



 Invest  
in  
Yourself

Your guide for taking a more active role in your health.

# Welcome!

Many employees don't invest in themselves as much as they should. And we get it – work takes over, your schedule is jam-packed, and it seems like there just isn't enough time in the day to focus on your wellness. However, investing in your health is one of the best returns on investment there is. Living a healthy lifestyle now will save you money on healthcare expenses in the future. Not to mention, investing in your health will help you live a longer, happier life.

A healthy diet or fitness routine, for example, can be thought as an investment to your short-term and long-term health. Making healthy nutritional choices and getting enough exercise can significantly reduce your risk for life-threatening diseases like diabetes, heart disease, or cancer. Living a healthy lifestyle will also help reduce some of the stress in your life and help boost your mental and emotional health.

To put it simply, investing in yourself is all about taking a more active role in your health. Small habits – like paying attention to the foods you eat or making sure you get eight hours of sleep each night – are considered investing in your health. You don't have to spend a fortune or use up all of your valuable free time to invest in yourself; you just need to adopt habits that make living a healthy lifestyle easy and enjoyable.

We developed this guide to help you become the healthiest and happiest version of you by investing in yourself. In this guide, you'll find some simple tips for taking a more active role in your health. We discuss five important aspects of health and wellbeing, including:

- NUTRITION
- EXERCISE
- SELF-CARE
- STRESS MANAGEMENT
- MENTAL WELLBEING





# Nutrition

Investing in your health means putting in some time and effort into your eating habits. Your diet has a tremendous impact on your health. Eating a nutritious, balanced diet can reduce your risk for chronic diseases, help you sustain a healthy weight, and give you the energy you need to feel good all day long.

Nutrition is one of the most important aspects of health for many reasons. Unhealthy eating habits are the main contributor to the obesity epidemic in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, about one-third of American adults are obese. Being overweight or obese can lead to many serious health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer. These are some of the leading causes of preventable death in the U.S.

Besides disease prevention, eating a healthy, balanced diet will help your body perform better. The nutrients absorbed from healthy meals boost brain function to help you concentrate and stay productive. A 2013 study found that employees who ate healthily all day long were 25% more likely to have higher job performance. They also reported that employees who ate five or more servings of fruit and vegetables at least four times a week were 20% more likely to have higher job performance and be more productive.

If you want to feel and perform your best, a balanced diet is essential. Here are a few simple ways to invest in your diet:

**Eat more fruits and veggies.** One of the simplest ways to maintain a more balanced diet is to eat more fruits and veggies. Unfortunately, many adults don't eat as many fruits and veggies as they should. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, the average American consumes a total of only three servings of fruits and vegetables daily. In general, adults should aim to eat 5 to 13 servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

Eating more fruits and veggies will benefit your health in a variety of ways. Some of the benefits associated with eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day include:

- Reduced risk of chronic illness
- Low in calories
- Zero added sugars
- High in fiber
- Mood boosting
- Better bone health
- Improved immune system

There are plenty of ways to add in more fruits and veggies to your everyday diet. Try topping plain Greek yogurt with fresh berries, adding a handful of spinach to your sandwich, or adding chopped veggies to your morning omelet. Focus on fruits and veggies that you love, and use them as the focus of your meals and snacks.





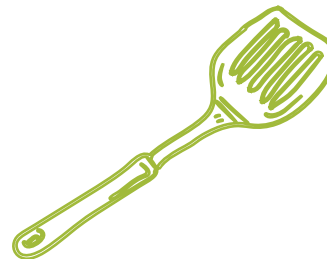
# Nutrition

**Focus on real foods.** Eating more real food and less processed food is one of the best ways to create and maintain a balanced diet. Highly processed foods – like chips, snack cakes, and chicken nuggets – are filled with unhealthy amounts of fat, sugars, sodium, and additives. These foods often contain little to no nutritional value. Unlike highly processed foods, real foods are full of vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that your body and brain need to function properly.

Some of the health perks of eating more real food include:

- Disease prevention
- Energy boost
- More satiating
- Healthy blood sugar levels
- Chemical and additive free
- Healthy heart
- Better mental health
- Healthy skin
- Lower triglyceride levels
- Lower blood pressure
- Healthy gut

Some examples of real foods include fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds, eggs, lean meats and minimally processed foods such as whole-grain pasta, whole-grain crackers, and Greek yogurt. By eating a diet filled with real foods and cutting back on processed foods, you can reduce calories, improve your diet, and feel healthier and happier. A simple way to start eating more real food is to replace one processed meal a day (like frozen pizza) with one real-food based meal (like grilled chicken with veggies).



