

Your Guide to the Wellness Kit

Introduction

'Wellness' is our ability to live a satisfying and balanced life through the combined use of our physical, mental, spiritual, social and material resources. Effective use of these resources to meet the challenges of daily life provides a feeling of satisfaction and control over our lives. It makes sense, then, that we learn to build and protect each of these resources to support our overall wellness. The Wellness Kit is about learning how to do this.

The Wellness Kit was developed for Canadian Forces members and their families making the transition from military to civilian life. Through our research, Canadian Forces families have told us that transition to civilian life can present many challenges. For example, releasing Canadian Forces members may have physical disabilities or be experiencing psychological problems; and the family may be leaving behind a supportive group of friends and neighbours. Changes in income and housing may also present problems.

The Wellness Kit is a series of fact sheets designed to provide you with information and suggestions that may apply to your particular situation. The topics were chosen to reflect the major challenges of military personnel and families in transition. Each fact sheet will help you assess an issue; decide what to do; and suggest ways to approach it. In addition, each fact sheet provides suggestions to help you find further information and community resources that can offer assistance.

The Wellness Kit is intended to be a family resource that you use as needed. Some of the fact sheets could be of use to anyone, like those on healthy eating, exercise or mental health. Others will apply only if you are experiencing a particular problem such as chronic pain or family conflict. We suggest that you browse through the kit and select topics of interest to you. We encourage you to share this information with family members and friends.

We hope that The Wellness Kit will contribute to the wellness of you and your family, adding to your knowledge and skills and directing you to other resources that will offer support.

Being Active

Building physical activity into our daily routine is an important part of maintaining and improving our physical and mental health. Canada's *Physical Activity Guide*, displayed below, recommends that we:

- choose a variety of activities from each of the endurance, flexibility and strength activity groups
- start with 30 minutes of light effort every day. You can do this all at once or in three 10 minute sessions. As you progress to moderate effort activities, your time can be reduced to 30 minutes, four times a week.

Being active should be part of your daily routine no matter how old you are, where you live or what your current lifestyle is.

Being active can:

- reduce your risk of developing many health conditions
- boost your mood and help you cope with stress, panic or anxiety
- help you sleep better
- improve your confidence and self-esteem

How do you start?

Ask yourself– how physically active are you now?

- Are you following the recommended activity levels described in Canada's *Physical Activity Guide*?
- Do you perform a variety of activities from each of the endurance, flexibility and strength groups shown in the Guide?
- At which of the five levels of activity in the Guide do you currently perform? Very light, light, moderate, vigorous, or maximum effort?
- Do you feel well and energetic?
- Do you have any health conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, or high blood pressure? Some people are able to control such conditions by using a combination of special diet and physical activity. It is possible to have a light level of physical activity that can maintain or improve your health. Talk to your doctor before beginning any activity program.

How you can become more active:

- **Gather information.** There are many books and articles available about being active. Check your local library, bookstore or health organizations. If you have been using the [Force Program from the Canadian Armed Forces](#), review it to see what activities you'd like to continue.
- **Think about ways** you can fit more physical activity into your daily schedule. Could you walk instead of taking your car– or park further away from the door?
- **Set goals for yourself**, such as a date when you'll progress to the next level of effort. Adjust your goals if you need to and reward yourself when you reach them.
- **Develop an activity program** to fit your abilities and needs. Health professionals such as Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Recreational Directors can help you.

Tips to help you get started:

- Take small steps– start with one small activity that fits easily into your day.
- Decide whether you want to do physical activities by yourself or with others.
- Choose activities you enjoy. It's a lot easier to stick to them!
- Keep a record of how many minutes you are active. Watch how they increase!
- Think about how good you feel when you are active and taking time for yourself.

Looking for ideas?

- Take the dog for a short walk three times a week and gradually increase to five times a week. If you don't have a dog, walk anyway!
- Think of an activity you would like to do for the first time– and try it!
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. If there are too many stairs, walk up one flight and take the elevator the rest of the way. Gradually increase your stair climbing.
- Try some light gardening– watering plants or cutting blooms can be great exercise.
- Use the hiking trails and bike paths available in your community.
- Play active games with your kids like soccer or hide-and-seek.
- Take a walk instead of drinking coffee on your next break.
- Try an activity like tai chi or yoga. Both combine low-impact, fluid movements and are great ways to relieve stress.

Healthy Eating

Good eating habits are important to help us feel our best. The [Canada's Food Guide](#) recommends that we:

- eat a variety of foods from the four food groups every day (grain products, vegetables and fruit, milk products and meat and alternatives); and
- eat an amount of food to suit our age, sex, body size and activity level.

Healthy eating can:

- help boost our energy.
- help us control our weight.
- help us cope with stress.
- help our bodies fight disease.
- help us feel good about ourselves.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself if you are eating a healthy diet now?

- Do you eat the variety and amount of food recommended in *Canada's Food Guide*?
- Could your eating habits be contributing to health problems? Conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and stress on joints can often be helped by eating a diet that follows *Canada's Food Guide*. If you have health or weight concerns, be sure to talk to your doctor before making any major changes to your diet.
- Are you a healthy weight? We all come in different shapes and sizes– that's why the Body Mass Index (BMI) shows a healthy range of weight for every height. To check your BMI, talk to a registered dietician or public health nurse.

