It’s Healthy Workplace Month!

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

Week 1: Being Well
Week 2: Feeling Well
Week 3: Eating Well
Week 4: Connecting Well

Here’s a healthy workplace kit for you—containing tools and articles to help you improve or maintain your health at work. There are also some fun word games for you to try!

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WEEK 1

Being Well
Most of us feel energized and happy after spending time outdoors. It may be because we’re breathing fresh air, enjoying a game of golf, having fun with friends and family or simply appreciating nature. Now, there’s scientific proof that sunshine and greenery are good for our bodies—and our souls.

According to Statistics Canada, the average Canadian spends 90 percent of his or her life indoors, and as we get older we become even more inclined not to venture out. Even summer days are not enough to entice many of us to spend extended periods outside. We’re soon complaining about the heat, bugs and pollen and heading back to the air-conditioned comfort of our homes. That’s too bad because there is increasing scientific evidence that suggests time spent outdoors not only protects us from many illnesses, but reduces stress, alleviates depression, improves our concentration, boosts our creativity and makes us happier. So why is it that we can’t help looking on the bright side when we’re outside?

A Sunny Outlook

A 2010 study looked at 280 healthy people in Japan, where visiting nature parks for therapeutic effects has become a popular practice called “shinrin-yoku” or “forest bathing.” On one day, one group was instructed to walk through a wooded area for a few hours, while a second group walked through city streets. The next day, they traded places. Those walking among plants were found to produce less cortisol (an essential hormone sometimes known as the stress hormone because it’s involved in the body’s natural response to physical or emotional stress), had slower pulse rates and lower blood pressure, as well as increased levels of white blood cells. In other words, they were calmer.

Another study found that people who live close to green spaces have lower rates of depression, anxiety and poor physical health than those who reside in more urban settings. Researchers found that having green space within a half mile of your house can also mean you’ll have lower rates of cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, mental illness, respiratory disease, neurological disease and digestive disease.
Looking On The Bright Side...Outside

It’s also well documented that natural light affects our mood. Sunshine boosts our levels of serotonin—the body’s natural happy hormone. That’s why we tend to feel happier and more energetic when the sun shines.

It’s hard to feel glum when we look at a rainbow, a chipmunk, flowers or a breathtaking view. Nature makes us happy because it brings us into the present moment.

Bright Ideas

When you don’t have to deal with all the stimuli and stress of daily life, the mind can instead do other things—such as be creative, imaginative, and able to problem solve. Taking your body and mind outdoors and away from phones, texts, emails, Internet, traffic and frantic schedules allows your imagination and creativity to take flight. You’ll feel happier, more productive and more focused. Your mind can have fun. Researchers at the University of Kansas reported a 50 percent boost in creativity for people who spent a few days communing with nature.

Spending time outdoors can actually sharpen your mind as well. A 2008 University of Michigan study demonstrated that after just an hour interacting with nature, people’s memory and attention spans improved by 20 percent.

The Sunshine Vitamin

We’re all happier when we feel healthy, energetic and rested and more and more research is demonstrating just how important the sunshine vitamin—Vitamin D—is to maintaining good health. It’s been shown to protect us against osteoporosis and some cancers while boosting our immune systems and balancing our hormones.

Vitamin D is called the sunshine vitamin because it’s manufactured by our bodies when sunlight hits our skin. Unfortunately, two-thirds of Canadians have Vitamin D levels below the amounts research is associating with reduced health risks and one in ten of us have such low readings that we don’t have enough to maintain good bone health. Part of that is due to our climate, part due to demographics (darker-skinned individuals make less Vitamin D because their skins have more pigmentation, a natural sunscreen) and part from lifestyle. And when we do go outdoors, we’re slathered in sunscreen that protects us against harmful sunburns by blocking ultraviolet B (UVB) light. However, UVB also begins the process of Vitamin D production in our bodies.

The good news is that adequate amounts of Vitamin D can be obtained through a healthy diet and sunshine (10 or 15 minutes a few times a week for those with fairer skin—but not enough to cause a reddening of the skin).

Look On The Bright Side—Outside

So if you want to feel energized, positive, creative and happy, think outside the box—or at least the brick and mortar box in which you live. Go outside and have some fun.

1 Park et al (2010)
Unscramble each of the clue words.
Copy the letters in the numbered cells to other cells with the same number.
WEEK 2

Feeling Well
Week 2: Feeling Well

Mental Illness Mythbusters

How much do you know about mental illness? It’s time to dispel some common myths about mental illness in order to reduce the stigma associated with it.

