

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



A Healthier Oregon!

Our state is initiating some very progressive advancements in health reform, working to bring a higher level of wellbeing to Oregonians. On October 31, Governor Kulongoski issued a press release calling on Oregon employers to assist employees in making healthier choices.

This Wellness Initiative is a win-win situation for both employers and their workers. Studies have shown that companies that have implemented wellness measures for at least a year experienced a decrease of 26 percent in health costs, 27 percent decrease in sick leave, and 32 percent decrease in workers compensation and disability costs. The result is healthier workers and a considerable savings for the employer. (The source for this information is a study called Meta-Evaluation of Worksite Health Promotion Economic Return, by Larry Chapman MPH, published in the "Art of Health Promotion Newsletter," a national publication.)

Because the largest share of health care costs for chronic diseases stem from tobacco use and obesity (at least 75 percent), the Governor's Wellness Initiative targets especially those two areas of concern:

Smoking. The last issue of *The INDEPENDENT* reported on the new Smoke-free Workplace law, which became effective on January 1, 2009. The new law covers all public buildings. Businesses will be responsible for complying with the law,

and will maintain a 10-foot "buffer zone" around entrances. Oregonians will gain a cleaner air environment, freedom from second-hand smoke, and a stronger incentive for smokers to quit. Business owners are embracing the new law from an economic standpoint – a more productive workplace, healthier workers, reduced cleaning and repair costs from smoke damage. According to the report, 80 percent of Oregonians are non-smokers; a large number of those who do smoke are wanting to kick the habit. Part of the wellness plan is to offer incentives and assistance for smokers to quit. Oregon's Quit Line is a free service (1-800-QUIT-NOW or 1-877-2NO-FUME).

Obesity. The Department of Health and Human Services says that sixty-one percent of employed adults in Oregon are at a weight that is too high to be healthy: 36 percent are overweight, 25 percent are obese. The Wellness Initiative will address this problem, helping employees who fall into these categories to seek a healthier lifestyle. Activities may include programs such as voluntary health risk assessments; education and motivating employees to address health problems; designing benefit plans to encourage healthy behaviors; screenings such as blood pressure and cholesterol checks; providing healthier options in vending machines.

"A healthier workforce can pay dividends, but we all also know intuitively that healthy employees are happier and more productive, producing positive effects at work and at home," Governor Kulongoski said in his press release.

The Governor's office has now begun the process to get the wellness program started, with planning meetings underway this month. We can expect to hear more about this innovative and exciting effort in the near future. Anyone interested in contacting the Governor's office may call 503-378-1111 with questions or comments.

Contact To Your Health! c/o The Independent 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia,, 97064, or email us at health@the-independent.net.

Information given on how to improve your own mental health

by the American Counseling Association

Admit it. Most of us don't give our mental health much attention unless we are facing a serious problem. That's too bad, because in today's complicated and troubled world most of us could stand to reduce our stress and worry, and to feel better about ourselves.

Think of improving your mental health as similar to improving your physical health. Just as exercise gets your muscles in better shape, there are things you can do to get your feelings and attitudes into better shape.

How to begin? Start by making time for yourself. In today's busy world it's easy to fill our

days with work, family and social obligations, leaving little or no time for ourselves.

The fix for that is to include "you" in your daily schedule. Create a real schedule that includes time each day for at least one thing you find relaxing or enjoyable. Maybe it's reading a book, working at a hobby, or just taking a relaxing walk. Put it in your schedule and make sure it happens.

Getting involved with others is another way to reduce stress and feel better about yourself. Today's tough economic times have many community, civic and religious organizations searching for volunteers to help carry out their work.

Giving something back to the community can offer a meaningful escape from your own problems (and often puts such problems in a better perspective) while also providing a sense of fulfillment and self-worth that's essential for good

mental health.

And don't ignore staying physically fit as a means to improve mental health. Studies find regular exercise is a great way to fight depression, for example. Plus, as we get ourselves into better shape, we usually start to feel more confident about ourselves – everything from how we look to what we can do. And that's good mental health.

No, you can't make stress and problems just disappear, but building a little relaxation into your life, helping those in need and staying physically active can all improve mental health and make it easier to cope with the problems you will face.

But if you find that your own actions don't have you feeling better, check out the help that a counseling professional or other mental health professionals can offer.

There are many fixes for bet-

ter mental health. Whether it's steps you take on your own, or help you get from a counseling

professional, good mental health is a goal worth achieving.

Protect yourself from Radon gas

Did you know that radon gas is the No. 1 cause of lung cancer in non-smokers? Nearly 50 people a day will die from indoor exposure to radon – that's equal to about 20,000 people each year.

The good news? It's simple and affordable to reduce radon risks in the home. As part of National Radon Action Month in January, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is releasing a series of public service announcements (PSAs) reminding families that a radon-resistant home is a greener and healthier home. EPA estimates that one in 15 homes will have elevated radon levels. If your home tests high, a qualified radon professional can install a mitigation system to lower the radon level.

Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that could be present in dangerous levels in the home. Radon is released from rock or soil, seeps into

homes through foundation cracks, and can reach harmful levels if trapped indoors.

Radon preventive actions have saved an estimated 6,000 lives from radon-induced lung cancer in the last 20 years. EPA is encouraging people to participate in National Radon Action Month by helping raise awareness about radon risk in their community. By doing so, they will be joining in the Radon Leaders Saving Lives campaign, a coalition of EPA, state and local governments, non-profit organizations, and radon professionals dedicated to doubling the lives saved from radon exposure over the next five years.

For information on how to get your home tested or to build your new home so it is radon resistant, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/radon> or call 1-800-SOS-RADON (767-7236).



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