**Cook your own meals.** Eating less take-out and cooking your own meals is an easy way to reduce calories, control your portion sizes, and ensure you know exactly what you're eating! Many adults rely on fast food for a convenient meal, but eating out regularly can wreak havoc on your diet. What many people don't realize is that eating healthily can be convenient – it just takes some practice and some new habits.

Meal prepping is an excellent habit to get into. It makes positive nutritional choices convenient and appealing throughout a busy workweek. When you meal prep, you won't need to pick up fast food over a lunch break because you'll already have a fresh, delicious meal ready to pop into the microwave. Plus, meal prepping can also help you save some cash – cha-ching!





# Nutrition

Ease yourself into meal prepping by starting with the basics. There are many websites and nutrition blogs with simple recipes and ideas for meal prepping to help you get started. If you're new to the world of meal prepping, choose meals that don't require as many ingredients or any complicated cooking techniques. Pick one day a week to get your grocery shopping done and prepare a week's worth of food. Once you get into the habit of meal prepping, making positive nutritional choices will be a breeze.

**Eat mindfully.** How you eat is just as important as what you eat! Practicing healthy eating habits might mean changing the way you think about food. Mindful eating is one of the best ways to stay aware of your nutritional choices and invest in a healthy diet. Many of us are guilty of sitting down to watch TV and then realize that we just ate an entire bag of chips. Mindful eating is about learning to pay attention while eating and staying mindful of your choices.

Mindful eating is beneficial in many ways when it comes to your diet. It could help you lose weight, eat more nutritiously, and reduce any feelings of stress that may come with eating. A few tips to help you practice mindful eating:

- *Eat slowly.* Take small bites and focus on the tastes and textures of your food.
- *Listen to your body.* Ask yourself if you're eating because you're actually hungry, or if you're eating because food is right in front of you.
- *Create a healthy eating environment.* Sit down when you eat your meals and eliminate any distractions.
- *Keep a food journal.* Track what you eat throughout the day and write down how you felt after eating particular meals.



**"A HEALTHY INSIDE STARTS FROM THE OUTSIDE."  
- ROBERT URICH**



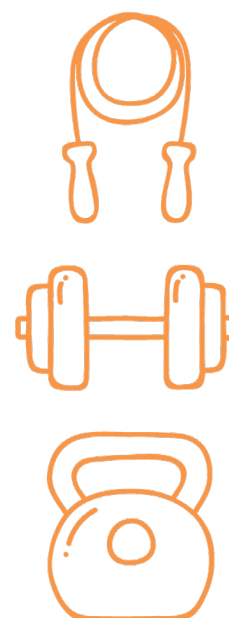
# Exercise

Regular exercise is one of the best things you can do for your body and mind. In combination with eating a nutritious diet, physical activity helps reduce your risk of chronic disease and promotes a healthy weight. The American Heart Association (AHA) suggests that adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week.

Unfortunately, many adults don't achieve this goal. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 80% of American adults don't get the recommended amount of exercise each week. Not exercising enough can potentially set you up for many health complications or conditions in the years to come. Studies have even linked physical inactivity to 5.3 million deaths worldwide each year – which is more than those caused by smoking cigarettes. This is why physical activity is such a crucial investment for your health.

Moving more and sitting less is a simple way to help yourself reach your goal of 150 minutes of physical activity each week. Regular exercise benefits your health in many ways including:

- Healthier heart
- Healthier lungs
- Better brainpower
- Less stress
- More energy
- Improved mental and emotional wellbeing
- Weight management
- Disease prevention
- Improved immune system





# Exercise

The following are some simple tips to help you get moving:

**Make exercise convenient.** Learning to make exercise part of your daily routine isn't about finding more time. It's about learning how to make it convenient and fit in with your busy schedule. The key to regular physical activity is creating a fitness routine that fits with your daily lifestyle. For some people, that might mean a trip to the gym right after work, and for others, it might mean a morning at-home workout. You don't always need an hour-long gym session to get a good workout in. Taking a jog around your neighborhood before dinner or squeezing in some deskercises at the office are some examples of convenient ways to break a sweat that won't disrupt your daily routine.

**Make it fun.** Help yourself move more by finding physical activities that you enjoy. Exercise shouldn't just be another chore on your daily to-do list. Exercising should be fun, motivating, and stress relieving. Playing your favorite sport, wrestling with your kids, or even gardening count as forms of physical activity. If you're bored of your same old workout routine, try out a couple of fitness classes to learn some new workouts and exercises. By focusing on physical activities that you enjoy, you'll be much more inclined to get moving.