One out of every five Canadians is affected by some form of mental illness, at some point in their lives. Even with its relative prevalence, mental illness remains shrouded in stigma and dogged by misconceptions that have evolved into myths. More recently, people are opening up about their bouts of depression or other conditions, such as anxiety disorders. However, other mental illnesses like psychosis and schizophrenia often remain in the shadows.

In order to dispel the myths associated with mental illness, it is critical to understand what it is. A mental illness can be defined as a psychological pattern, potentially reflected in behaviour, that is generally associated with distress or disability, and which is not considered part of normal development.

There are different kinds of mental disorders—each characterized by different sets of symptoms that affect how we think, feel, and behave. Symptoms can include depressed mood, extreme mood swings, disturbances in thought or perception, obsessions or fears, or other overwhelming feelings of anxiety. People with mental illness are often afraid to tell their friends or employers, for fear of being shunned or facing certain prejudices. Others are told to just “snap out of it.” However, mental illnesses can be treated, and often with excellent results.

Below are six common myths associated with mental illness, accompanied by the truths that dispel them.

Common Mental Illness Myths

- **Myth 1: Mental illness is a single, rare disorder.** Mood disorders, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, impulse control disorders and addiction disorders are all mental illnesses. There are multiple types of mental illness, each with its own features and underlying causes. Similarly, each mental illness relates to brain chemistry gone awry, affecting things like mood and perception. But each of these illnesses has its own specific causes, features, and approaches to treatment.
Mental Illness Mythbusters

• **Myth 2: People with a mental illness never get better.**
Treatments for mental illnesses are more numerous and more sophisticated now than ever before. As well, researchers continue to discover new treatments. Because of these advances, many people do recover, and others are able to keep conditions under control. Today’s pharmaceutical treatments are better able to target the specific parts of the brain where treatment is needed. While some conditions might wax and wane in severity throughout a person’s adult life, symptoms can be kept under control with proper treatment. Full recovery is attainable, and it may involve more than just drugs; it also may include being socially and physically active, because recovery means getting people back to ‘leading normal lives.’

• **Myth 3: Psychiatric disorders are not true illnesses. People who have a mental illness are just “crazy.”**
Unlike a broken leg or heart attack (which are easily detected by simple tests), mental illness has traditionally been an invisible disease. This inability to see what’s wrong adds to the perception, and even fear, of mental illness. But mental illnesses are bona fide medical conditions. They involve complex physiological processes, as well as changes or imbalances in brain chemistry.

• **Myth 4: Children don’t get mental illnesses. Their emotional problems are just part of growing up.**
Parents naturally want their children to do well, so some may brush off or explain away behavioural problems or other childhood difficulties as being mere growing pains. However, numerous psychiatric conditions, including depression, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety disorders, can and do occur in childhood. Roughly 1 in every 33 kids and 1 in every 8 teens suffer from depression.

• **Myth 5: People with a mental illness lack intelligence.**
Intelligence has nothing to do with mental illnesses. On one hand, many people with mental disorders are brilliant, creative and productive people. On the other hand, some people with mental disorders are not brilliant or creative. Overall, the level of intelligence among people with mental illness likely parallels the patterns seen in any healthy population.

• **Myth 6: People with a mental illness shouldn’t have jobs. They’ll just drag down the rest of the staff.**
People with mental illness can, and do function well in the workplace. They are unlikely to miss any more workdays because of their condition than people with a chronic physical condition such as diabetes or heart disease. Employees may not even be aware that a co-worker suffers from a mental illness. Similarly, a stress-ridden workplace may be a breeding ground for the development of stress-related mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety disorders, and threaten the delicate work-life balance.

Mental illnesses are not just feelings or reactions to experiences or events. There are different kinds and each can be identified by a collection of different symptoms that persist for a specific period and significantly interfere with a person’s roles, activities, relationships, and/or capacity for self-care.

Mental disorders can affect almost every aspect of a person’s life over a considerable period. The more we know about them, the more able we are to dispel the myths and clear up the misconceptions surrounding them.
One out of every five Canadians is affected by some form of mental illness, at some point in their lives.

WEEK 2

Feeling Well Cryptogram!

Unscramble the words below to reveal the answer (your hints: H = S and Y = O ).

YQZ YRN YV ZFZIJ VXFZ OSQSTXSQH
XH SVVZONZT AJ HYEZ VYIE YV
EZQNSK XKKQZHH, SN HYEZ GYXQN
XQ NWZXI KXFZH.