What you can do to change your eating habits:

- **Get information.** Check your local library and bookstores for up-to-date books, newspapers and magazines with healthy eating tips and recipes. Find out which food

stores in your area offer in-store demonstrations or provide information about preparing different foods. Many of the larger food stores have registered dieticians to help shoppers.

- **Adjust your food habits over time.** Begin with making small changes, introducing new and healthy foods gradually. Give yourself time to get used to different tastes.
- **Make a meal plan.** Plan your meals one week at a time, listing three healthy meals to eat each day. Include your family in this activity and be sure to follow *Canada's Food Guide*.
- **Use your meal plan to make a grocery list.** Try not to shop on an empty stomach. It will help you avoid temptations.

Ideas for healthy eating:

- Drink plenty of water—especially in warm weather or when you are active.
- Cut down on sugar, salt, alcohol and caffeine. (Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, colas and foods containing cocoa.)
- Learn to read food labels to check the sugar, salt and fat content of food.
- Keep nutritious food at the front of the refrigerator so you can reach for it easily.
- Keep cut up fruit and vegetables on hand for snacks.
- Be physically active. Walking or other physical activity will help you manage your weight and stay healthy.
- If you are trying to lose weight, write down what and when you eat. It'll help you see where to make changes.
- Avoid eating when you are feeling stressed. Find other ways to deal with stress.
- Enjoy meals in the company of family and friends on a regular basis.

Different people need different amounts of food

The amount of food you need every day depends on your age, sex, body size and activity level. Canada's Food Guide suggests a variety of serving sizes to help you plan your food choices. It is useful to be able to picture these serving sizes so you can decide your own portions.

- One serving (50-100 g) of meat, poultry or fish = the palm of your hand
- 1 cup (250 ml) vegetables & fruit = your fist
- 25 g of cheese (milk products) = your thumb
- 1 serving (1/2 bagel) or grain products = a hockey puck.

Nurturing Mental Health

Good mental health is the sense of well-being we have when all aspects of our lives are in balance - social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental. When we concentrate too much in one area, it will affect other parts of our lives. For example, if we put all our energy into our work, we soon find that our spiritual and social lives begin to suffer.

Your personal balance is unique to you. Everyone has different needs. By paying attention to what's going on in your life, you can learn to find a balance that works. Just as there are things you can do to stay physically healthy, there are things you can do to stay mentally healthy.

Enjoying good mental health throughout your life means feeling good about yourself, deciding what is important to you, and interacting well with others.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself - do you have a healthy balance in your life?

- Do you take care of your body and mind by healthy eating, being active and getting a goodnight's sleep?
- Do you regularly take time to relax and enjoy the company of family and friends?
- Do you spend time with at least one friend whom you trust and can talk to?
- Do you find time to be alone to think about yourself and your life?
- Are you achieving financial balance in your spending between real needs and wants?
- Do you keep mentally alert, learning new skills or information?

What you can do to nurture a sense of well-being in your life:

- **Take charge of your own mental well-being.** While you need to actively pursue physical health by eating well and being active, it is just as important to actively pursue your mental well-being. You can keep your mind active and exercised by reading and learning new information and socializing regularly with others. Make decisions on the key stressors in your life. It is hard to have a sense of well-being if you are stressed by major worries. That is why it is important to resolve these issues.
- **Get information** from your library or bookstores about how to stay on top of your mental health. If life seems too hard or overwhelming, there is help available through community organizations like the Canadian Mental Health Association, family service bureaus or your family doctor.
- **Ways to nurture your mental health:**
 - **Build your self-esteem.** We all have strengths and weaknesses. Be proud of your strengths and learn ways to improve the things you'd like to change. > Activity: On a piece of paper, draw two columns. Write a list of your strengths in one and a list of the areas you would like to work on in the other. > Activity: Celebrate your successes by having a party with family and friends.
 - **Take care of your physical health.** Eat well, keep fit and rest to reduce stress and enjoy life. > Activity: Eat a balanced diet. Find a healthy eating class and enroll today. > Activity: Get plenty of physical exercise. Start walking or running or join the local fitness centre. > Activity: Avoid fatigue and be sure to get a good night's sleep.
 - **Create positive parenting and family relationships.** Don't take your family for granted. Work on building good family relationships. Remember to let them know how much you value them. > Activity: Bring your family together to discuss issues but also think of ways to have fun with them. How about going to the park or the movies? Do it regularly.
 - **Give and receive** kindness and compliments. Sincere compliments make everyone feel better. Don't be afraid to accept them gracefully - that is not conceit.

