DECEMBER
SAFETY TALK

Surviving Holiday Stress

As the holidays approach, demands come at us from everywhere. The tips for this month are effective throughout the year, and particularly when we all feel the added stress the holidays can bring.

When stress becomes unmanageable, it can cause physical, behavioural and psychological challenges, which impact your ability to cope with everyday life.

Here are a few tips to help you stay in control:

Wake up early. Give yourself an extra 15 minutes at the start of each day. You won't feel as rushed and your state of mind will be calmer.

Prioritize daily tasks. This is good advice for any time of the year! Take time to plan ahead. Instead of trying to do it all at once, break up your work into tasks and prioritize them. Some use High/Low, others use A/B, yet others use must do/should do to prioritize. Whatever method you use, include yet another: "would like to do" and be sure you do some of those each day along with the high or "A" priorities.

Take breaks. Part of why we like to multi-task is that we get bored doing one task for too long. It's better to take regular short breaks but stay on the task you set for yourself until it is done, then move on to the next.

Multi-task where appropriate. If one task requires only motor skills and the other uses your mind, it is possible to do both at the same time. This is why you can fold laundry while talking on the phone. But focusing on doing one thing at a time and doing it well will minimize errors, reducing the need for corrections – and the increased stress that can cause.

Resist distractions. Checking your email, your phone and social media are all tempting when you are working at completing tasks but doing so disrupts your focus. Check it once an hour rather than being connected at all times.

Don't over commit. You may receive a lot of invitations this time of year. Say yes only to the ones you really want or need to attend and don't be afraid to say no to others. Avoid spreading yourself too thin by saying yes to everything.

Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control (such as the behaviour of others). Rather than let these add to your stress level, focus on the things you can control, such as the way you choose to react to perceived problems.

Take a few days off for yourself. You need to take care of yourself! Learn to relax. Cut back on caffeine, practice meditation, listen to music, learn to express your feelings and practice breathing exercises. All of these can help reduce your stress levels.

Get active. Being active is important throughout the year. When participating in physical activity your body creates endorphins - chemicals in the brain that act as natural stress reducers. Walking at lunch or doing 20 to 40 minutes of aerobic activity in the morning can lift your spirits as well as get you into better shape.

Sleep. This is obvious, but a good nights' sleep is necessary for your physical and mental well-being.

British Columbia Municipal Safety Association

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