**Move more at work.** Many full-time employees struggle to get in enough exercise throughout the day because they are stuck inside an office for 40 hours a week. To combat this, it's important to find sneaky ways to move more while at work. Always take the stairs instead of the elevator, park far away from your office building, and get up to talk to co-workers rather than calling them on the phone. You should also take walking breaks throughout the day if possible. Speak with your manager about starting a walking club at your office!



"MOVEMENT IS A MEDICINE FOR CREATING CHANGE IN A PERSON'S PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND MENTAL STATES." - CAROL WELCH



# Self-Care

Taking proper care of yourself is essential for your short-term and long-term health. Many of us forget about how important self-care is and how beneficial it is to our health. It's easy to put self-care on the back-burner during a stressful week. However, a stressful, busy week might be the time that you need to practice self-care the most. Self-care can help manage stress, prevent burnout, and boost your feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

Self-care is engaging in any activity or behavior that brings about a positive effect on your mental, emotional, or physical health. Although it might sound indulgent to you, practicing self-care is anything but selfish. You need to be your best self before you can truly help others. If you want to start prioritizing your wellbeing, you can easily add in some simple behaviors to your busy schedule. Along with eating well, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep, here are some simple ways to practice more self-care:

**Visit a wellness retreat.** Sometimes it's necessary to get away for a bit. Spending a weekend at a wellness retreat is an excellent break from the real world. Most wellness retreats host a variety of activities that will help boost your physical and mental wellbeing. Many include a spa day, yoga classes, massages, healthy meals, outdoor play, and relaxing downtime. If a wellness retreat isn't in your budget, you can easily create your own wellness retreat in your home over the weekend! Plan a relaxing "stay-cation" filled with your favorite healthy foods and relaxing activities.

**Commit to 15 minutes a day.** No matter how busy you are, you can always find 15 minutes to spare for some self-care. Engaging in self-care for even a short amount of time on a daily basis can have a positive impact on your mental, emotional, and physical health. Schedule your 15-minute self-care break during a convenient time every day, and set an alarm as a reminder. It can be right after you wake up in the morning, over your lunch break, or right before you go to bed. Just be sure to find a time that works best for your schedule.

"AN EMPTY LANTERN PROVIDES NO LIGHT. SELF-CARE IS THE FUEL THAT ALLOWS YOUR LIGHT TO SHINE BRIGHTLY." - UNKNOWN





# Self-Care

**Find your favorite self-care activity.** There are many different ways to practice self-care. In fact, self-care activities can be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Find a mixture of self-care activities to practice on a regular basis. Some ideas include:

- Visit a spa
- Read a book
- Take a night out with your partner or friends
- Go offline (shut off your phone, social media, and other technology!)
- Start a mindfulness journal
- Create a gratitude list
- Volunteer
- Reconnect with nature
- Color
- Play with pets
- Work on a puzzle
- Get a massage
- Pick up a new hobby (like learning to sew or starting photography)
- Take a yoga class
- Meditate
- Engage in a random act of kindness





# Stress Management

Everyone has stress. It is a normal part of life. What's important is how you deal with stress. Without proper coping or management strategies, little everyday stressors can lead to eventual burnout. Stress and burnout can cause some serious physical and mental health consequences. Some of the physical consequences associated with chronic stress include:

- Weakened immune system
- Chronic aches and pains
- Digestive issues and poor gut health
- High blood pressure
- Hair loss
- Increased risk of heart attack or stroke
- Weight gain or weight loss

Some of the mental consequences associated with chronic stress include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability
- Difficulty staying productive
- Trouble sleeping/chronic fatigue
- Increased risk of anxiety and depression
- Personality changes

Investing in your health and wellness means learning to manage and cope with stress in a healthy way. Some simple ways to keep stress under control include:

**Utilize PTO.** Don't overwork yourself! Many cases of chronic stress are associated with long hours in the office and poor work-life balance. An estimated 662 million vacation days are left unused each year. This is unfortunate because taking some time off of work is one of the best ways to recover from work-related stress. You don't have to go on a fancy vacation to take advantage of your PTO. Even a weekend getaway or a half-day to catch up on sleep can make a huge difference. You'll return back to the office feeling refreshed and re-focused.





# Stress Management

**Practice positivity.** Adapting a positive mindset is one of the easiest things you can do to manage some of the stress in your life. By reducing negative self-talk, you'll feel less stressed out and more optimistic about the future. Training yourself to think positively can change the outlook you have on stressful situations – making them easier to manage. If you're having trouble adapting a positive mindset, pick a positive mantra to repeat to yourself throughout the day whenever you're feeling stressed.