- > Activity: The next time someone gives you a compliment say, "Thank you, I really appreciate hearing that."
- **Learn to manage stress.** Planning and time management can help reduce stress.
 - > Activity: Make it a habit to take a five minute 'mental holiday' every day. Go to a quiet place, close your eyes and dream about a favourite place or memory. Feel yourself relax.
- **Find ways to cope** with changes that affect you. At some point, all people face problems or misfortunes in their lives. Such problems are stressful and can lead to many emotions, including sadness, anger and grief. People cope with their problems in different ways.
 - > Activity: Many people find support groups helpful and like to share their thoughts and possible solutions with people in similar situations.
 - > Activity: You may prefer to talk to a friend, mental health professional, or clergy.
- **Find positive ways to express strong emotions** like anger, sadness and fear. Think about why you have these feelings. What types of activities upset you? Which are calming?
 - > Activity: Talking to a good friend can help reduce the intensity of your feelings.
 - > Activity: Do some physical exercise at home or at the local fitness centre. You should seek professional help if you frequently feel strong emotions like these.
- **Make friends** who will share the good and bad times, the joys and sorrows, with you.
 - > Activity: Build a 'friendship tree' that starts with you as the tree base and builds out from there. Ask each of your friends to bring a new friend to your next gathering. This is a great way to form a walking group or a coffee club.
- **Think about your priorities.** There are so many choices in today's world. What are the things that matter most to you? What are your physical needs (food, clothing, shelter)? What are your physical wants (DVDs, cars)? You also need to consider your social, mental and spiritual needs and priorities. Think about who and what matters most to you at this time in your life.
 - > Activity: Financially, a budget can help your family separate the 'needs' from the 'wants' or 'nice to have' items.
 - > Activity: Take the time to consider your social, mental and spiritual needs and priorities. It can be very helpful to write out a list for each of these three needs. Put each item in its order of importance to you right now.
- **Get involved in your community.** Volunteering is a great way to meet new people and learn new skills. It can also give you a sense of satisfaction and helping.
 - > Activity: Begin small with an activity you like. Most communities have organized programs that need volunteers. Maybe you would like to volunteer in your child's school or with a seniors' project?
- **Get to know yourself.** As you get to know and accept yourself, you will find self-confidence and a sense of peace.
 - > Activity: Set a few minutes aside each day to be alone with your thoughts. You may want to do this in a quiet room or while taking a walk. A breathing exercise can relax and calm you. You can think about what makes you happy, who and what you really care for.
- **Have fun.** Laughter and humour can boost your mental health or sense of well-being, help to release tension and reduce stress levels.
 - > Activity: Look for things to laugh at - read cartoons, watch comedy shows, or share a joke. Find ways to surprise and delight your friends and family.

Depression

Everyday challenges can sometimes leave us feeling sad and hopeless even though we are quite healthy mentally. Usually these feelings pass after a period of time. If they don't go away, you may be suffering from depression. Depression becomes an illness when your negative feelings begin to affect your personal and work life. Depression has many causes and can happen to anyone at any time.

These are some of the warning signs of depression:

- feeling sad and worthless
- not interested in favourite things
- lack of energy
- having problems sleeping
- loss of appetite
- recurring thoughts of death or suicide.

If you think you or someone you know may suffer from depression, seek professional help from a doctor or mental health professional.

Creating a Family Budget

The idea of a budget seems simple enough, doesn't it? Money comes in and money goes out. Usually, though, balancing income and expenses is not that easy. A budget or spending plan can help you manage the family's finances.

Money problems can create a lot of anxiety and stress. They can be a major source of conflict within a relationship. Creating a reasonable budget can relieve some of this stress. It is important for a family to sit down and work on a plan together. This way, each member is involved and given a say in the family's major financial decisions.

A family budget can:

- make the best use of money
- save money
- reduce stress
- maintain family harmony
- make you feel good about yourself

Where do you start?

Ask yourself: What are your family's spending habits?

- Do you have a budget or spending plan?
- Are you able to save some money each month?
- Do you feel frustrated and tense when you think about your household expenses?

- Does your money run out before the month ends?
- Do you talk to your partner about money issues?

How do you get better control of your finances:

- **Get organized.** You will need to take a longer term look at your family's spending habits. Gather your utility bills and invoices for any major expenses you had during the past year. These will help you estimate your yearly expenses. If you don't have them or have moved to a new area, utility companies will be able to give you an estimate of these costs. Credit card companies also maintain records of their card holders' transactions. As well, you will need pay records or a copy of your last tax return. If necessary, your current employer or last employer will be able to give you information about your pay.
- **Design a family budget.** You can use the sample budget outline given or look for other examples in books, magazines, or Internet sites. You may also want to talk to someone at your bank or look for a course in personal finance.
- **Write** down your household income from wages, pensions, insurance and tax credits starting with the current month and then record the month's expenses. You may need to search through your checkbook, bank statements and receipts. The more accurate and detailed you can be, the better picture you will get of your financial situation.
- **Think about** your family's lifestyle and spending habits. Your partner and children should be involved so they will understand and be part of the decisions made. What are the most important things you spend your money on? What could you do without?
- **Estimate** your family's income and expenses for the next year. You can base it on your current month's budget. Do you expect your income to change during the year? Have you accounted for expenses such as Christmas, holidays and birthdays?
- **Find out** about your Credit Report. A credit bureau service is available in every province. Call or visit the office to check your credit rating. You will find them listed in the yellow pages or government services pages of your phone book.