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Unscramble the words below to reveal the answer (your hints: H = S and Y = O ).
WEEK 3

Eating Well
Eating Well To Stay Well

Eating well is essential to staying well. A healthy diet boosts our immune system and helps prevent certain chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers. It keeps our bones and joints healthy, our muscles strong, our bodies lean and our energy levels high. Eating the right foods also helps our minds run in tip-top condition. So why do so many of us have such poor eating habits?

In a land of plenty, many of us are overweight yet undernourished. We’re overweight because we’re consuming too many highly processed foods that are low in fibre and high in saturated fats, salt and/or sugar, and we’re undernourished because we’re eating too few of the foods our bodies need to function well.

We need food—but the right food

We need to consume adequate amounts of protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins, and minerals because each has important functions in our bodies.

Protein

Protein is essential for life. It provides the building blocks needed to support growth, builds and repairs important body tissues, transports nutrients, and ensures a healthy balance of electrolytes and fluids. Protein is found in meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, dairy products and some meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu.

Carbohydrates

Many people shun carbohydrates believing they cause weight gain. It’s true that highly processed snacks, cakes, cookies, many breads and pastries have little nutritional value. But healthy carbohydrates found in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and dairy foods are the body’s main source of fuel, especially for the brain.

They usually contain fibre, which helps our digestion work well, and can be rich sources of antioxidants, which help prevent many diseases. Healthy carbohydrates should make up between 45 and 65 percent of our daily calories.
Eating Well To Stay Well

Fats

Fats also have a bad reputation. But like carbohydrates, not all are bad. In fact, we need fat to protect our organs and bones from shock and to insulate nerve fibres and help transmit nerve impulses.

Fat provides needed energy and helps our bodies absorb fat soluble vitamins. Most importantly, fat provides flavour and texture to food—and it stays in the stomach longer, preventing hunger soon after meals.

However, we do need to avoid or limit saturated fats and trans fats. Saturated fats are found in fatty cuts of meat, butter, cheese and ice cream. Transfats are mostly found in packaged snack foods, commercially baked goods, and fried foods. Instead choose unsaturated fats, which are found in avocados, nuts and seeds, vegetable oils (canola, olive, peanut, safflower, sesame and sunflower) and fatty fish (herring, mackerel, salmon, trout and smelt).

Vitamins and minerals

Vitamins and minerals perform hundreds of roles in the body. There are many vitamins and minerals that your body needs but can't manufacture or not in adequate amounts. Fat-soluble vitamins—A, D, E, and K—can be stored in your liver and fatty tissues. However, water-soluble vitamins—C and the B-complex vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folate, B6 and B12)—are not readily stored and can be easily washed away and eliminated in your urine as water passes through the body. So, it's important that your body receives a fresh supply of these vitamins regularly.

How much food?

Knowing why we need certain nutrients is only half the battle. We need to know what and how much to eat.

Canada's Food Guide recommends a balance of:

- **Vegetables and fruit.** Choose dark green vegetables such as broccoli and spinach and orange vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes.
- **Grain products.** Make at least half of your grain products whole grain (barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa) each day.
- **Milk and alternatives.** Select lower fat dairy products. Limit cream cheese, ice cream, coffee cream, and sour cream. These foods are high in saturated fats as well as calories.
- **Meat and alternatives.** Select lean meats and eat at least two servings of fish a week.

Finally, drink plenty of water, watch your portions, choose healthy snacks and don’t skip meals—especially breakfast. Breakfast is crucial to good health. It kick-starts your metabolism and wakes up your brain. It can also help improve your mood, making you less cranky in the morning.
WEEK 3

Eating Well Crossword!

Complete the crossword below.

