Special COVID-19 Edition

Episode #4: WorkWell: Creating and practicing healthy habits

The sudden mass-conversion to remote work has challenged us to quickly adapt and learn new ways to manage our workload, while also dealing with the isolation and the need to preserve human connection. Many of us are also trying to figure out how to homeschool or take care of our families while still getting our work done. As we navigate this new phase in work-life integration, we need to pay special attention to our own mental and physical health.

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher – Deloitte US Chief Well-being Officer, and I'm here today to provide you with information you can use to build healthy habits to take care of your body, mind, and purpose.

It's perfectly normal to be hyper-concerned about our family, friends, and colleagues during this time. Unfortunately, that well-intentioned concern can keep us from taking care of our own needs, which can lead to stress, anxiety, exhaustion, and even burnout. To make sure those who are depending on us get our best, we need to make ourselves a priority.

So, how do you get started on the path to developing self-care habits to ensure that you're eating right, exercising, and getting enough sleep, among other things? One of the best things to do first to take a step back and ask yourself, "What do I really need in this moment?" Self-care is not a one-size-fits-all. For example, exercise is incredibly important to me – it's a non-negotiable. Typically, I would go to the gym to recharge, but since I don't have that option right now, I'm doing other things, like running on my home treadmill while streaming classes. For you, it might be a walk or run outside while maintaining a safe distance.

Perhaps you need human connection right now. Setting up a video chat or a virtual smoothie break can push away those feelings of isolation. Or, maybe, it just feels better to sit in silence and just BE for a little bit, with no devices or distractions. The point is, by asking yourself what healthy option you need in the moment and then responding to it, you're practicing the right self-care for you.

Once you've figured out some self-care practices that work for you, the next step is to make them part of your daily routine. It can feel really hard to keep to a schedule right now, but there are several benefits to doing this. Sticking to a set of activities and rituals can provide a sense of normalcy as well as help us feel a little more in control.

- Eat a nutritious meal or snack every 2-3 hours. Eating light and eating often gives your body just the right amount of fuel, which helps to improve energy levels, brain function, and mood.

- Keep a water bottle or glass with you to stay hydrated while you work.

- Move more. We've heard it said that sitting is the new smoking. Try to stand up at your workspace frequently or during a call. Chair exercises, resistance bands, or using a balance ball, if you have one, can offset some of the effects of sitting.

- Get some exercise! I've said this before: stepping outside for a walk and some fresh air does both your mind and body good. There are also many videos on the internet featuring stretching, yoga, and other workouts you can easily do in your living room, whatever your fitness level.

- Try meditation. Scientific studies confirm that meditation is an effective way to manage stress and practice mindfulness. There are several meditation apps that make it easy to get started. I use the Headspace meditation app. You can also try just taking a few deep breaths – inhaling for a few seconds, holding it, and then slowly exhaling. Or thinking about three to five things you're grateful for every time you wash your hands.

- Schedule breaks in your calendar. When working remotely, there aren't those natural breaks in the day that you might have had before, such as a commute. Think about using the time that you might have had for your commute to exercise or to meditate. You can also take a quick joy break to watch a favorite video or listen to your favorite song while dancing.

- Create nighttime sleep ritual. To really recharge and refresh your mind and body, you need 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Preparing your body for rest with a regular routine can make it easier to fall and stay asleep. As part of my ritual, I maintain a technology-free zone so that the blue light doesn't interfere with my ability to fall asleep. I also avoid caffeine in the afternoons or evenings.

To help you make these healthy habits a part of your daily routine, you may want to try putting them in your calendar, just like you would any meeting or phone call. This is something I've started doing. If you were to look at my calendar right now, you would see recurring appointments for breakfast, lunch, dinner, time for movement or exercise, and even bedtime. Our regular schedules have been disrupted so much, that having these on my calendar gives me more control and helps me honor these commitments to myself. And because I also make it a point to tell people about what's in my calendar, they also honor them.

Sometimes the biggest barrier to self-care is feeling like it's too much or there isn't enough time. To make it easier, try breaking the habits down into micro-steps. Choose one thing to add to your routine and then build from there. Using this snowball approach, you can gradually build momentum, and before long, you'll have added several healthy habits to your daily routine.

Finally, we should all remember that we're living in unprecedented times. You may find days where you're not giving yourself the self-care you planned. This is the time to show yourself compassion and kindness. Instead of judgment or guilt, forgive yourself and resolve to try again tomorrow.

Creating and maintaining healthy habits requires some planning and effort, especially at the beginning, but believe me, the daily decisions to eat healthy meals and snacks, take scheduled breaks, and to go to bed on time will pay off in helping us to feel well, which also allows us to show up for others.

I hope you found these tips for creating and maintaining healthy habits helpful. Until next time, BE well, everyone.