Before making a purchase, ask yourself: Do you need it or do you want it?

Ways to save money:

- Pay yourself first. You won't miss the money you put away if it is built into your budget. Payroll deductions like Canada Savings Bonds are a good way to do this.
- Pay down on your debt and reduce or avoid interest charges.
- Are you paying for telephone or cable TV services you don't use? These costs can really add up over time
- Cut down on eating out. Prepare special meals at home.
- Make a food shopping list and stick to it when you go to the store.
- Check the free programs and services that are offered in your community.
- If you quit smoking, try to save the money you would have spent on cigarettes.
- Use the public library. You can save on buying books or magazines and Internet service.
- Share babysitting and child care responsibilities with friends or neighbours.
- Learn to repair things in your home.
- Resist impulse buying– think about buying the item for a couple of days.

Month _____ Year _____			
MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
Wages/Salary (Net)	\$	Child Tax Credit	\$
Disability Pension (Net)	\$	GST Credit	\$
Other pensions (Net)	\$	Other Income (Net)	\$
Family Allowance	\$	A. TOTAL NET INCOME	\$
MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES			
ACCOMMODATIONS		FOOD	
Rent/Mortgage	\$	Groceries	\$
Park Rent	\$	Lunches	\$
Property Taxes	\$	Restaurants/Fast Food	\$
Electricity	\$	Corner Store	\$
Water/Sewage/Garbage	\$	Other	\$
Heating	\$	SUPPORT	
Telephone	\$	Spousal Support	\$
Cable	\$	Child Support	\$
Internet	\$	CLOTHING	
Property Insurance	\$	Clothing	\$
Property Maintenance	\$	Cleaning/Repair	\$
Other	\$	HEALTH and PERSONAL CARE	
TRANSPORTATION		Pharmacy	\$
Car/Lease Payment	\$	Dentist/Optometrlist	\$
Fuel	\$	Medical Treatments	\$
Vehicle Maintenance	\$	Medical/Disability Insurance	\$
Registration/License	\$	Haircuts	\$
Vehicle Insurance	\$		
Parking	\$		
Public Transport	\$		
SUBTOTAL	\$	SUBTOTAL	\$

EDUCATION		ASSORTED	
Course Tuition/Fees	\$	Life Insurance	\$
Course Materials(Books, Supplies)	\$	Child Care/Day Care	\$
Schooling/Student Loan	\$	Laundry	\$
Books/Magazines/Newspapers	\$	Pet Care	\$
RECREATION	\$	Cigarettes/Alcohol	\$
Sport fees	\$	Entertainment	\$
Sport equipment	\$	Hobbies/Clubs	\$
Trips/Vacations	\$	Gifts	\$
Family Outings	\$	Donations	\$
Movies, Videos, DVDs	\$		
FINANCE			
Cash	\$	SUBTOTAL	\$
Savings - Bank Account	\$		
Savings - Emergency Fund	\$		
Savings - RRSPs, RESPs	\$	B. TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES	\$
Savings - Other	\$		
Bank Charges	\$		
Credit Payments (credit accounts)	\$		
Credit Card Payments (ex. Visa)	\$		
SUBTOTAL	\$		
MONTHLY BUDGET SUMMARY for _____ (month,year)			
NET MONTHLY INCOME (A)	\$		
TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES (B)	\$		
FREE BALANCE (A minus B)	\$		

Managing Stress

Stress is an important and natural part of living. A certain amount of stress can motivate us to reach our goals, but too much stress for too long wears down our physical and emotional health. When our stress level starts to get out of hand, our bodies undergo a series of changes known as the *stress response*. Common signs include:

- muscle tension.
- mood swings and changes in memory or concentration.
- tiredness and changes in sleep patterns.

Reduce stress by:

- making decisions.
- avoid putting things off.
- getting others to help you with tasks.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself what is creating stress in your life

Change is often a major source of stress. Understanding what changes in your life are causing your stress may help you control it.

- Have you recently experienced one of the following events: making the change from military to civilian life? Changing jobs? Moving? Financial changes? Leaving old friends? Making new friends? Dealing with a civilian rather than military culture?
- Are you experiencing other major life events such as marriage, death of a loved one, or divorce?
- Do you have long-term worries, including financial or health problems?
- Do daily hassles such as traffic and rude people really upset you?

How to manage your stress level:

- **Identify what is causing your stress.** Are surface problems hiding the real, deeper ones? Once you determine what is really bothering you, you will be able to do something about it. If you feel overwhelmed, please seek help.
- **Get information.** Everyone handles stress differently so there is no perfect way to manage it. There are helpful books, videos and courses available to help you. Think about how you like to cope with stress:
 - Do you like to take action and deal directly with situations?
 - Do you like to talk about your feelings with supportive family or friends?
 - Do you take your mind off things by being active?
- **Take the time to relax.** You could visit with family or friends, take a walk, work on a hobby, or practice relaxation exercises. Try these breathing and muscle relaxation exercises:

- Pull your shoulders up to your ears, hold for few seconds and then release with a sigh.
- Sit down and take a deep breath. Flop over like a rag doll and let all your tension go.
- Close your eyes and picture a pleasant scene or memory.
- **Think about your priorities.** Look at what is happening in your life and assess your priorities. What is really important? What can wait for another time?