Across
1. Green and purple bite-sized snack
2. Make sure you get enough of this and vegetables
3. Cashews and almonds make things taste
4. Cool salad ingredient
5. Greek treat
6. We need a balanced diet to be this
7. Canned or fresh, it's a yummy fish (in moderation)
8. Cool salad ingredient
9. Only if it's lean
10. Get from foods over supplements
11. Your body's primary source of fuel
12. Nice in water
13. Fruit rich in Vitamin C
14. Choose green and orange ones
15. Delicious fish
16. Get crackin'
17. Canned or fresh, it's a yummy fish (in moderation)
18. Eat a lot of this colour
19. What our bodies need but can't produce
20. Helped Popeye stay strong
21. Great for protein, but remove the skin
22. Whole wheat is the best option
23. Only if it's lean
24. You must do this to stay well
25. Choose green and orange ones
26. Better when dipped in milk
27. An element essential to life
28. Don't cry over this milk
29. Choose this rice

Down
2. Mash 'em and boil 'em
5. An element essential to life
7. Your body's primary source of fuel
9. Don't cry over this milk
10. Nice in water
11. Fruit rich in Vitamin C
13. Don't work through this midday meal
15. Delicious fish
16. Great for protein, but remove the skin
19. What our bodies need but can't produce
22. Get crackin'
26. Whole wheat is the best option
WEEK 4

Connecting Well
Week 4: Connecting Well  
Get Involved And Get Noticed

Look around your company and find the people who love working there. It’s probably not because their jobs are any better than yours. What is probable is that they’re involved with as many committees, corporate events and fundraising campaigns as they can manage. The busier this makes them the happier they seem to be. Is this the secret to job satisfaction?

Most of us are busy juggling parenting and family responsibilities, house maintenance, social commitments and increasingly demanding careers. It’s no wonder we’re stressed. But if we’re enjoying our lives and jobs, stress fuels our creativity and helps us be more energetic and focused. However, if we’re feeling overworked, overwhelmed and overlooked, that stress can have a negative effect on our job performance as well as our physical and mental wellbeing. In fact, stress can literally make us sick. It can cause:

• sleep disturbances;
• headaches;
• gastrointestinal upset;
• hypertension;
• anxiety and irritability; and
• depression.

Continued stress can also put us at risk of developing serious health issues including high blood pressure, heart diseases, and some cancers.

We spend a good part of our lives at work, so it’s important to our physical and mental health—and our careers—to find ways to increase our happiness and decrease negative stress.

Working It Out

There are many reasons why people are unhappy at work. Maybe it’s because they’ve been performing the same duties for years and are bored, or that their jobs have changed and they’re frustrated. Maybe their careers have
Get Involved And Get Noticed

stalled or they have a conflict with a colleague. The fact is, no one’s job is perfect but to reach our professional goals we need to stay focused, engaged, cooperative and positive. One way that can help us do this is getting involved at work.

Getting Involved

Joining a committee, helping out with a fundraising campaign, taking part in learning and development ventures, being part of a company event or volunteering for a large interdepartmental project have many benefits. These include:

• **A sense of purpose.** If your job isn’t providing you with a sense of purpose, try helping to run a fundraising campaign for the less fortunate or organizing a company event that people look forward to. It’s a good feeling to know you’re making a difference.

• **Getting noticed.** Those busy office volunteers aren’t hiding in their cubicles all day. They’re visible and getting noticed. It’s no wonder these are people who seem to advance in their careers faster than anyone else.

• **Showing what you can do.** Volunteering for committees and interdepartmental projects lets you demonstrate your many skills.

• **Meeting possible mentors and supporters.** What better way to come in contact with senior or more experienced employees who can help guide you through the complexities of the business world? Volunteering for corporate initiatives can be a powerful networking tool.

• **Making friends.** By becoming involved, you’re more likely to meet engaged, passionate, and positive people. Surrounding yourself with positivity is a great way to maintain your own positivity. In addition, the workplace is a much more enjoyable place to be if you have friends with whom you can share successes and disappointments, who will give sound advice and who will join you on that company charity walk.

• **Taking control of your career.** You’ll be learning more about different departments and job functions as well as upcoming training and development opportunities, vacancies and secondments.

How To Begin

Volunteering for various corporate projects, committees, campaigns and events isn’t easy for the more introverted among us. However, it’s easier if you feel passionate about something. For example, if you’re interested in health matters, your health and safety committee would probably love to hear your ideas. Or you could start an informal lunchtime walking group or organize a healthy potluck lunch and recipe exchange for your department. Start small and let your confidence grow.

Don’t get frustrated at not getting selected for the first high profile initiative you sign up for. The secret is not to give up. People have to get to know you and your abilities. Again, start small by helping out with corporate events or fundraising campaigns. You’ll soon get noticed and be working on a career enhancing project. More importantly, you’ll find you’re actually enjoying your job more. And that will definitely get you noticed.
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Homewood Health offers the highest quality of clinical support and intervention available within the EFAP industry, and an unmatched continuum of services — spanning health promotion, mental health and addictions support, and prevention-focused work-life balance services.

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