help prevent heart disease. Making time for fun in our daily lives helps us to cope with, manage and overcome life’s inevitable challenges. More and more companies are incorporating fun into the workplace because they know it increases work satisfaction, develops creative and critical thinking, improves morale and heightens productivity.

So, if fun and humour can provide significant benefits to your mental and physical health, why not take a look at how they measure up in your life? The following are some ideas to help you lighten up, both at work and at home.

**TIPS FOR HAVING FUN IN THE WORKPLACE**

**Take advantage of your company’s commitment to community and social responsibility.** Helping others stimulates personal happiness, and many enjoyable activities can be carried out in the workplace to support philanthropic initiatives, such as bake sales, sports events, lending skills to charitable organizations and supporting needy families with gifts at holiday time.

**Encourage colleagues to get to know one another and establish more meaningful connections in the workplace.** This could be accomplished by displaying family photos in your workspace, making time for conversation about personal endeavours, and planning occasional social events.
Participating in business learning opportunities can be an enjoyable way to get you away from your workstation for a little while. You can learn new skills, and it can lead to feelings of satisfaction and self-confidence.

Have a contest. Baby picture contests, health challenges and fundraising contests, can not only help to build rapport, morale and teamwork, but also create enjoyable memories.

Organize monthly potluck lunches. These can be associated with holidays, cultures or other themes.

Organize theme days, such as favourite sport day, crazy hat or ugly sweater day, share your hobby day or themes associated with seasonal holidays. Support your company’s charitable efforts by having theme day participants donate a small amount, like a loonie.

TIPS FOR HAVING FUN AT HOME

Encourage humour and laughter. Make an effort to spend time with fun and playful people you know. Tell funny stories at the dinner table, have a game night, or allow yourself to be silly with your family members or friends.

Create something. Creative play gives pleasure, releases stress, and increases imagination, concentration and problem-solving abilities. Creative activity is both relaxing and stimulating, and can be a solitary or group activity. Try making homemade cards and wrapping paper, a new recipe, beading a necklace, taking photos of your neighbourhood, or creating a new meditative space in a garden.

Give yourself reminders to lighten up. Place pleasurable mementos on your desk at work or in your car, frame a humorous quote, or create a photo wall of you and your family and friends having fun.

Take ten minutes to make a list of things you are grateful for. The simple act of expressing gratitude, for things both small and great, is a powerful force in driving away negative thoughts that contribute to stress and unhappiness.

Instead of sitting around watching those tired re-runs on television, spend an hour watching funny pet videos or other humorous video shorts that your friends pass around on social media.

Switch up the ordinary. Take a different route to work. Shop at a different grocery store. Change the living room around. Paint the inside of the bathroom cabinet turquoise or fuchsia or some other colour you wouldn’t put on a wall.

The Best Medicine

A good laugh makes our bodies and minds feel good, but do we actually know why? Laughing increases blood flow, can lead to reductions in stress hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline and when laughing, the brain releases endorphins that can relieve some physical pain. Additionally, laughter also boosts the number of antibody-producing cells and enhances the effectiveness of our T-cells — leading to a stronger immune system.