Try these breathing and muscle relaxation exercises:

- Pull your shoulders up to your ears, hold for few seconds and then release with a sigh.
- Sit down and take a deep breath. Flop over like a rag doll and let all your tension go.
- Close your eyes and picture a pleasant scene or memory.
- **Get involved** in hobbies, sports, or volunteer work to give yourself a 'mental holiday' from your stress. Not thinking about your problems for a while can give you some mental distance from them.
- **Talk about your problems.** Another point of view can be helpful. If you need to talk with someone other than a family member or friend, contact a community organization that offers counselling or talk to your family doctor. Friends and family members may be helpful once they realize that you are having a hard time.

Develop a plan to help you manage your stress. Focus on one problem at a time:

On a blank sheet of paper:

- Write down **an item** that is creating stress in your life. It might be your health, a relationship, money, or something else.
- List your **options**. What are all the things you could do about this problem? What is realistic? What is not?
- Write down the **consequences** of each option. What will happen if you do something? What will happen if you do nothing at all?
- **Decide** on your best option.
- Choose a date to **follow-up and evaluate** whether your actions have worked out as you planned.

Tips to help you manage your stress:

- Regular exercise is a great way of relieving stress.
- Eating a well-balanced diet will help you feel your best. See *Canada's Food Guide* to make sure you're eating well.
- Get a good night's sleep so you feel rested and ready for the day ahead.
- Cut back on the amount of caffeine you drink in teas, coffees, colas, or chocolate.
- Take time for quiet activities that bring you pleasure like reading, listening to music, or painting.
- Learn to manage your family's finances. Financial worries can be very stressful.

- Reduce what you expect of yourself and others. Relax.

Coping with pain

Everyone has experienced some type of pain, either from an injury or illness. Acute pain is the most common type of pain and results from an injury, a spasm or an illness. It goes away after a relatively short time. Chronic pain is recurring or persistent pain that lasts for weeks or even a lifetime. It is harder to manage than acute pain. The most common types of chronic pain are headache, low back pain, arthritis pain and nerve pain.

Help yourself cope with pain:

- eat a healthy diet
- get enough exercise and sleep
- manage stress and think positively
- monitor your pain symptoms
- look for things to laugh about every day

How do you start?

Ask yourself - do you suffer with chronic pain?

- Does pain affect your daily tasks?
- Does pain affect your sleep at night?
- Does pain make you feel irritable or depressed?
- Does pain affect how you get along with others?

Learn to manage your pain:

- **Attitude plays a major role** in how you feel and respond to pain. Learning ways to manage your pain will help you have a quality life and a sense of well-being. Become a self-manager by building your knowledge and taking action on your situation.
- **Learn about pain and its causes.** Check the local library, bookstores and the Internet for up-to-date books or articles about pain and pain management.
- **Learn how to describe your pain.** Being able to accurately describe your pain will help your doctor and other health professionals to help you. Use a daily chart to track:
 - the location of your pain
 - the type of pain (for example: throbbing, sharp, achy)
 - the intensity of your pain (try using a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the worst)
 - the duration or length of time you feel pain.
- **It is healthy for you to talk about what and how you are feeling** rather than keeping your feelings inside. Talking about your pain is not complaining. It is important to acknowledge and accept that other people may find it difficult to understand how you feel. This is when good friends can provide you with comfort and support.
- **Find out what is causing your pain.** Your doctor will review your treatment options, including medication and non-medication. Remember: medications are usually only one

part of the solution. Always take medicines wisely, following the directions and keeping a detailed record. Too much or misuse of medication can cause side effects and, in some cases, lead to addiction.

- **Surround yourself** with supportive professionals, family and friends. Seek out organizations that deal with your type of problem. They will help you feel less alone and can often provide good ideas about ways to cope with your pain.
- **Develop a pain management plan** with a health professional such as a nurse, occupational therapist or physiotherapist. Learn as much as you can about pain, how it can be treated and what you can do to find relief. The more you understand about your condition, the more you will be able to control it.

Ideas to help you cope with your pain:

- Practice relaxation, meditation or visualization techniques to distract you from your pain and the stress it creates.
- Learn how to lift objects safely and how to avoid falls.
- Try to think positively and, as much as possible, try not to focus on your pain.
- Maintain a healthy weight to reduce stress on your joints and muscles.
- 'Listen' to your body for signals that you need to rest.
- Eat a healthy diet following *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Ask for help when you need it.

Managing angry feelings

Everyone gets angry sometimes. It is a normal and healthy emotion. However, when anger gets out of control, it can lead to problems at home and at work. We can't always avoid the situations or people that make us feel angry, but we can learn to control our reactions.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself, "Is anger creating a problem in your life?"

- Do you often feel angry?
- Does feeling angry interfere with your enjoyment of life?
- Is anger making you act aggressively or violently toward yourself or others?
- Is anger hurting your relationships with family, friends and co-workers?
- Do you know what is causing your anger? Could it be from a traumatic event in your past?