**Learn to say "no."** Constantly accepting new projects when you're too busy or agreeing to attend every social gathering can be a recipe for disaster. It's important to learn not to take on more than you can handle. You are never obligated to say "yes" to everything! Getting rid of unnecessary commitments will free up more time for you to spend on things that are truly important to you.

**Engage in stress-relieving activities.** There are many effective stress-relieving activities that you can engage in on a daily basis. Set 10 minutes aside on a stressful day to get some stress relief. Some ideas include:

- Meditating
- Going to the gym
- Spending time outside
- Yoga
- Practicing breathing exercises
- Listening to your favorite music
- Taking a walk
- Writing in a journal
- Watching a funny movie (laughter reduces stress!)
- Gardening
- Cleaning





# Mental Wellbeing

Health isn't just about fitness or disease prevention – it's about living your best life. While investing in your physical health is crucial to prevent chronic illness, investing in your mental wellbeing is just as important. Even if you eat right and workout on a daily basis, if your mental wellbeing is suffering, you won't feel happy or healthy.

Overlooking your mental health could lead to depression, anxiety, or other mental illnesses. With approximately 48.3 million adults in the United States experiencing a mental illness each year, it's crucial to pay attention to and monitor your mental health. Even if you feel mentally and emotionally healthy at the moment, it's still a good idea to practice habits that support and improve your mental health. Here are a few simple ways to invest in your mental wellbeing:

**Download apps.** Put your smartphone to good use by downloading apps that can help improve your mental wellbeing. Using apps is an easy, convenient, and affordable way to boost your mental and emotional health. Plus, it's not nearly as time-consuming as other alternatives. Some great mental health apps to download:

- Headspace • Pacifica • Lantern • Happify • Talkspace

**Keep a mood journal.** A mood journal is an excellent way to track how you feel and why. Writing down notes about your day will help you connect with your feelings, process your emotions, and help you release some steam in a healthy way. Keep your mood journal simple and jot down some notes about your day and how you're feeling mentally. Keep it with you so that you have access to it whenever you get the urge to write.

"THE MIND AND BODY ARE NOT SEPARATE.  
WHAT AFFECTS ONE, AFFECTS THE OTHER."  
- UNKNOWN





# Mental Wellbeing

**Identify and use your individual strengths.** Strengths awareness helps you to recognize and embrace who you are at your core. When we focus on what we naturally do well and develop those talents and skills further, we release the pressure to excel in all areas. When we stop comparing ourselves to others and remove the need to be like someone else, it frees us to develop our unique abilities. Using your strengths also helps you feel energized and empowered. Not sure what your strengths are? Check out Tom Rath's StrengthsFinders 2.0 book, which features 34 strength themes and an assessment.

**Go off the grid.** Many of us have a digital addiction. Nearly half of American smartphone users say they can't live without their phones. In a technology-driven world, it's normal to spend some time online and take advantage of the benefits smartphones have to offer. However, it's important to realize when your use of technology has started to impact your mental, emotional, and social health. Leave your smart phone at home for a day and disconnect from constant emails, alerts, and other interruptions. Spend time doing something fun with someone face-to-face.

**Practice forgiveness.** Whether it's a simple spat with your spouse or long-held resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved conflict can go deeper than you may realize—it may be affecting your mental health. People who forgive have better mental health (including reducing levels of anxiety, depression and stress) and report being more satisfied with their lives. So make forgiveness part of your life even if it's just forgiving that person who cut you off during your commute.

**Take advantage of mental health days.** Taking a mental health day off can be necessary sometimes. If you're feeling overly stressed or emotionally unwell, there's no shame in taking a day or two to recover. Use this time to really focus on your mental health and help yourself get in a better place. Meet with your therapist, engage in self-care, or spend some time outdoors. Remember to keep mental health days as productive for your wellbeing as possible.

**Make time for exercise.** Yes, we already mentioned how important exercise is on page 6 but regular exercise will also give your mental health a big boost. As we get older, our brains begin losing neurons and eventually, our brain tissue starts shrinking. Physical activity can help combat the effects of an aging brain and keep it sharper longer. As for mental and emotional health, exercise releases certain chemicals in your brain that help boost feelings of happiness and wellbeing. Exercise has been proven to be one of the best ways to decrease stress and reduce your risk of depression and anxiety. Try to aim for 30 minutes of exercise every day to achieve mental health benefits.



To invest in yourself is the best investment of all.

Your daily habits and lifestyle choices have a tremendous effect on your short-term and long-term health. By practicing healthy habits, you are investing in a healthy, happy, and long life. While you might not be able to change your behavior overnight, by making your diet, physical activity, and mental wellbeing top priorities, you can gradually develop habits that will change your life for the better. Remember that lasting results require lasting changes. Start investing in yourself today to reap the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