How to manage angry feelings:

- **Get information.** Your local library and bookstores have books and magazine articles about anger. Community organizations, like the Canadian Mental Health Association, also have information and people you can talk to.
- **Identify what things trigger your anger.** Pick a specific incident and think about it. Was your anger a sudden reaction or did it build up slowly until it finally erupted? Did you get

angry because you felt startled or afraid? Recognizing the situations that make you feel angry can help you prepare yourself for them.

- **Apply positive thinking.** Learn to express your anger in a positive way without blaming or shaming someone else. Explain how you feel and why you feel that way, such as "I feel hurt when you ignore me" or "I feel frustrated when I have to fill out these forms." Statements such as these will help you discuss the problem directly and honestly. It's just as important, of course, to listen to the other person's feelings.
- **Distract yourself by thinking of something positive in your life.** Make a list of four items that make you feel happy and think about them when your emotions are getting out of control. Laughter is a great way to defuse anger so try to find some humour in your situation.
- **Get physically active.** This can provide a healthy way to discharge your anger. Go to the gym and have a vigorous work-out. Maybe you can express your feelings through painting or playing a musical instrument.
- **Learn to relax and reduce the stress in your life.** This will help you feel more in control of what you do and say. Relaxation techniques such as meditation and deep breathing can be done anywhere and at any time. There are books and courses available to teach these and other techniques.
- **Practice anger management techniques** to relieve your physical tension and help you take charge of the situation. Some examples are:
 - Slowly repeat a word or phrase such as 'calm down' or 'relax' and take deep breaths.
 - Distract your thoughts by working on a hobby or taking a walk.
 - Use humour to diffuse the situation and try to see the funny side of a situation.
 - Learn stress management techniques such as relaxation, meditation and deep breathing exercises to reduce your stress level.
- **Get professional help** as soon as possible if your anger is creating major problems in your life or is becoming violent. Discuss your situation with your family doctor or contact an organization that offers counselling in your community.

More ideas to help you manage angry feelings:

Try these and practice them so they become automatic in stressful situations:

- Breathe deeply in and out while slowly counting from one to four.
- Walk away from the situation until you feel calmer.
- Take a few minutes and concentrate on thinking about a pleasant image or memory.
- Tell the other person you are angry. Do this in a respectful way.
- Praise yourself when you have remained calm during a stressful situation.

Resolving Family Conflict

Every family experiences some level of family conflict. Disagreements are a normal part of any relationship. They happen when people have differing needs, wants, values or beliefs. However, if these conflicts go unresolved, they can begin to harm relationships in the home.

Common causes of family conflict include:

- Differing opinions on how to discipline children or teenagers
- Disagreement over financial matters
- The needs of one or of both partners may not get met.

Resolving conflict depends on mutual respect and the abilities and willingness of all members to find a solution that everyone can live with.

To communicate effectively:

- Let each person speak
- Listen carefully
- State viewpoints clearly and honestly
- Treat each other with respect
- Acknowledge each other's feelings.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself - how well does your family resolve conflicts now?

- Is the same conflict and tension present every day?
- How serious is the conflict? Are there arguments? Are there physical fights? Do family members speak in loud voices and slam doors? Do they get upset and cry?
- Is there a time of day when conflicts tend to happen in your family? Is it in the morning, after school, at dinner, or before you go to bed? Or after someone has started drinking?

Steps to help resolve family conflict:

- **Involve all family members.** While you can't avoid all conflict, it is possible to improve your ability to deal with it. Situations may develop without warning, throwing your family into crisis. It is important for all family members to be involved in finding ways to resolve your conflict so you can work on it together.
- **Get information.** Libraries and bookstores carry the latest books and magazine articles on resolving family conflict, especially such topics as marriage, raising children and dealing with teenagers. Schools and community organizations sometimes offer courses or special talks about dealing with family conflict. Gathering ideas will help give you options to use when you are faced with a problem.
- **Improve your ability to react positively to situations.** Walk away or take deep breaths to calm yourself and to give yourself time to think before reacting. Learn ways to communicate effectively such as having each person taking a turn to speak without interruption. Set rules about how you will talk about conflicting situations. For example, there will be: no name calling, no interruptions, each person will have a turn to speak.
- **Develop an action plan.** If there is a recurring issue that causes conflict in your family, develop a plan to resolve it together. Work on one issue at a time and be sure to fully involve all family members who will be affected by the decision. The plan can be

reviewed from time to time. It can also be used as a model when resolving other family conflicts.

- **Get professional help.** If the conflict in your family is serious, becoming violent or emotionally destructive, seek professional help. Community organizations such as family service bureaus and the Canadian Mental Health Association have trained mental health professionals who can work with you and your family. Contact them today.

A plan to resolve conflict:

On a sheet of paper, you can write:

- The exact issue/problem that is causing conflict
- The facts related to this specific issue
- The possible causes for the conflict
- Possible solutions
- Together, choose the best solution
- Decide how to carry out the solution
- Check back later to see if things are working out.

Things to remember about resolving family conflicts:

- Decide if the issue is worth getting upset about.
- The goal is to resolve the problem, not to win the argument.
- Always treat everyone involved with respect.
- There are always alternatives, but sometimes you must search for them.
- Both parties must agree to a solution that each can live with.
- Seek professional help.

Taking Action on Addiction

Addiction is a complicated issue that affects everyone differently. The term *chemical dependency* is used to describe all forms of addiction or dependence on alcohol or drugs. It is considered a primary disease and is progressive, chronic and fatal. It affects the whole person - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

How does an addiction develop?

Addiction follows a process. Most people don't have difficulties when they start using alcohol or drugs. And, if their use remains moderate, occasional and in social circumstances, they may never have a problem. Some people, however, begin to focus more on the alcohol and drugs than on other areas of their lives. Their use of alcohol or drugs becomes abuse and then dependency.

Life circumstances play an important role in whether or not a person becomes addicted. The process that moves a person from simple use to abuse to dependency is influenced by culture, life events, biological make-up and relationships with family and friends. Genetics may also contribute to addiction, but will not be the only cause.

Sometimes, people suffering from conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or chronic pain try to cope by using alcohol and drugs (including both prescription and over-the-counter types). They may become addicted to one or all of these substances without even being aware of their growing problem.

You may have a problem if you:

- drink alcohol or use drugs in secret
- suffer blackouts
- have headaches or hangovers
- consume quickly and more often.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself - do you have any of the warning signs of an alcohol or drug addiction?

- Are you having problems with any part of your life? Physical health? Work? Family? Mental health? Your social or spiritual life?
- Do you know when to stop drinking? Do you often drink too much and become intoxicated? Do you binge drink?
- Do you have withdrawal symptoms such as shakiness, irritability or seizures when you stop drinking alcohol or using drugs?
- Are you using illegal drugs or having your drugs prescribed by more than one doctor?
- Has your drug use increased since you first started using them?
- Are you spending more and more time thinking about where the money for your next drinks or drugs will come from?

If you answered 'yes' to one or more of these questions, you may have the signs of a drug or alcohol addiction.

How to change this part of your life:

- **Be honest with yourself.** Does your alcohol and drug use affect your life? Your family's lives? Think about all aspects - social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental. You are the only person who can make the decision to stop.
- **Get information.** Check your local addiction services for books, pamphlets and materials. Learn how addiction develops and the stages involved in the recovery process. Knowledge will give you the understanding and confidence to help you make this change.
- **Stop using alcohol or drugs.** Get advice from a doctor or other health professional about how to safely stop using alcohol or drugs.
- **Get support.** Talk to someone about your situation, preferably someone who knows about addictions. Addiction support programs are available in every province and offer both individual counselling and group support programs. Your family and friends may also give you valuable support.

Ideas for when you stop:

- Take small steps at first and reward yourself when you succeed. Treat yourself to a night at the movies or a special food.
- Learn and use relaxation techniques such as sitting quietly and thinking of a peaceful scene.
- Eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.
- Find ways to distract yourself when you have the urge to use alcohol or drugs. Try taking a walk or working on a home project.
- Live one day at a time.

Not Smoking

The decision to stop smoking is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Research shows that smoking significantly increases the risk of developing serious health conditions. Cigarette smoking is a major risk factor in heart disease, lung cancer and stroke. It is the #1 cause of preventable illness and death in Canada.

Just one cigarette:

- speeds up your heartbeat
- causes blood vessels to narrow so your blood pressure increases
- upsets the flow of blood and air in your lung
- causes the temperature in your fingers and toes to drop.

The longer you smoke . . . the deadlier it gets.

Good reasons to stop smoking:

- reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke
- help you feel more relaxed and energetic
- improve the health of everyone in your home
- save money

Where do you start?

Ask yourself about your smoking habit now:

- Can you remember why you started smoking? Most people start when they're teenagers and want to fit in. Why do you smoke now? Think about the pros and cons and write a list for each one. Is your smoking worth it?
- Why are you thinking about quitting? Are you concerned about your health? Do you want to set a good example for your partner and your children? Save money? Protect your family from second-hand smoke? Quitting smoking is not easy, and to keep motivated you will need a powerful reason. Try writing a list of the top five reasons you want to quit and carry it with you to refer to whenever you have a craving.

- Making a firm decision to stop smoking is the first step in kicking the addiction. Cigarettes are addictive so you have to be strongly committed to quitting. Smoking cessation programs, books and Internet sites can provide advice to keep you encouraged.

How to kick the addiction

- **Get ready.** Once you've made the decision to quit, prepare yourself by making other lifestyle changes. You can prepare your body by drinking more fluids, regular exercise and plenty of rest. Change your environment by removing ashtrays and making your home and car smoke-free zones. Decide on the date you will quit. Choose a time that will be easier for you: if you smoke more at work, quit on the week-end. If you smoke more at home, quit during the work week. Don't change the date.
- **Be realistic.** Stopping smoking will be hard. Knowing what to expect can help get you past the difficult times. Most people find the first three days the hardest and this is when most setbacks occur. Immediate withdrawal symptoms usually continue for another three weeks. People often have trouble again three to six months after stopping. Review your reasons for stopping to help overcome these cravings.
- **Prepare yourself for the date you set to stop smoking.** You can do this by going without cigarettes for a period of time, washing your clothes and airing your house to get rid of smell of cigarette smoke. You can also throw out your cigarettes and buy yourself a gift to celebrate your decision to stop. Tell your family and friends that you are going to quit. Ask for their assistance by not smoking when you are around, especially at first.
- **Choose how you are going to stop.** There are many different options, including nicotine-free and nicotine replacement therapies, acupuncture, laser therapy, aversion therapy, hypnosis, stopping suddenly or cutting back slowly. There are also smoking cessation and self help programs available through community health organizations. This is where support and encouragement from other people can help keep you motivated. Learn more about these options through books, newspaper and magazine articles and Internet sites. Your doctor or other healthcare professional can discuss the options and make a recommendation depending on your health and personal preferences.
- **Prepare yourself for nicotine cravings and plan ways to overcome them.** Most people feel the most intense urges during the first few days after quitting. These usually last only a few minutes and the urge passes whether you smoke a cigarette or not. Think of ways to distract yourself. You could phone a supportive friend, exercise, drink a beverage like water or juice, or review your list of reasons for stopping. Keep thinking positively and, when the urge to smoke passes, remember to reward yourself. You could go to a movie or buy a good book.
- **Endure the withdrawal symptoms.** They generally last from one to three weeks. The most common ones include dry mouth, sore throat, coughing, hunger, tension and irritability. Once you get through this, you will be in the recovery stage. You could use the money you have saved to buy yourself a special gift to celebrate your success.
- **Substitute a new habit to replace the old one of smoking.** This should begin on the day you stop. Try reading a newspaper or talking to a friend at the time you would have smoked a cigarette. Some people need more than one try to stop smoking so, if you stumble, don't give up. With determination, a good plan, and the support and encouragement of others, you can achieve success.

Did you know?

- **20 minutes** after the last cigarette: blood pressure and pulse rate return to normal
- **2 days** after stopping: your senses of smell and taste begin to return
- After **1 year**: your risk of heart disease is reduced by half
- Within **3 years**: your risk of heart disease is the same as someone who never smoked
- Within **10 years**: your risk of lung cancer is reduced by half

Ideas to help you stay 'smoke free':

- Keep active every day so you won't think about smoking.
- Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake. Both are associated with smoking.
- Help reduce your stress by practising relaxation techniques.
- Exercise - it can help reduce your cravings.
- Practice the four "D's" whenever tempted: Delay, Deep breath, Drink water, Do something.
- Reward yourself with a gift bought with the money you have saved by not smoking.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Did you know that we spend almost one-third of our time sleeping? A good night's sleep helps us deal with the demands of everyday life. Many people, however, have trouble sleeping. They may have difficulty falling asleep, waking up during sleep or have distressing dreams. When one or more of these difficulties continues over a period of time, a person becomes *sleep deprived*.

How much sleep is enough?

The best measure of how much sleep you need is how you feel when you wake. If you feel well and are energetic, then you likely had a good night's sleep.

Where do you start?

Ask yourself: What are your sleep habits now?

- Do you fear going to bed at night? Do you feel anxious when getting ready for bed?
- Do you worry when you are in bed?
- If you wake during the night, do you anxiously check the bedroom clock?
- Do you usually sleep the same hours every night?
- Do you have any of the warning signs of sleep deprivation?
 - Do you often feel irritable and fatigued?
 - Do you often find it difficult to concentrate?
 - Do you feel drowsy during the day, especially in the mid-morning or mid-afternoon?
 - Do you fall asleep in five minutes or less?

How to get a good night's sleep:

- **Get information.** Check your library and bookstores for up-to-date books and magazines with articles about sleep. They may help you understand why you have sleeping problems and suggest solutions.
- **Determine the cause of your sleep problem.** Could it be something in your environment, like noise, light or temperature? Can you think of ways to change things that are disturbing your sleep?
- **Sometimes sleeplessness can be a symptom of deeper problems.** Emotions such as fear, anger, guilt and depression can keep you awake thinking and worrying. Strong emotions like these are hard to shut off at bedtime. They can affect your ability to get to sleep and to stay asleep. If your emotions often keep you awake at night, you should talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. Your doctor may prescribe a sleeping pill to help you in the short-term. For long-term help, talking to a mental health professional may help you overcome your problems.

Tips to help you get a good night's sleep:

- Keep a regular schedule. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day of the week.
- Maintain good health habits like eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise.
- Don't exercise within a few hours of bedtime.
- Avoid napping during the day.
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.
- Have a quiet time before going to bed. Try to go to bed in a peaceful state of mind.
- Make sure your bed looks inviting and is firm with good support.
- Make sure your stomach isn't too empty or too full before going to bed.
- Keep your bedroom temperature cool.
- If your thoughts keep you awake, try getting up and writing them down.
- Think of a pleasant memory or image to help you relax and relieve stress.